

**FEMALE HR EXECUTIVES' CONTRIBUTIONS TO FIRM PERFORMANCE:  
THE EFFECTS OF GENDER ON  
DECISION-MAKING AND STRATEGIC-PLANNING**

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## **Abstract**

Women in leadership roles in Human Resources (HR) are gaining recognition in business strategy and strategic decision making; however, their level of participation in these strategic business functions is unclear and needs to be unambiguous. Furthermore, though many researchers have publicized that HR leaders' contributions positively impact a firm's performance, the body of literature does not distinguish HR leaders by gender. Men and women in HR are categorized as HR leaders, HR executives, HR managers, HR professionals, or HR practitioners, which makes it difficult to tell if they are referring to men or women. As a result of this ambiguity, this study attempts to fill a gap in research by determining what are the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in human resources management (HRM), how gender affects their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making, and how this bias (or prejudice) in turn may impact the overall effectiveness of a firm's performance. The study expands research on female HR leaders in an attempt to publicize the value and worth of these women as contributors to firm performance. Understanding the value female HR leaders bring to the organization may open more doors to corporate suites where women can share their perspectives with Senior Executives in discussions, communications, and business decisions. Interviews conducted with female executives revealed that although women in HRM are involved in business strategy and strategic decision making, their level of involvement vary based on several underlying factors. The study findings further revealed that although women executives in HR are contributing to firm performance, they often have to assert themselves in order to be heard and taken seriously as decision makers.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to human resources leaders and executives (men and women), who desire to be recognized as strategic business partners and sit at the corporate table with key business executives. This dissertation is especially dedicated to all women in human resources management, who have witnessed their contributions go unnoticed and underappreciated because of gender. I urge male organizational leaders to see women in human resources management with “fresh eyes” in order to revolutionize their organizations.

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## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

Women in Human Resources Management (HRM) are advancing to leadership roles and their contributions are becoming more important to the future of an organization (Brandl, Mayrhofer & Reichel, 2008). Successful organizations will be those who demand women's involvement in strategic business functions in order to achieve a competitive advantage (Nielsen & Huse, 2010). In recent years, women in leadership roles in HRM have been creating value and delivering results as they play a more strategic role in many organizations. Organizational leaders expect these women to have business intelligence, understand the business language, and demonstrate their capabilities as decision makers. Most importantly, this group of women is expected to align HR strategies with business strategy as a means to maximize productivity and organizational performance. Yet, there is little research about these women's level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making or how their contributions influence firm performance. For instance, in studies that emphasize the value HR leaders contribute to firm performance (Brockbank, Ulrich, Younger, Ulrich, 2012; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ulrich, 2007; Ulrich, Brockbank, & Johnson, 2009; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan, & Allen, 2005), the gender positively influencing a firm's performance is not identified. As a result, readers may assume the positive influence is from male-dominated leadership since historically, studies have shown that men dominated strategic business meetings (Oakley, 2000; Okanlawon, 1994; Shalvi, 2011). Consequently,

women may not be getting the recognition they deserve. Women's contributions to firm performance may also be minimized and undervalued; thus limiting their opportunities in organizations.

In this study, the significance of the gender of the HR leader is a critical issue, requiring organizational leaders to recognize female HR leaders for the role they play in HRM and their contributions to business strategy and strategic decision making. Therefore, this researcher studied the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM, how gender affects their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making, and how this bias (or prejudice) may impact the overall effectiveness of a firm's performance. The findings of this study provide organizational leaders with insight into the importance of maximizing the perspectives of women in strategic business functions as a means to increase a firm's performance.

Moreover, Resource-based Theory (RBT) as a theoretical framework improves the understanding of the role women in HR play in management hierarchies and explains the phenomenon. The theory supports the strategic utilization of these women and expands existing knowledge of their valuable contributions to strategic business functions. The framework of the study describes and supports the theory and challenges organizational leaders to view women in organizations worldwide as valuable contributors to a firm's performance. Seminal research shows the transformation or evolution of the role of HR leaders.

### **Seminal Research**

For decades, studies on HRM have focused on the administrative function of the HR department and the competencies of HR leaders in organizations worldwide. As the

paradigm shifted in HRM, HR leaders reassigned administrative tasks to lower-level HR professionals in order to play a more strategic role in the organization (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich 1998; Ulrich, Brockbank, & Yeung, 1989). This changing role of the HR leader has caused researchers to be more concerned with new mandates of the department (Ulrich, 1998), the link between HRM and firm performance (Ulrich, Cody, LaFastro, & Rucci, 1989), and the career paths for women and men in HRM (Ackah and Heaton, 2003). As a result, researchers such as (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ulrich, 1998) shifted their focus to the strategic role of the HR leader without taking into consideration the significance of gender. Specifically, seminal research provided little evidence of the strategic role of women in leadership roles in HRM or their level of involvement in strategic business functions.

However, what has been confirmed by Okanlawon (1994), who examined the role of women as strategic decision makers, is that men dominate strategic decision making within organizations. Okanlawon found that because of men's dominant roles, organizations do not inform women executives about important business affairs, men do not want to cooperate with them, and women often receive important communications about the company late. Denton and Zeytinoğlu (1993), who investigated the impact of gender in university settings, support this finding. Other seminal researchers (Daily, Certo, Dalton, 1999; Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1998) provide some explanation of why women are not acknowledged in the literature by pointing out that men outnumber women in positions of power. This advantage over women in leadership, according to Schein (1975) and Powell (1982), stems from strong characteristics that are perceived as masculine. The gap in the literature leads to assumptions that women in leadership roles

in HRM are not contributors to decision making. Therefore, it is critical to explore their level of involvement in strategic business functions. Likewise, it is also important to recognize these women for the strategic role they play in the organization, not only to fill the gap in the research, but because women's contributions in decision making have become significant for organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Gooch, 1994).

### **Scope of the Problem**

The scope of the problem is that there is a lack of research about women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to their involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making, and how their contributions, or lack thereof, affect a firm's performance. Although many studies have publicized the advancement of women in HRM, few studies reveal their significance as strategic decision makers. Instead, men in HRM continue to receive more recognition because they occupy a majority of leadership positions and are given more strategic tasks to manage (Faugoo, 2011; Brandl, Mayrhofer & Reichel, 2007; Reichel, Brandl & Mayrhofer, 2010). Furthermore, Pichler, Simpson, and Stroh (2008) indicated that men in HRM received higher salaries than women, moved through the ranks faster than women, and receive more training than women in HRM. Ackah and Heaton (2003) stated that despite women's credentials (advanced degrees) and backgrounds in HR studies, men were more likely to receive promotions to upper management in HR. When compared to men, Ackah and Heaton found that women in HRM lacked role models and mentoring, which would support their roles at the top of the organization.

However, despite several significant differences between men and women in HRM, Terjesen, Sealy, and Singh (2009) argued that an increase of women in decision

making roles could benefit organizations. This benefit comes from the uniqueness women bring to problem solving with their creative ideas. Several existing studies that inform this research (e.g., Brandl, et al., 2008; Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008), illustrate the need for more research on women's significance in strategic business meetings, and whether their contributions influence organizational success. Conversely, they attest to the need for strategic integration in HRM, and suggest that future research examines gender as a possible barrier to women's careers.

In summary, the literature that informs this research acknowledges gender differentiation in management roles, outlines some of the effects gender has on women's careers, and describes a need for strategic integration in HRM. The extent of this gender phenomenon may help to illuminate a woman's level of involvement in business strategy and decision making. Evidence shows that a majority of women settle in lower-level positions in HRM, despite a recent rise to leadership roles (Faugoo, 2011; Pichler, et al., 2008). Yet in countries that are more socialistic, Brandl et al. (2008) reported that women play an integral part in organizations; thus making them valuable contributors to the organization.

### **Background of the Study**

The background of the study includes evidence from the literature that shows a rise in the number of women in leadership roles in HR over the past two decades, and explanations for the progression. The background provides the rationale for filling the gap in the research by illustrating the significance of female HR leaders' contributions to business strategy and strategic decision making. One explanation that supports women in decision making can be found in Nielsen and Huse's (2010) study where they

acknowledged that women bring different perspectives to decision making. Decision making, according to Okanlawon (1994), is a full function of the organization's life that should be shared collaboratively with all members of the organizations, including women. The background of the study concludes with a look at the affect of gender and the limitations this barrier often places on women's potential, capabilities, performance, and productivity.

### **Women's Advancement in HRM**

Women have dominated the field of HR since its inception and are rising in leadership positions, (Brandl, et al., 2007; Brandl, & Pohler, 2010; Pichler, et al., 2008). This gradual increase of women in executive positions in HRM represents a change in leadership, not only for women who want to achieve successful management careers (; Brandl et al., 2008; Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008; Reichel et al., 2010), but also for organizations that want a competitive advantage in global markets (Truss, 1999). Moreover, this increase of women in leadership has improved organizational competitiveness for many companies across global markets (Duffy, Fox, Punnett, & Gregory, 2006; Jonsen & Maznevski, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Nielsen & Huse, 2010; O'Neil, Hopkin & Bilimoria, 2008). Gooch (1994) contended that women make a significant contribution to organizations. She argued that organizations that increase the number of women in leadership positions will be successful moving forward. Branson (2012) attested that their strong participation in business decisions prevents many financial disasters from occurring in companies. Organizations that increase the number of women at the top could achieve a competitive edge globally.

## **Women's Contributions**

As illustrated in the literature, women bring unique perspectives to decision making and business strategy (Nielsen & Huse, 2010); however, current approaches to effectively formulating and executing business strategy may require women and men to work collaboratively. In the literature (e.g., Brockbank et al., 2012; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ulrich, 1998; Ulrich et al., 2009) researchers stressed the importance of involving HR leaders in business strategy. Lawler and Mohrman explained that organizations see value in the contributions of HR leaders when they have full involvement in the implementation of strategy. They indicated that this involvement requires HR leaders to utilize human capital resources to lead strategy initiatives, to serve as change agents, and to help implement strategy on the front line.

Women in HRM are prepared to support organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with new competencies they have acquired. Yeung, Brockbank, and Ulrich, 1994) contend that reducing HR costs, improving HR quality of services, and focusing on business needs are expectations of the HR leader in new organizations. Ulrich (1998) believes that HR leaders who are fully supported by the organization have been able to (1) assist the organization to meet global challenges, (2) increase revenue through growth, (3) revolutionize technology, (4) maximize productivity and performance through human capital talents, and (5) lead change to achieve organizational excellence. Successful execution of these business tasks by the HR leader clearly puts the organization at an advantage competitively.

Additionally, with joint resources (men and women), organizations are able to acquire and maintain a competitive advantage over the competition (Olalla, 1999).

Women can help create a competitive advantage for a firm because of their creative ideas (Nielsen & Huse, 2010). However, although it is apparent that women in HR contribute value to an organization, several barriers continue to hinder their progress. Research shows that because of gender women are often undervalued (Oakley 2000). The next section explains the effect of gender on women in leadership roles.

### **Gender Effects**

The effects of gender can limit women's progression in leadership. Gender effects can be defined as differences or inequality in the treatment of men and women that may negatively impact or influence their lives. In studies that examined the impact of gender, researchers cited several reasons for limited opportunities for women in organizations worldwide. For example, in Ragins' et al. (1998) study on the gender gap in the executive suite, they reported that female executives identified several factors that hinder women's advancement to the top, such as inhospitable work climates, the glass ceiling, and misconceptions about women. In another study, Ryan and Haslam (2007) cited stereotyping as a "second wave" of barriers impeding women's advancement in organizations. The damaging effect of this stereotyping against women, as Koenig, Mitchell, Eagly, and Ristikan (2011) explain, is not because some people portray women as negative. Instead, they argued that women are harmed by stereotyping because people perceive them as the sensitive and compassionate gender. Consequently, women lower their own performance, productivity, and self-esteem when they are affected by these barriers (Oakley, 2000).

In several other studies (e.g., Brandl et al., 2007; Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008), evidence of the limitations placed on women was also found in both lower and

top-level positions in organizations. Pichler et al. (2008) attested that even though women might advance to mid-level positions, their progress beyond that level in the organization becomes stagnant. The explanation Duehr and Bono (2006) provided for this problem is that leaders choose men and women for roles based solely on gender or gender characteristics. This standard way of thinking, Schein (1978) believes, reinforces societal norms that men fit dominant roles in the hierarchy and women fit marginal jobs. As a result, a number of problems occur: (1) Men outnumber women in top management positions (Pichler et al., 2008; Reichel et al., 2010), (2) men and women are evaluated based on a different criterion (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), (3) double standards are set for men and women in promotional opportunities and salaries (Oakley, 2000), and (4) women's voices and input in decision making are often restricted (Neilsen & Huse, 2010; Terjesen et al., 2009). Increasingly, the effects of gender make it challenging for women to work at their fullest potential; thus limiting their value in the organization.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem is that the literature does not contain empirical evidence about women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to their involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making. The literature also lacks information about how women's contributions, or lack thereof, affect a firm's performance. Historically, the role of the human resources department focused on managing welfare and administrative functions (Faugoo, 2011); however, as the department shifts to responsibilities that include more strategic functions, HR leaders, both men and women, are challenged to fulfill the expectations of strategic HRM (Ulrich, 1997). As a result, over the past decade, researchers have been evaluating the skills, business knowledge, and competencies of HR

leaders. These researchers wanted to determine HR leaders' contributions to the overall effectiveness of a firm's performance (Brockbank et al., 2012; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ulrich, 2007; Ulrich et al., 2009). Based on their findings, researchers affirmed that HR leaders have earned a seat at the business table with business leaders (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003, Ulrich et al., 2009). Wright et al. (2005) further confirmed a positive relationship between HR leaders' contributions to business strategy and a firm's performance.

Brockbank et al. (2012) extended the investigation on HR's contributions to firm performance and found that when HR leaders demonstrated six domains of competencies, they had a positive impact on business performance. These competencies were identified as: "Credible Activist, Strategic Positioner, Capability Builder, Change Champion, HR Innovator and Integrator, and Technology Proponent" (Brockbank et al., 2012, p. 3). Additionally, Ulrich et al., (2009) studied five ways HR leaders might improve their roles as "Strategy Architects," which allows them to facilitate positive outcomes to business performance. These approaches directly involved strategy, with some focus on the external customer. Uen, Ahlstrom, Chen, and Tseng (2012) uncovered a link between the quality of HR service, HR contributions, and HR strategic involvement after surveying 42 companies in Taiwan. Their study revealed that when HR service quality is enhanced, HR leaders add value to the overall effectiveness of a company. Sang-Long, Ismail, and Amin's (2010) exploratory study in Malaysian manufacturing companies found nine HR competencies that had a strong correlation with a firm's performance.

Although the consensus among researchers revealed that HR leaders' contributions positively affect a firm's performance, the literature does not distinguish

HR leaders by gender. Many HR theorists do not identify the HR leaders who contribute value to the firm's performance as men or women; the gender of the positive influencers is unclear. Recent research (e.g., Brandl et al., 2007; Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008; Reichel et al., 2010) publicizes the rise of women in leadership roles in HRM, yet simultaneously emphasizes that men are the preferred group to manage strategic functions in HRM. Pichler et al., (2008) opined that women in HR are in conflict about their role in strategic decision making. They explained that when the function does not involve managing strategic tasks, women advance to the top, yet when the function includes adding value to strategic decision-making, women face segregation, or men gently push them aside. Furthermore, although these studies indicate a progression for women in HRM, they still imply that men receive the credit as contributors to firm performance. Because of this uncertainty, some researchers (e.g., Nielsen & Huse, 2010; Shalvi, 2011) stressed the importance of understanding the level of involvement women have in strategic business meetings, once they get into leadership roles. It is also advantageous for organizations to understand the participating experience of these women. This awareness is important because corporations should maximize the potential of all employees to improve firm performance.

### **Purpose of the Study**

As indicated previously, several researchers have explored the skills, business knowledge, and competencies of HR leaders to determine their contributions to the overall effectiveness of a firm's performance (Brockbank et al., 2012; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ulrich, 1998; Ulrich et al., 2009). In these investigations, some researchers found that HR leaders have developed new competencies and have received

some acceptance as strategic business partners with key executives (Brockbank et al., 2012; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ulrich, 1998; Ulrich et al., 2009). Thus, earning them a seat at the “table”. These researchers affirmed that HR leaders are participating in the formulation and execution of business strategy, contributing to strategic planning, and are involved in strategic decision making. In Lawler & Mohrman’s study, the authors explored HR leaders as strategic partners; their results revealed that HR leaders’ contributions to strategic business functions were adding value to a firm’s performance. Despite the hype about HR leaders, these studies again did not distinguished HR leaders by gender. As a result, it is still unclear whether women, who are substantially contributing in strategic business functions, are receiving equal recognition for a firm’s performance. There also seems to be no research on the differences between men and women in HRM with regard to how they influence decision making and firm performance.

Shalvi’s (2011) study that examined how men and women are treated differently in business meetings confirmed that gender inequality influence organizational decision making. This inequality, according to Reichel et al. and Faugoo, is displayed in the delegation of strategic responsibilities in leadership roles in HRM. Inequality may also affect the degree to which women fully participate in strategic business functions. Several studies (e.g., Brandl et al., 2008; Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008) explored the rise of women in HRM and possible factors associated with gender that influence their inclusion in leadership roles. In one study, Brandl et al. (2008) uncovered that researchers, who investigated the advancement of women in HRM, place more emphasis on their individual characteristics and less on their strategic role they played in the organization.

They believed that the significance of gender contributing to strategic functions is important. They suggested further research to examine barriers at the organizational level in HRM once women have occupied leadership positions. Identifying whether female HR leaders are positively contributing to firm performance may help add to knowledge in organization and human resources management.

Ever since women have acquired leadership positions in HRM, their level of involvement in strategic business functions is unclear. Reichel et al. (2010) made several research recommendations, so this study investigates the potential gender barriers that exist for female HR leaders. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making. Another purpose is to gain insight about how their contributions (or lack thereof) may affect a firm's performance. Understanding the role of women and the contributions they make to strategic business functions can consequently help to identify the barriers and gaps that exist in female leadership responsibilities. This study attempts to discover if business leaders properly acknowledge and utilize women's skills in strategic leadership positions, and if so, how does this affect the overall firm performance? Similarly, the study aimed to uncover the potential benefits of acknowledging, including, and incorporating women's input into strategic planning.

### **Rationale**

Researchers found that women's potential and capabilities are limited when barriers are present in organizations (Bilimoria & Piderit, 1994; Heilman & Eagly, 2008; Pichler et al., 2008; Mok Kim Man, Skerlavaj & Dimovski, 2009). One study, Terjesen et al., (2009) found that although women on corporate boards positively contributed to a

firm's level of performance, they did not have the responsibility of governance of a company. In other studies (e.g., Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008; Reichel et al., 2010), researchers reported that women in HRM did not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts in managing strategic functions. Reichel et al. (2010) claimed that there are few studies about women in HRM, their competencies, leadership styles, characteristics, and value in organizations. Even though there are studies about HR professionals, HR managers, HR executives, and HR leaders' progress in business strategy and decision making (Pichler et al., 2008; Ulrich et al., 2009), the studies do not address women's success in managing these business functions. Their contributions to business strategy and strategic decision making, particularly in male-dominated executive boardrooms, are ambiguous. For example, several researchers (e.g., Brockbank et al., 2012; Uen et al., 2012; Ulrich 1998) have addressed positive attributes of HR professionals; however, the gender of the HR professionals contributing to business strategy is unknown. Furthermore, these studies do not identify whether women are involved in decision making with key executives or whether the executives even include them at the business table. Reichel et al. supported the need for more research that reveals women's value and worth in an organization. They suggested further research that addresses the effect of gender in the upper echelons of an organization.

Additionally, findings from various studies (e.g., Brandl et al., 2007; 2008; Brockbank et al., 2012; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Faugoo, 2011; Reichel et al., 2010; Ulrich, 1997; 2007; Ulrich et al., 2009) are useful in this study; the sources will help to assess how engaged women executives are in business strategy and strategic decision making in male-dominated business meetings. The findings may help provide answers to

whether women continue to face unequal treatment in upper management, specifically with regard to complex job functions that involve strategic planning and decisions. Because the role women play in strategic business decisions is not clearly identified in many studies, this study attempted to fill a gap in the literature by identifying women's participation experiences, how gender affects the level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making, and how their contributions impact the overall effectiveness of a firm's performance. The findings of this study help to fill the gap in the existing research; the findings extend the current research and add to it, specifically with regard to the role that women in HR leadership positions play in decision making. In addition, the current research supports existing literature on human resource management and organizational management. This research provides an awareness of inequality, and subsequently, a foundation for change.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question is: How do women in leadership roles in HRM contribute value to a firm's performance? The research questions are designed to help uncover information about women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to their experience in business strategy and strategic decision making. Each of the research questions answered questions that emerged from previous research (e.g., Brandl et al., 2008; Reichel et al., 2010; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ulrich et al., 2009). For example, Lawler and Mohrman asked, "What is the role of HR professionals in business strategy?" The research questions further provide the structure and framework for the study, and guide further discussions about the effects of gender on women's involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making. The research questions for this study are:

R1. What role do women in leadership positions in HRM fulfill in business strategy and strategic decision making in medium-sized organizations?

R2. What is the participation experience of women in leadership positions in HRM with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making in medium-sized organizations?

R3. How do the contributions of women in leadership positions in HRM, with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making, influence a medium-sized firm's performance?

R4. How does gender bias (or prejudice) affect women in leadership positions in HRM with regard to their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making in medium-sized organizations?

### **Significance of the Study**

In an extensive review of the literature, researchers have publicized the role HR leaders play in business strategy, the role of HR professionals in organizations, and various other topics on HRM related to women's advancement, leadership characteristics, and responsibilities. More specifically, there is limited research on women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to their contributions to business strategy and strategic decision making, and how their contributions affect a firm's performance. Reichel et al. (2010) suggested that future research should focus on understanding the barriers associated with gender at the organizational level in HRM that may influence women's progress once they have advanced to the top of the organization. As a result, this study is significant for a number of reasons. First, this research is important to the field of Human Resources Management and Organizational Management because it helps fill a gap that exists in the

literature, specifically with regard to women in leadership and how their contributions (or limited contributions) affect firm performance. This research helps to identify the role women play in strategic business decisions, and the barriers they face in having full inclusion in strategic decisions. The researcher identified existing gender barriers, and analyzed how they affect a woman's level of performance in strategic business functions. This information is expected to be a significant contribution to the body of literature and to business leaders who seek to improve firm performance, specifically with regard to strategic planning and decision making. The acknowledgment and understanding of these barriers is a critical step that can fill a gap in the research and inform (or guide) future research.

In addition, the findings of this study provide organizational leaders with insight into the importance of maximizing the perspectives of women in strategic business functions as a means to increase a firm's performance. The results of the research have practical applications that can affect firm practices and female contributions, which could contribute to improved firm performance. Beyond that, the research gives female leaders the opportunity to express their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about their roles. This research allows for women's voices to be heard when they previously may not have been heard. Moreover, revealing women's contributions to a firm's performance could have a direct impact on how Senior Executives perceive women in HRM in this era. Ulrich (1998) affirmed that HR leaders need to lead change in organizations. To do so, he appealed to HR leaders to become partners with Senior Executives and to collaborate with them in strategic business meetings. Ulrich et al. (2009) believed that HR has earned a seat at the business table where they can contribute to strategic planning. Researchers

(e.g., Daily et al., 1999; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Neilsen & Huse, 2010; Ragins et al., 1998; Terjesen et al., 2009; Yu, 2011) have already examined the impact women have in decision making on corporate boards and have concluded that women's perspectives could have positive organizational outcomes.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Corporate suite.* The corporate suite is where the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) meets with his/her management team to ensure that the organization's mission and vision are achieved, strategic plans are formulated and executed, innovative processes and systems are developed, and the overall quality and effectiveness of organization is sustained (Gharajedaghi, 1999).

*Gender bias.* Gender bias is an invisible barrier that slows or interferes with a woman's career advancement because of culture or stereotypic beliefs regarding gender (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011).

*Firm performance.* Firm performance in this study is defined as operational performance in terms of how HR business practices are aligned with business operations to ensure organizational efficiency and competitiveness.

*Gender stereotypes.* Gender stereotypes are perceptions and beliefs that people assign to women because of gender (Duehr & Bono, 2006). For example, people may stereotype women as gentle and caring individuals when compared to men, who are categorized as aggressive and forceful (Schein, 1978).

*In-group.* These individuals engage in negative and biased behaviors that cause them to exclude the opposite sex from business decisions and social networks (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

*Leadership.* “Leadership is an observable set of skills and abilities that are useful whether one is in the executive suite or on the front line, on Wall Street or Main Street, in any campus, community, or corporation” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 386).

*Out-group.* Duehr and Bono (2006) and Eagly and Carli (2007) linked this characterization to women’s underrepresentation in formal communications and networks; women are usually the out-group.

*Resource-based theory.* Resource-based theory explains the link between strategic management and a firm’s performance. The theory asserts that intangible and tangible resources that are scarce, irreplaceable, unique, and valuable put a company ahead of its competitors (Olalla, 1999).

*Sex-role stereotyping.* Sex-role stereotyping is the belief that common attitudes and behaviors occur among the same gender (Schein, 1978).

*Sex-segregation.* Sex-segregation occurs when male leaders separate themselves from female leaders in business and social settings because of their gender (Brandl et al., 2007).

*Strategic business functions.* Strategic business functions are job responsibilities that include strategic planning, business strategy, decision making, and operations planning that are intended to give an organization a competitive advantage over its competitors.

*Strategic decision making.* Strategic decision making is an organizational function that involves forecasting that is based on the decisions and actions of key members of the organizations.

### **Assumptions**

In this study, there are a few assumptions. The first assumption was that the evidence gathered from this research would add to an existing body of knowledge by filling a gap in existing research that ignored the significance of gender in discussions regarding the strategic role of female HR leaders. The second assumption was that the comprehensive testimonies the participant shared about their experiences with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making would allow the researcher to solve the research questions. The final assumption was that the sample drawn would provide data that is generalizable to a larger HR population and that the findings of the study will be valuable to the scholarly community.

### **Strengths**

A major strength of the study is that it provided a strong review of current and existing literature related to women in leadership roles, and their contributions to business strategy and decision making in male-dominated strategic meetings. According to Hailey, Farndale, and Truss (2005), Senior Executives pressure HR leaders to be strategic and operational, and as a result, issues emerge from role ambiguity and conflict among HR leaders. The current study also provided new, valuable, and significant information that explains women's role and level of involvement in strategic business functions with Senior Executives. The study helps to illuminate what impact gender has, if any, on women's level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making.

Additionally, this study is strong in its research design and approach. The qualitative phenomenological design allowed the researcher to collect in-depth

testimonies and real life experiences from women in leadership roles, specifically with regard to how they experience the phenomenon. Collecting this information was important in understanding how women are substantially contributing to firm performance. The strength of the study is also in the research questions, which elicited rich responses from participants in order to better comprehend the experiences of women who were involved in business strategy and strategic decisions with a predominately-male group.

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

Researchers have studied the strategic function of the HR department for over a decade, as well as the role HR leaders play in business strategy and strategic decision making (Brandl, et al., 2008; Pichler, et al., 2008; Ulrich, 2007). In doing so, some researchers have used theories to stimulate dialogues about whether HR leaders are valuable contributors to firm performance and whether they should be at the “table” with senior leaders formulating business strategy (Olalla, 1999; Ngo, Lau & Foley, 2008; Rosli & Mahmood, 2013). One theory used by researchers to evaluate the link between strategic management and firm performance is Edith Penrose’s Resource-based Theory. Researchers who applied this theory gained insight on how tangible and intangible resources can be utilized to create a firm’s competitive advantage (Yasemin & Mahoney, 2004). According to Penrose (1959), there are three ways a firm can achieve a competitive advantage: (1) by growing and increasing revenue not by ownership of its resources but by discovering creative and innovation ways to manage those resources, (2) by diversifying resources that lead to the development of ideas, opportunities, and competitive advantages, and (3) by utilizing its knowledge pool and resources in a way

that they become the driver of the growth pattern and direction of the firm (Yasemin & Mahoney, 2004). Penrose's resource-based theory has been applied by Olalla (1999), who attested that a firm's resources must be valuable, rare, scarce, and non-replaceable if it wants to create economic value. Rosli and Mahmood (2013), who examined the moderating effects of HRM practices and entrepreneur training on innovation, found that the bundling of HR services contributes to a firm's positive performance. Meanwhile, other researchers such as Rugman and Verbeke (2004) have challenged Penrose's resource-based theory on how relevant it is to the protection of a firm's competitiveness.

Resource-based theory is appropriate for this study because the theory supports the utilization of all resources (women and men) to achieve a firm's competitive advantage. Resource-based theory is used to inform the research by providing evidence of how women as a valuable resource can contribute to a firm's performance. As a framework, resource-based theory helps organizational leaders to understand how the "bundling" of resources and knowledge can help create economic value and sustain growth in the organization. Figure 1 describes the impact of women's contributions when they are used as a valuable resource.

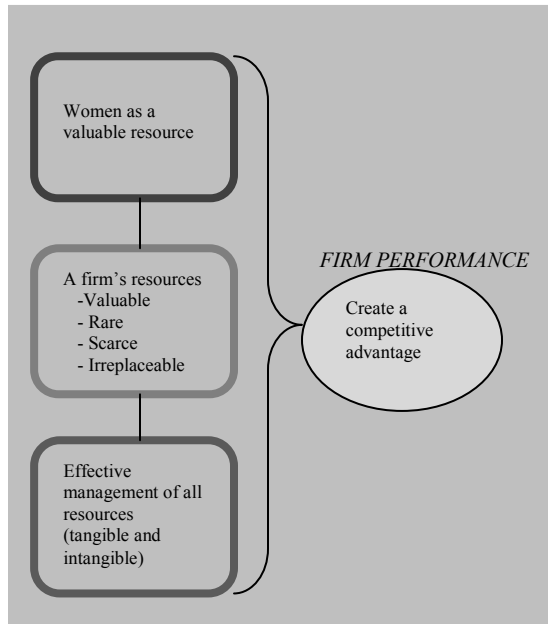


Figure 1. The conceptual framework helps explain the relationship between strategic management, women’s contributions, and a firm’s performance from a new perspective.

### **Nature of the Study**

The proposed research was exploratory in nature. A qualitative phenomenological methodology was employed to better understand the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making. Ten women in leadership roles in HRM were the informants; they provided testimonies that supported the conceptual framework and helped answer the research questions. Though participants were directly from upper management in HR, the population characteristics were similar with regard to gender roles, leadership positions, and potential gender dynamics within the upper echelons of the organizations (Creswell, 2000). This population and setting were significant and appropriate because some

researchers (e.g., Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008) attested that in many HR departments men control strategic functions.

Using purposive sampling, the researcher chose accomplished women executives from a population of HR leaders. Groenewald (2004) affirmed that this type of non-probability sampling is appropriate for a phenomenological study. The chosen population was a small representation of the larger population of HR leaders, who are included in strategic business decisions with Senior Executives. The smaller population included women who are in HR leadership roles in mid-size companies in and around New York. Because of the method for selecting interviewees, and because of the nature of the current research, the researcher designed the research questions to remain open-ended during the interviewing process. As mentioned earlier, previous researchers have not identified HR leaders by gender; instead many studies simply credit HR contributions to positive organizational performance. Therefore, uncovering how women positively influence a firm's performance is important.

Moreover, the participant group was relatively small; this allowed the researcher to gather detailed, in-depth information about the rich experiences of each individual. The researcher used a questionnaire in addition to interviews to collect data from participants. This depth of inquiry was necessary in uncovering how gender affects women's experiences, involvement in and contributions to strategic planning, and overall firm performance. The researcher does not intend for the conclusions from the current research to be unique to one industry, but instead, the research should be generalize-able to various business types, including HRM. Chapter 3 includes a comprehensive description of this methodology and the research process.

## **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter 2 provides a thorough review of related literature, in order to provide a solid foundation for the unique topic of women's participation experiences in business strategy and strategic decision making. Chapter 2 explores factors related to gender that may influence a women's contributions in strategic business functions. The literature review provides information, and illustrates the gap that exists in the current research (where researchers have failed to distinguish HR leaders by gender). An examination of the related literature provides some explanations for why it is a business necessity to involve women in HRM leadership roles in important strategic business functions.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for this study, which included a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach. Additionally, the researcher thoroughly describes the data collection procedures, as well as the population group, and specifics about the research methods, questionnaire, and interview questions. Finally, Chapter 3 describes the data analysis procedures, which details how the researcher collected the data, stored it, summarized it, and analyzed it for better understanding. This analysis includes an approach to the data from a feminist and constructivist perspective. The researcher chose this methodology in order to remain subjective about the phenomenon under investigation.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the collected data, including narrative about participants' experiences, similarities and differences discovered in perceptions, specific responses that addresses the research questions, and other important information obtained from the data collection, member checking, and triangulation processes.

Chapter 5 reveals the important findings from the study, including patterns of information, new understanding, and strategies to enhance the business partnership between women in leadership roles in HRM and key executives. Additionally, Chapter 5 details the limitations of the current study, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the current research is to fill a gap in the literature by determining what are the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM, how gender affects their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making, and how this bias (or prejudice) may affect the overall firm performance. Drawing on the insight of Resource-based Theory, the research draws attention to the valuable contributions and innovative ideas of women in leadership roles in HR. Resource-based theory suggests that women are among a firm's valuable internal resources for achieving a competitive advantage. How a firm utilizes (or fails to utilize) women in business strategy and strategic decision making, could determine how the firm performs in competitive markets. The literature review explores the work of several researchers, who examined women as decision makers to determine their involvement (or lack therefore) in strategic business functions (Nielsen & Huse, 2010; Terjesen et al., 2009). The chapter further examines some of the key factors that influence decision-making practices in terms of gender bias, stereotypes, perceptions, and role expectations. In exploring these factors, researchers found that when these gender barriers are intact in organizations, women's capabilities in the organization are limited (Reinhold, 2005; Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

Moreover, because existing literature does not include specifics about the topic of the current research, the literature review provides a review of related topics in order to gain insight into the background of the gender inequity problem in HRM. Published scholarly peer-reviewed journals, empirical works, and theoretical literature specific to gender inequality and women in HRM are considered and analyzed by the researcher. This chapter includes an analysis of seminal, existing, and relevant research and controversies regarding women, leaders, and topics related to strategic planning in HRM. The information collected has provided sufficient evidence for the researcher to support the research questions and draw an inference from the findings. Information, suggestions, and insights from the literature review, and the gaps that exist therein, have informed the current research.

### **Gap in the Literature**

Many studies on HR management and strategic HR management are focused on the new competencies and skill sets HR leaders need to acquire in order to become business partners with key executives; thus earning them a seat at the business table (Brockbank & Ulrich, 2005; Brockbank et al., 2012; Chiu & Selmar, 2011). Studies are also acknowledging HR leaders for their contributions to business strategy, decision making, and firm performance. However, in this hype surrounding HR professionals, researchers make no distinction between men and women and the value each gender contributes to overall firm performance. Specifically, these studies do not identify how each gender contributes to business performance, and makes little mention of women's level of involvement in business functions with key executives.

Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, researchers categorize men and women as HR leaders, HR executives, HR managers, HR professionals, or HR practitioners, which makes it difficult to tell if they are referring to men or women. For example, in the works of Brockbank and Ulrich (2005), they used the term HR professional to describe the value this group adds strategically to the company. In another study by Chiu and Selmer's (2011), they explored whether HR people are strategic business partners but referenced the term HR executives and HR managers. For example, they stated CEOs and line managers' perceptions of HR executives as business partners conflicted with HR executives' portrayal of themselves. Uen, Ahlstrom, Chen, and Tseng (2012) also used the titles of HR executives, HR managers, HR professionals, and HR practitioners interchangeably to articulate this group's lack of participation in strategic meetings. Evidently, if the significance of the gender is to be known, men and women have to be identified in the roles they play in the organization. Without a clear distinction between genders, people may be left to assume that based on strong societal norms and role expectation, the HR leaders influencing firm performance are men. This message can weaken women's credibility and reinforce stereotypical beliefs that men are favored to manage strategic functions (Faugoo, 2011, Pichler et al. (2008).

Because research suggests that women are the less dominant group in decision making (Weyer, 2007; Patel, & Riley, 2007; Pichler, 2008), this study draws upon resource-based theory to discover the contributions of women in leadership roles in HRM. Brandl et al. (2008) pointed out that there is insufficient knowledge about the gender of the HR director and the role this individual plays in the organization. As a result, Brandl et al. (2008) has been instrumental in informing this study. Therefore, the

study aims to extend the research of Brandl et al. (2008) by gathering information about the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making. Other studies that offer support for this research, even though they do not specifically address how women add value to firm performance are (Brandl et al., 2007; 2008; Brockbank et al., 2012; Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008; Reichel et al., 2010; Ulrich et al., 2009). These studies examined the extent to which HR leaders have transformed and their significance in strategic business functions. The studies further publicize the newly acquired skills, competencies, and knowledge of the HR leader. Overall, the objective of the literature review is to provide background information about the issues of gender inequality in HRM and inform the research.

### **Resource-based Theory as a Framework**

Resource-based theory as a valuable conceptual framework for this study supports the strategic utilization of women in HRM. Too many studies have acknowledged the strategic performance of HR leaders but have disregarded how gender influences a firm's performance (Brockbank et al., 2012; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ulrich, 2007; Ulrich et al., 2009; Wright et al., (2005). This study helps to distinguish the HR leader by gender, and helps to identify the significance of her role in strategic meetings and discussions. Resource-based theory postulates that there is a link between strategic management and a firm's performance (Olalla, 1999). The theory considers internal and external resources as key variables to a firm's success. Resources that are scarce, irreplaceable, unique, and valuable put a company ahead of its competitors; thus, positively affecting a firm's performance (Olalla, 1999). This advantage can only happen if each organization is

different with unique resources that define its culture (Olalla, 1999). As resources, women and men bring different styles, talents, and contributions to firm performance; thus making it important to separate by gender their worth or value. Resource-based theory supports the need for CEOs and Senior Executives to improve their attention to women as a valuable resource to a firm's performance.

In addition, Ngo et al. (2008) says that resource-based theory is instrumental in building the credibility of strategic HRM and the role HR leaders play in business strategy. Resource-based theory shows that HR practices that support performance based incentives contribute to a firm's business outcomes. Rosli and Mahmood (2013) explained that in HRM, resource-based theorists believed that the bundling of HR services contributes to a firm's positive performance. Ulrich et al. (2009) identified these bundled services as (1) being involved in the formulation of strategy, (2) helping to explain and describe reasons for the strategy, (3) ensuring the implementation and outcome of strategy by aligning HR practices, (4) realigning the activities and perspectives of leaders to strategy, and (5) integrating the perspective of the customer into the corporate business plan. The next section explores how resource-based theory supports the role women play in a firm's success.

### **Theoretical View on Women in HRM**

Resource-based theory describes unique resources that allow an organization to reach a competitive edge over its competitors (Olalla, 1999). Flamholtz (1972) explained that women and men in HRM can create this advantage because, "...like all resources, people possess value because they are capable of rendering future service that have economic value" (p. 243). Studies show that women have economic value and are

capable of generating firm performance (Branson, 2012; Nielsen & Huse, 2010; Terjesen et al., 2009). As Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung, and Lake's (1995) noted, this value can include rejuvenating the business with fresh ideas, programs, and initiatives. Women can create value for a firm when organizations are able to use their knowledge, skills, and capabilities; organizations see women as rich and tangible resources.

Resource-based theory supports the significance of the role women play in organizations, but implies that women are under-utilized in organizations. Faugoo (2011) found this was the case in his study on the rise of female HR directors in HRM. In the study of Nielsen and Huse, they also found that organizations are not doing enough to acknowledge women as valuable and important contributors to firm performance.

Organizations may even agree that women have a wealth of knowledge and information that cannot be replicated, yet their talents are not fully utilized. Flamholtz (1972) advised that "an individual's value is not merely a function of personal attributes; rather, it is the product of a set of interacting economic, social, and psychological variables" (p. 259). In support of resource-based theory, the literature has repeatedly shown that an organization depends on all of its "resources" (whether they are tangible or intangible) to get ahead of their competitors. As their contributions become more apparent, organizations will not only view women as valuable "resources" to the organization, but will begin to see the role of women in leadership as a necessity.

Olalla (1999) identified tangible and intangible resources as valuable, scarce, rare, non-replaceable; however, as the marketplace evolves, organizations may be forced to be attentive to common prerequisites proposed by resource-based theory. Hence, influencing organizational leaders to incorporate women's perspective in business decision making

(Branson, 2012). According to Daily et al. (1999), women's contributions to decision making is critical to an organization's performance and outcomes. When making critical decisions, it makes practical business sense to incorporate all of the information available into the decision making process. Therefore, organizations should evaluate and consider women's perspectives along with men's perspectives (Okalawon, 1994). Resource-based theorists have asked that organizations view women's independent and original thinking as valid and significant. Several studies validated that women's unique and valuable ideas positively affect the direction of an organization (Branson, 2012; Oakley, 2000; Terjesen et al., 2009).

In summary, resource-based theory influences this study because the literature shows that organizations underutilize and overlook women as decision makers (Oakley, 2000). According to the research, over the past two decades women have become more of an integral part of the decision-making process in organizations. Organizations are utilizing women as resources and women are receiving some credit for some of their contributions to business strategy and strategic decision (Brandl et al., 2008). Research has also shown a progression towards recognition of women as decision makers, indicating that women's perspectives are valued and applicable in the decision-making process. Yet much more can be done by organizations to accelerate the pace at which women are being recognized and credited for their contributions in HRM. If resource-based theory suggests that women can positively impact the corporate bottom line, then it is curious why there is not an increase in the number of women involved in decision making. Some researchers believe that CEOs fail to delegate strategic responsibilities to the HR leader (Brandl & Pohler, 2010). While others opined that the reluctance

originated from CEOs' uncertainty about the role HR plays in the organization (Todericiu & Serban, 2013). If these assumptions are found to be true, women in HRM will need to widen their "scope of action" in order to alter the perceptions of CEOs.

### **Existing/Relevant Literature Informing the Current Research**

While a number of studies have revealed that women in HRM are advancing to the upper echelons in organizations (Brandl et al., 2007; 2008; Faugoo, 2011), very few studies have examined these women's involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making. According to resource-based theory, women are underutilized as decision makers. To improve the understanding of the value women in HRM add to firm performance, existing and relevant research lays the groundwork for this study and provides plausible reasons why the contributions of women are different from the contributions of men in HRM. For example, Okanlawon (1994) contended that the decisions that are made in organizations involve all members of the organization; therefore, women should not be excluded from this organizational process. In addition, exploring existing and relevant studies that address women as decision makers, their effectiveness as decision makers, and contributions to business strategy and decision making, will help to discover women's level of involvement in strategic business functions and the degree to which they add value to firm performance.

To lay the foundation for this research, this researcher reviewed the existing research on women in HRM, including the work of Brandl et al., 2007; 2008; Brandl & Pohler, 2010; Faugoo, 2011; and Reichel et al., 2010. In their investigations, women in HRM received a significant degree of recognition for their progression to leadership roles. However, each researcher had a distinct perspective about why women are able to

climb the corporate ladder in HR. For example, using a quantitative methodology, Brandl et al. (2007) surveyed 984 companies across 22 countries to analyze the negative effects of social policy practices when female HR directors were involved in strategic planning processes. In that analysis the authors further examined the relationship between social policy practices and gender-egalitarian attitudes when societal factors are considered. The study's results found a link between social policy practices and the strategic integration of women in directorship roles in HR. However, gender-equalitarian attitudes did not show the same kind of relationship with regard to female leadership. The fact that women have succeeded in different leadership roles in different sectors, illicit the question of whether higher gender-egalitarianism attitudes are responsible for paradigm shifts that allow progression for women decision-making hierarchies.

Brandl and Pohler's (2010) literature expanded the studies of Brandl et al., 2007; 2008) in that they collected the testimonies of Austrian CEOs in order to analyze their perception of HR and determine whether HR played a strategic role in the organization. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the authors used supporting frameworks and theories, such as contingency theory, to generalize their findings. The findings of the study suggested that CEOs in Austria have difference perceptions of their HR departments than CEOs in the United States. Furthermore, they concluded that even though CEOs felt the need to support their HR departments and expand the role of HR directors in decision making, CEOs were reluctant to delegate strategic responsibilities to HR leaders. However, because the study appeared to consider CEOs from Austria and the United States as a homogenous group, significant information about the attitudes of

CEOs may have limited the study. As a result, it was difficult to determine gender biases within HR departments in these two countries.

In another significant example, Reichel et al. (2010) presented the benefits of integrating women in HRM without eliminating the division of the traditional roles occupied by men and women. Reichel et al. conducted their research in 11 European countries between 1995 and 2004 and built upon the work of Brandl et al. (2007). The researchers identified the percentage of women in HRM, and uncovered how that percentage affects the status of HRM. Reichel et al. argued that leaders place women into upper management in HRM for two reasons: (1) to integrate women into business by succumbing to societal pressures that are forcing organizations to diversify decision making, and (2) to draw attention to sex stereotypes that lead organizations to place women in upper management positions that are more communal. Reichel et al. further reported that assigning women to these positions supports the integration of men and women in upper management without compromising roles in HRM that are traditionally stereotyped. Although this perspective suggests that more organizations will adopt gender-equalitarianism attitudes, little evidence shows a significant increase of women in strategic business functions since 2010. Besides, Reichel's et al. findings revealed that men were more involved in strategic functions, despite organizations' attempt at enhancing diversity.

A follow-up study by Faugoo (2011) that traced the rise of women in HRM found that enabling social practices, gender equalitarianism, and diversity approaches were related to the rise of these women. Faugoo reported that in certain European countries, such as the U.K., Australia and Canada, women either outnumbered men or were equal to

men in HR director positions. However, organizations viewed men as more suitable than women in managing strategic functions. The author also cited differences in the treatment and promotional opportunities for men and women. In light of this evidence, Faugoo concluded that in countries that had higher gender-equalitarianism, women occupied positions that are usually slated for men in HRM. This inequality not only affords women less strategic responsibilities but it presumably reduces their visibility and restricts their voice in decision making processes.

### **Existing/Relevant Research Methodologies**

The methodologies used in the existing studies that explored women in leadership roles in HRM are a blend of qualitative and quantitative studies; however, many were qualitative. In this study, the researcher has chosen a qualitative methodology. This methodology allows the researcher to ask detailed, in-depth questions about “what” is happening with regard to the phenomenon, not just “why” it is happening. Several of the studies with a qualitative methodology (e.g. Faugoo, 2011) helped to identify factors contributing to women’s advancement. Other existing studies aimed to expand research on women in HRM, while considering the pervasiveness of gender as a barrier for women in organizational hierarchies. For example, Brandl et al. (2008) sought to understand why social policy practices and gender-equalitarian attitudes impact women’s careers in HRM, while examining the benefits of integrating women in decision making. Much of the existing research assumed that women’s roles in strategic tasks are limited due to stereotypical beliefs about men. Brandl et al. (2007) revealed that women in HRM are being ousted as the profession takes on more strategic responsibilities. Stereotypes and bias seem to be interfering with women’s success, despite theory that identifies

women as positive contributors. The existing research methodologies allowed the researchers to discover several factors that have contributed to the integration of women in HR leadership, including societal pressures placed on organizations, stereotypes based on role expectations, staffing decisions, and the gender demographic within HR (Reichel et al., 2010).

### **Limitations/Implications of Existing/Relevant Research**

Some of the existing studies examined by the researcher have limitations. Faugoo's study that investigated the rise of women in HRM was limited to European countries such as the UK, France, and Germany, and does not appear to be a true representation of women in HRM in corporations worldwide. The study relied on qualitative data collected from secondary sources and, as a result, the researchers did not obtain first-hand experiences of women, which may have affected the findings. Women did not provide testimonies that may have revealed their perceptions or assumptions about their progression in HR. Additionally, Brandl et al. (2008), used a cross-country comparison to analyze the strategic role of female HR directors; this study also had limitations. The study was limited because they did not consider internal and external economic and environmental factors, which could have influenced the findings. Instead they may have underemphasized the role women play in strategic business meetings and decision making. Placing more emphasis on the significance of women in strategic roles may have improved the attention of leaders to delegate more responsibilities to these women. Without this awareness, women's contributions to firm performance remain ambiguous.

In another study, Reichel et al. explored the progression of women in leadership roles in HRM across 11 European countries. The study was limited in that it only explored the experiences of women in European countries and did not include other countries, such as the United States. As a result, the authors admitted that future research was necessary because institutional pressures were not generalizable to all countries studied (Reichel et al., 2010). The limitations of the literature signify that there is a need for additional research on women in leadership roles in HRM. There are so many unanswered questions about the role of these women and the potential benefits to an organization that must be studied. Theories suggest that women can positively contribute, but current research has not been able to validate that connection. There is a gap in the existing research that needs to be filled.

### **Women's Advancement in HRM**

Women have dominated the field of HR since its inception and are rising in leadership positions, (Brandl, et al., 2007; Brandl & Pohler, 2010; Pichler et al., 2008). This gradual increase of women in executive positions in HRM represents a change in leadership, not only for women who want to achieve successful management careers (Pichler et al., 2008; Brandl et al., 2008; Reichel et al., 2010; Faugoo, 2011), but also for organizations that want a competitive advantage in global markets (Truss, 1999). Research shows that across 11 countries, there was a 7.5% increase of female leaders in HRM from 1970 to 1990, and a 40% increase from 1995 to 2004 (Faugoo, 2011; Reichel et al., 2010). Moreover, in a study surveying male and female HR directors in 5,820 companies in over 22 industrialized countries, it was found that in highly gender-egalitarian countries, women in HRM were more likely to fill leadership positions than

men (Brandl et al., 2007). The reason is that most organizations in those countries do not categorize women based on perceived characteristics. Organizations also did not categorized women by stereotypic feminine and masculine roles. As a result, women have a greater chance of advancing to leadership positions where they are acknowledged as valuable contributors to the organization.

### **Leadership and Gender in HRM**

Kouzes and Posner (2003) defined leadership as a transparent set of skills and abilities that are valuable for a specific job type regardless of the profession, environment, or industry. Some researchers argued that organizations place women and men into leadership roles because of characteristics and traits that are perceived as either masculine or feminine (Koenig, et al., 2011; Oakley, 2000). For example, Oakley opined that people often characterize women as too soft spoken and timid to fill leadership positions. Koenig et al. (2011) posited that men occupy leadership roles because people categorize those roles as masculine. In HRM, leadership denotes the strategic responsibilities of the HR leader. This important function involves the formulation and execution of strategy and decision making (Brandl et al., 2008). According to Ulrich et al. (2009), the expectation of the HR leader in new organizations is to reduce HR costs, improve HR quality of services, and focus on business needs. They expanded the leadership responsibilities of the position holder in HRM to include: (1) assisting the organization in meeting global challenges, (2) increasing revenue through growth, (3) revolutionizing technology, (4) maximizing productivity and performance through human capital talents, and (5) leading change to achieve organizational excellence. Resource-based theory suggests that a firm's human capital be maximized in this way as well;

however, many organizations continue to maximize the potential of male employees, leaving females behind. Brockbank et al. (2012) further added that the HR leader, who should demonstrate leadership, must possess new competencies and be able to interact with business leaders.

Unfortunately, women in HRM, despite their progression over the past two decades, face skepticism about their capabilities in leadership. One plausible explanation is that some CEOs do not believe that HR leaders are business savvy (Todericiu & Serban, 2013). That is, some business leaders continue to see HR professionals as the people who manage employment and personnel issues. There is also the assumption based on the literature that men are best suited for leadership roles in HRM. For example, Brandl et al. (2008) described the migration of men into leadership positions in HRM. These authors claimed that because the department is more strategically focused, men have found the profession more attractive; thus causing women to be ousted or replaced by men. However, this imbalance is not necessarily related to ability, skill set, or experience; instead, this difference appears to be more influenced by gender bias, stereotypes, the glass ceiling, and misconceptions of women. This statement supports Oakley (2000) finding that gender-based barriers are factors to consider in the slow progress of women who want to advance to the upper echelon of an organization.

Further examination into women in leadership in HRM revealed that the glass ceiling fosters favoritism for men over women (Pichler et al., 2008). Pichler et al. used pre-existing research to reach this conclusion and validate two hypotheses: (1) that women in HR outnumbered men in low-status managerial positions in organizations that support employee involvement because of feminine characteristics, and (2) men

outnumbered women in high-status managerial positions that emphasize strategic HRM because of masculine characteristics. Based on the data examined, the researchers were able to validate claims that feminine characteristics contributed to the overrepresentation of women in low-status roles; however, they did not identify masculine characteristics as a barrier to women's ascension to high-status management roles. Pichler et al. did not provide specific evidence as to why women are not favored in leadership, which led to recommendations for future research. This question of WHY continues to plague researchers and theorists who see the potential benefits of women in leadership, but do not see the resources used in actual practice.

### **Leadership Styles**

As women advance to leadership roles in HRM, some organizational leaders question and criticize their leadership styles. This skepticism happens because historically, people saw women as suited for "soft" roles (Truss, 1999). There is also the question of whether women's leadership styles can influence organizational effectiveness and productivity. Sen and Metzger (2010) examined the leadership styles of 19 female leaders from the United States and 19 female leaders from Latin America. Using a qualitative and quantitative methodology, the researchers found that women tend to be more transformational leaders than men are. A transformational leader, according to Sen and Metzger, is someone who has a leadership style that people characterize as feminine. They described this style of leadership as less authoritative and more participative. In contrast, they found that men were transactional leaders; this leader tends to display more control and authority in his style of leadership (Sen & Metzger, 2010).

Whether women have transformational leadership styles or some combination of transformational and transactional, how women demonstrated leadership matters if organizations are to recognize them as effective leaders. Sen and Metzger stated that leadership styles should be distinctive and built upon compassion, empathy, and caring characteristics. They revealed that women possess these characteristics as leaders, which Sen and Metzger claimed are necessary in a new global economy. Support of this testament is found in earlier studies of Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003); where they found that leadership styles of women align with organizational effectiveness more than leadership styles of men. Eagly's et al. research findings were uncovered in a meta-analysis of 45 studies. Their examination of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles uncovered some differences in how men and women behave in their roles as leaders. Primarily, the studies revealed that leadership styles of women were more interpersonally oriented and democratic, while leadership styles of men were task-oriented and autocratic (Eagly et al., 2003).

Furthermore, because there is an existing mindset about gender and preferred leadership styles, the transition of women into these roles may be slower than the process for men. The interpersonal orientation and democratic ideals are valuable, but this style is different from traditional styles. People may be finding it hard to adjust to the leadership styles of women, particularly, when there are societal forces that continue to foster the mindset of *think leadership, think man*. For women who want to surmount these challenges, Oakley (2000) advised them to be themselves; although being themselves may set them different and apart from the "widely-accepted stereotypes concerning traits value in CEOs" (p. 330).

Eagly et al. further argued that women demonstrate certain patterns of behavior that make them superior leaders. Specifically, they opined that women are more engaging as leaders; this engagement often increases employee job satisfaction. Women are also more concerned about the self-development of others (Eagly et al., 2003), while men are more concerned with accomplishing the task. Sharpe (2000) contends that these important leadership styles allow women to lead more effectively and outshine men in almost every category (as cited in Eagly et al., 2003). Moreover, using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) survey, Bass and Avolio (1994) gathered data from 582 males' direct supports and 219 females' direct supports to assess women's leadership styles. Bass and Avolio found that subordinates, both men and women, believed that women managers were more "effective and satisfying" as leaders (p. 557). Subordinates also believed women demonstrate more "idealized influence of charisma" than male leaders (Bass & Avolio, 1999, p. 53). This evidence reveals a need for organizations to integrate more women into roles that will allow their leadership qualities to benefit the organization. Again, research indicates the need for the integration of women, and theory supports maximizing each employee's potential, so how do leaders bridge this disconnect between theory and practice?

### **Women and Leadership Traits**

Resource-based theory suggests that each employee has specific talents that can contribute to a positive work environment (Olalla, 1999). Positive traits of a leader are evident in transformational leadership (Eagly et al., 2003; Koenig et al., 2011). Kouzes and Posner (2003) conceptualized transformational leaders in terms of their ability to transform the behaviors and standards of people. When this transformation happens,

people are energized and ready to meet organizational challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Given the evidence in the literature, women receive more credit for positive outcomes demonstrated through their leadership traits (Eagly et al., 2003). To be specific, Eagly et al. found women to be more attentive to the needs of subordinates and less self-centered. Eagly et al. found that soft traits influence productivity and organizational effectiveness. They further found that women, in particular, reward behaviors and have the ability to bring about change in people's lives. Workers tend to gravitate toward women because they understand employees' emotions and are intelligent about their personal affairs (Eagly & Carli, 2008). Women are also able to build trusting work atmospheres where subordinates feel comfortable working (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Clearly, these traits do not make women weaker or ineffective as leaders. The findings of these studies were consistent with the leadership characteristics displayed by women and showed a vast difference in how men and women lead in organizations.

### **Women's Leadership Characteristics**

Women's characteristics as they pertain to leadership are one quality within a number of qualities that make women effective leaders. Oakley (2000) pointed out that what differentiates behaviors of male and female leaders are the roles they play, their leadership styles, and characteristics. She implied that the characteristics of a leader have a direct impact on organizational effectiveness, and that leaders who have soft characteristics tend to have great listening skills and the ability to develop a deep understanding of their employees. This connection with employees allows them to reciprocate a relationship built on mutual trust and respect. Kouzes and Posner support Oakley's position by affirming that when women demonstrate soft traits, employees are

more productive. Jiang, Kim, Han, et al. (2009) added that there is a connection among employees' behaviors, their ability to access their knowledge and skills, and high performance. They believed that employees' contributions and input might be restricted because of unsympathetic and inattentive superiors, and could result in employees who are more likely to have low levels of output.

Moreover, employees want leaders who can listen attentively, who are caring, and who have social and emotional intelligence. Even seminal researchers (e.g., Oakley, 2000; Schein, 1975) found that women possess the characteristics that employees gravitate to, which motivates them to be productive. Eagly et al. indicated that this is rarely the case with male leaders, as they tend to lack soft characteristics among their many positive traits as leaders. They argued that women have the ability to influence people, foster harmonious relationships, and create a positive atmosphere through group cohesion. Publicizing the significance of women's characteristics could explain why it is important to value women as contributors in decision making. If characteristics that are considered traditionally female are valued, and can contribute to positive employee performance, why are these resources not utilized more in the form of higher and complex roles for women within an organization? The need for continuous research on women in strategic decision making may provide some understanding of this problem.

### **Women's Participation in Business Strategy**

Women bring unique perspectives to business strategy; however, current approaches to effectively formulating and executing business strategy may require women and men to work collaboratively. In the literature (e.g., Brockbank et al., 2012; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ulrich, 2007; Ulrich et al., 2009) researchers stressed the

importance of involving HR leaders in business strategy. Lawler and Mohrman explained that organizations see value in the contributions of HR leaders when they have full involvement in the implementation of strategy. They indicated that this involvement further requires HR leaders to utilize human capital resources to lead strategy initiatives, to serve as a change agent, and to help implement strategy on the front line. Olalla (1999) explained that with joint resources (men and women), organizations are able to acquire and maintain a competitive advantage. Women can create a competitive advantage for a firm because of their creative ideas and the unique perspectives they can contribute to business strategy as well as strategic decision making (Nielsen & Huse, 2010).

Furthermore, Ulrich (1998) postulated that successful organizations are those that can quickly execute the organization's strategy to stay competitive. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel (1998) gave several definitions of the word strategy in their ten schools of thought: a course or plan of action, a ploy, perspective, position or activities. Similarly, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) defined strategy as a "process or innovation, experimentation, and discovery" (p. 195). Regardless of these variations, Daily et al. (1999) advised that shared business decisions allow for greater satisfaction in the formulation and execution of strategy, while positively affecting a firm's profit margin. Therefore, unlocking the right talent in organizations by allowing women to participate in business strategy may lead to the successful execution of strategy. Researchers, who support women's contributions to business strategy, suggest that further investigation of their value-add services are necessary (Ulrich et al., 2009).

## **Women in Strategic Decision Making**

Although HR leaders have some level of involvement in business strategy and decision making, research shows that women lack involvement in strategic decision making (Brandl et al., 2008; Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008). Vroom (2008) corroborated that men dominate decision making even though there is no evidence that points to men as better decision makers than women. Researchers found that women are less compromising in decision making regarding standards for ethical business practices. This oversight, according to Valentine and Rittenburg (2007), is because women act more ethical in decision-making processes than men do. Branson (2012) added that women bring fresh viewpoints that generate effective solutions to problem solving.

In addition, Samartseva and Fomina (2002) stated, “Women have worked out their own techniques that are appropriate to the uncertain conditions in which business finds itself today” (p. 69). They further argued that women’s decision making is geared toward “fraternalistic norms of behavior” (Samartseva & Fomina, 2002, p. 73), which suggests that women take a more participative approach in decision making. This approach requires constant follow-up with executives and monitoring of how they make decisions to ensure that the group reaches a consensus. With women’s participative style, it is more than likely that organizational leaders will make effective decisions when women are included in decision making. This assumption is supported by this study’s theoretical framework that predicts that organizations that bundle their resources produce positive outcomes. However, despite this increased awareness of women’s underrepresentation in certain sectors, there seems to be no rush by organizational leaders to increase diversification in decision making in organizations.

This failure to act was found in Samartseva and Fomina's exploration of women's management styles as entrepreneurs. In that study they reported that although women exhibited different types of skills, their primary focus is to get the job done effectively. Women were also found to have more ideas about how to manage issues than men do, and they are able to apply their ideas more selectively than men (Samartseva & Fomina, 2002). Women also offer more flexibility in decision making and are able to compromise, regardless of the situation. Yet continuous appeals to organizations to recognize women's innovative ideas and unique point of views that can contribute to the maximization of a firm performance seems to go unnoticed. For example, Oakley (2000) cautioned organizations not to ignore women's voices and input on decision-making to avoid organizational problems. O'Neil et al. (2008) remarked that the most successful organizations are those that maximize women's human capital and encourage their input in decision making. Terjesen et al. (2009) attested that women's involvement in decision making is good for business in changing and learning organizations. If a majority of the literature supports the role of women in decision making, why do organizations continuously support men as key decision makers? What else is operating to prevent women from occupying decision making roles at a rate equal to men? Investigating this organizational blindness is necessary if organizations want to ensure that quality in decision making leads to positive organizational outcomes.

### **Trends on Women as Decision Makers**

Research is limited with regard to the role that women leaders in HRM play in business strategy and strategic decision making. Yet women are constantly advancing to the upper echelons of corporations, in politics, government, and other professions

worldwide. Evidence of this progression was found in Bass and Avolio's (1994) study; they confirmed that four million women in the United States own small businesses. Yu (2011) reported that women own over 9.1 million firms in the United States, which is over 38% of all establishments. In markets worldwide, women are owners of 25% of companies. In Germany they are responsible for generating one million jobs by establishing new businesses, and in Japan women own 23% of businesses (Yu, 2011). These statistics are a clear indication that women are progressing in business. They have the business skills and business knowledge required to lead organizations and collaborate with men in strategic business functions. The question raised is whether additional research will be effective in supporting women's contributions in organizations? If theory suggests that women are underutilized and research supports this notion, then why do organizations continue to show women lagging behind men in leadership roles? In order to understand why this phenomenon persists, Yu suggested more research that highlights women's talents as decision makers. A logical extension to research would be to investigate gender barrier in recruitment, selection, and promotional processes that seem to be contributing factors.

To reiterate women's talents as decision makers, Dawson and Kleiner (1992) mentioned that people sometimes label women as ruthless, but motivated. One example where this ruthlessness was transparent is in the decision making approach of Hillary Rodham Clinton, who occupies the Secretary of State position in President Obama's Administration. An article in the New York Times about Hilary Clinton stated,

Mrs. Clinton was the administration's lead voice in a diplomatic showdown with Pakistan, bluntly warning its military leaders that they would face serious consequences if they continued to tolerate safe havens

for extremist organizations that have crossed the border to attack Americans and Afghans” (Myers, 2011, p. 1).

A second example includes Madeleine Korbelt Albright, a Czech-born refugee, who was the first lady to occupy the position of United States Secretary of State in President Bill Clinton’s second administration from 1997 to 2001. Madeleine Albright also held high-ranking positions at top foreign policy research institutions (U.S. Department of State Archive, 2001). Articles portrayed her as a woman of incredible stature with input into foreign affairs that helped guide the United States government in relations with foreign countries. However, despite the “ruthlessness” these women demonstrated in their roles as influential leaders, apparently, very little impact has been made today to change the attitude of men towards women as decision makers.

In Vanderbroeck’s (2010) study it is noted that women are adopting attitudes that people perceive as masculine to succeed in male-dominated roles. Oakley (2000) cautioned that these women who try to “fit in” run the risk of having people view them as un-feminine. She believes that this characterization creates a perception that women are either ineffective or incompetent. Furthermore, this characterization has caused a woman’s ability as a leader to be questioned and criticized without merit. Though the perseverance women have shown seems to have given them new opportunities for status and recognition in the business world, does this mean that women must continue to adjust their skill set, personality style, or leadership qualities in order to be fully accepted as leaders? Must women continue to adopt traditionally male roles and characteristics in order to gain full membership in corporate suites and board rooms?

Fundamentally, the future for women can be different from the past if women rediscover their place in organizations as business opportunities emerge. The question pondered is whether organizational leaders will reassess women's capabilities with "fresh eyes" and see them as capable decision makers. Answers to this question can vary in the literature. For example, in the qualitative study by Todericiu and Serban (2013) that focused on the changing role of the HR professional to strategic business partner, they found that CEOs expect HR leaders to be involved in strategy and decision making in order to promote the value of the department. Yet CEOs were not convinced that HR leaders are fulfilling their newly strategic role. Specifically, 70 % of CEOs felt that although HR leaders play a key role in strategic planning, their HR agenda was not broad enough. Another 37% of CEOs believed that HR people were not business savvy. Todericiu and Serban's study concluded that HR leaders lacked assertiveness in demonstrating their worth to CEOs. Though the study did not identify the gender of the HR leaders, there is reason to believe that challenges for women in HR will be greater than their male counterparts. Getting CEOs to see women from new a lens may require women to not only demonstrate business intelligence but to influence the perception, ideologies, or beliefs of men about the role women play in an organization.

### **Women in Strategic Processes**

Understandably women in leadership roles will have to do much more to convince CEOs that they are fulfilling their strategic roles. Nielsen and Huse (2010) argued, an organization should not consider gender as a criterion for decision making, and should not overlook the unique value and expertise women possess that can positively influence decision making. This argument supports resource-based theory's notion that resources

should be combined to produce effective organizational outcomes. There is also evidence from Okanlawon (1994) that when executives exclude women from decision making, they are denied consistent engagement with key executives that will allow them to gain credibility and recognition as decision makers. Okanlawon indicated that because of this exclusion, colleagues often fail to cooperate with women; thus hindering their chances of being a part of decision making processes. He further attested that women bring different ideas and experiences to decision making, which helps minimize the number of problems diagnosed inaccurately or detected late. Such effects are noted by Nielsen and Huse, who echoed that when women's viewpoints are included in decision making, the organization's chance of higher performance increases.

Overall, the literature suggests that women's involvement in decision-making is an absolute necessity, yet the potential significance of their contributions to business strategy and decision making seems to be overlooked. This lack of recognition seems to be more harmful to women as individuals, rather than to the organization as a whole. For example, Wrigley (2002) found that women often feel underappreciated and undervalued, while Oakley (2000) reported that women feel ostracized and insignificant; thus causing them to underperform and become unproductive. Eagly and Carli (2007) attested that women have made more sacrifices than men have in order to gain recognition in strategic roles. Kottis (1993) added that women have done all they have been asked to do in terms of acquiring the business education, skills, and competencies to become decision makers. She affirmed that women speak the business language, understand strategy, engage in problem resolution, and make sound business decisions (Kottis, 1993). Yet organizational leaders seem slow to acknowledge women's contributions in decision making (Torchia,

Calabró & Huse, 2011). Understanding why women in high-level positions are not being recognized at a rate equal to men in similar roles needs further research. Particularly, because resource-based theory predicts that organizations that co-create women experiences will achieve a competitive advantage.

### **Women's Contributions to Firm Performance**

Women to a large extent are involved in important strategic functions within an organization that ultimately improves the firm performance. Any resource that improves a firm's performance should, accordingly, be considered as valuable and unique. Hence, when resources are combined (men and women), decisions are diverse and the organization's performance improves (Olalla, 1999). Despite this insight, an appeal for more women in decision making has not been made by organizational leaders. While studies on decision making have emphasized the benefits for diversity, organizations rarely increase the number of women in decision making. Among the studies that investigated this problem are Nielsen & Huse (2010) and Terjesen et al. (2009). In Nielsen and Huse's study, they examined survey data from 120 Norwegian firms to determine whether there was a positive relationship between women contributions to board decisions and improved board strategic involvement. Through their investigation, they were able to draw attention to a number of factors that show a relationship between women on boards and corporate performance.

Conversely, in Terjesen's et al. (2009) study on women on corporate boards, they compared board performance when women are included and excluded from a board's decision making. Evaluating all-male boards and diversified boards, they discovered that a firm with female board members outperformed the non-diversified board. Women

contributing on boards also helped to increase market capitalization in large firms, enhanced corporate governance and ethical conduct, and reduced poor business deals. In light of the investigations, both Nielsen and Huse (2010) and Terjesen et al. (2009) concluded that a woman's contributions to decision making influence firm performance. While the need for women in decision making is clear in the literature, women are still underrepresented in many sectors in decision making processes.

How important the mere presence of a woman is in decision making was emphasized in Daily's et al. (1999) literature that addressed women's contributions to firm performance. Daily et al. argued, women's inclusion in strategic decision making is particularly necessary to markets that sell products women desire. They explained that women make a majority of the products sold, which makes their input valuable in business decisions. In another study, Branson (2012) supported the significance of women's strong involvement in business decisions. He felt that women's contributions could prevent many financial disasters from occurring in companies. His attestation of a woman's value to a firm is evident in the declaration: "If Lehman Brothers were actually Lehman Sisters the company never would have gone under" (Branson, 2012, p. 795). Similar to most researchers in the existing literature, it appears that Branson made a bold attempt to draw attention to women in decision making by publicizing their influence on firm performance. For women, this appeal to organizations is beneficial but to men the attention presumably can either increase or decrease diversity in decision making.

Terjesen et al. go on to say that in business meetings, women have an innate ability to cause men to temper their political behaviors and focus on the task. They affirm that women regulate meetings because they do not like to "play games" in business talks.

In Dezsö and Ross' (2012) qualitative study, they used data from panels of top executives of S & P 1500 firms collected over 15 years to explore the link between women in leadership roles and improved firm performance. Their findings confirmed that when women are sharing in decision making with men, the performance of the firm improves. This improvement happens because women add real life experiences to discussions and are able to bring insight into dilemmas the organization may face. Furthermore, when women are included in discussions with men, there are more alternatives and richer solutions to problem solving (Dezsö & Ross, 2012). Among discussions with men, Daugherty (2012) called attention to organizational barriers that contribute to the challenges women face in decision-making roles. In particular, Oakley (2000) acknowledged that although women demonstrate their competencies in strategic processes, societal barriers and other barriers often hinder their progress in leadership roles. As Oakley warned, the underutilization of resources is not necessarily based on capabilities, but rather, they are a consequence of societal factors that remain as an obstacle for women. Despite continued research on women in leadership and the existing research that shows potential benefits of equality in leadership, there remains a gap in the research; there is little research on these societal barriers that impact gender.

### **Societal and Other Barriers in HRM**

Societal barriers and other barriers stem from past and present experiences and may have a direct impact on relationships between men and women in the workplace (Oakley, 2000). These barriers include stereotypes, gender bias, discrimination, and the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is a metaphor that prevents women from excelling to management; the glass ceiling acts as a barrier for those who have already advanced to

leadership (Pichler et al., 2008). In the current literature (Brandl et al., 2007; 2008; Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008; Yan, et al., 2009), researchers provided extensive insight into the restrictions these barriers have on the careers and lives of women in HRM. Oakley (2000) provides an example of the underrepresentation of women at the top of the organization. She identified barriers, such as the boys' club, stereotypes, tokenism, and the glass ceiling as factors that hinder women's progress in the workplace. According to Oakley, when these barriers are intact in organizations, executives may criticize women and deem them "unsuitable" for management positions. This kind of perception may be unique to each individual, deeply rooted in the individual's history and may be very difficult to acknowledge, and therefore, difficult to change.

These individual and personal perceptions are not often a focus of research; there is a gap in the existing research with regard to the individual experience of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to their involvement (or lack thereof) in business decisions. Oakley explained that women have different experiences in the business world. For example, some women adopt behaviors that are perceived to be masculine but are then characterized as too aggressive. Yet when they show emotional intelligence, they are told that they are not tough enough to be a member of "boys' network". Regardless, without understanding the challenges women face, many organizations may remain blind; unable to see the value of women as a valuable resource.

Research has shown that the barriers women face won't just disappear. In fact, barriers, despite their origin and prevalence in organizations, have a direct impact on women regardless of a woman's status and power in the organization. Oakley implied that organizations strengthen these barriers each time a man is appointed to a powerful

position. She explained that parents (and other social influences) foster this dominance throughout childhood; boys tend to socialize with boys while girls socialized with girls. The early social behavior may have contributed to the dominance of men in leadership roles. Weyer (2007) said, “The leader is bound by roles related to gender. These roles are developed from consensual beliefs within society about the attributes of women and men and are based solely on gender” (p. 484). Weyer’s statement further implies that social and transference behaviors cement barriers in organizations. As a result, prejudice, whether overt or covert, may negatively influence men’s relationship with women in most hierarchies.

Kottis (1993) pointed out that prejudice causes women to lack both formal and informal power, which are critical for leadership. Kottis explained that women in management are “caught in a vicious circle” (p. 10); they do not have sufficient power for ascension to senior management positions because they are not members of men’s social networks. Yet when they try to become members of social networks, men ostracize them because they have no power. When they do gain a little acceptance to male groups, they are still unable to generate the degree of power needed to be accepted as business leaders. Oakley affirmed in the literature that stereotypical behaviors towards women in male-supportive networks are strong “social forces” that maintain barriers in organizations. With these social forces in place, it seems highly unlikely that the circle of men in top-level positions will be broken for several more decades. Even Oakley (2000) acknowledged, “Given that CEOs themselves have a great deal of power over who will be their successor, their responses can only be interpreted as a prediction that is likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy” (p. 332). This statement further supports future

research on the importance and benefits of including women in decision making and strategic planning.

In addition, organizations should work to eliminate the barriers impeding women's career progress, as they only serve to keep women underrepresented in many business activities that men dominate. Traditionally, there seems to be an organizational consciousness that supports the existence of barriers that prevent women from "taking over" male-dominated roles. Lahtinen and Wilson (1994) posited that men feel threatened by women because organizations feel pressured to increase women's presence in hierarchies. While there is a business necessity to increase the number of women in management (Brandon, 2012), there are some organizational leaders who innovate without women's ideas. Those leaders presumably operate under a huge misconception. Schein (1978) cautioned that most organizations' approaches to leadership continue to support the "think manager think male" syndrome. Irrespective of this organizational blindness, attitudes towards women in leadership must improve if women are to have equal opportunities in organizations, and in society. This mindset is an individual experience that is deeply rooted and difficult to change.

In order to better understand an individual's experience about gender and leadership, qualitative research is necessary. Probing in-depth into the real life experiences of women in HRM not only fills a gap in research, but provides insight that may help organizations see the urgent need to increase the utilization of women in strategic functions. The notion that organizations can continue to strive competitively in the marketplace without women's input and innovative ideas seem less realistic today than a decade ago. Resource-based theory postulates that a firm's resources that are

unique among other significant factors can help achieve a competitive advantage (Ngo et al., 2008). Furthermore, women are advancing to top level positions with immeasurable skills, and have managed to hold titles such as Vice President, Senior Vice President, Senator, Prime Minister, and President. Clearly, the shifting of attitudes towards women is happening though they still hold many challenges for women in leadership.

### **Attitude towards Women in Leadership**

The prevalence of commonly held attitudes towards women in leadership positions compound challenges for women as they advance to leadership roles. Evidence of this problem can be found in Bilimoria and Pidert's (1994) study and Oakley's (2000) study. They found that women do not receive the same level of support as men; they are criticized and scrutinized more than men are, and they are not praised for their accomplishments as highly as men are. Other researchers uncovered that men receive higher salaries than women do, despite similar competencies and skill sets (Wrigley, 2002; Pichler et al., 2008). Yan, et al. (2009) also found favoritism in employment decisions, compensation, and benefits. Clearly, the effects of negative attitudes towards women seem to have put women at a disadvantage at many levels within the organization.

However, although many studies suggest that men are creating and displaying negative attitudes towards women, some research do not corroborate this finding; men and women alike were found to engage in this behavior. In Johnson and Mathur-Helm's (2011) study, executive women were found reluctant to promote other women. Specifically, women executives limit opportunities for other women in the workplace by creating barriers that prevent them from ascending to management roles. Johnson and

Mathur-Helm referred to this obstruction as the “Queen Bee (QB) Syndrome.” They went on to describe how organizations with this QB syndrome find women executives reluctant to help other career-driven women who want to succeed as leaders. Johnson and Mathur-Helm further noted that women executives display more biased attitudes towards women than they do towards men. Such prejudice also tends to influence the decisions and judgment of women executives in their evaluation of other women. Additionally, the women with QB syndrome tend to be ruthless and lack empathy.

Indeed, there is always the question of whether women’s attitudes toward other women, or men’s attitudes toward women, are more harmful to women who want to advance in the organization. Dubno (1985) asserted, men and women have conflicting attitudes toward women in leadership but men respond less favorably to women in leadership roles than women do. This attitude towards women was later validated in Daily’s et al. (1999) study, where the researchers found that men responded negatively toward women in corporate suites and boardrooms. Specifically, men often ostracized women and shut them out of important decisions. In even more recent studies, Shalvi (2011) attempted to raise consciousness of women’s underrepresentation in decision making in countries such as Israel. She called attention to similar attitudes of men toward women. She stated that women are almost invisible when they are around the business table with men. In some business meetings, she cited that a woman would make a suggestion and others would ignore it. A few minutes later, a man might make the identical suggestion and others would praise him for his creativity. She commented, “Not being allowed to speak is one thing, but then to speak and be ignored is the highest humiliation” (Shalvi, 2011, p. 157). Humiliation, shame, fear, pride, and other emotional

experiences are deeply personal and therefore, require an individual analysis to understand them. Little research exists on this kind of unique experience for women in leadership roles in HRM; this gap must be filled.

In examining logical rationales for the attitudes towards women, some researchers blamed stereotypical behaviors and misperceptions of women as leaders (Oakley, 2000; Pichler et al., 2008; Schein, 1978). Other researchers pointed to men's fear of women's advancement to upper management (Lahtinen & Wilson, 1994). Oakley argued that men's personal feelings, created by their upbringing, are a possible cause. Regardless of the reasons, women in HRM are unable to perform their job responsibilities fully because of negative attitudes towards them in leadership. Nielsen and Huse explained how these attitudes limit women in decision making. Even the resource-based view emphasizes the positive benefits of integrating ideas in order for a firm to get ahead of the competition. Yet, seeing a woman as a valuable and tangible resource seems to be often devalued by many organizational leaders.

### **Gender Bias in Decision Making**

Gender bias in decision making obstructs communications and interferes with the choices and judgment of decision makers (Okanlawon, 1994). This argument is consistent with the resource-based view that supports diversification in organizational decision making. Ely et al. (2011) attested that gender bias prevents women from utilizing their skills to their fullest potential. Other researchers (e.g., Lieber, 2009; Ragins et al., 1998; Reinhold, 2005) added that gender bias causes a woman to question her potential to become a leader. In other studies (e.g., Nielsen and Huse, 2010; Terjesen et al., 2009), gender bias was found in executive suites and boardrooms where women's

voices and input in decision making are often restricted. Indeed, the harmful effect of gender bias seems to be under-estimated despite the limitation it places on women's voices in important business meetings. An organization examining this problem from the perspective of resource-based theory may see the value of a woman's viewpoint and support the utilization of women in decision making.

In further examining gender bias, Lieber (2009) discovered that gender bias can cause women to have low morale, negative self-esteem, and damaged reputations. In the literature of Westphal and Stern (2007), they investigated gender bias in boardrooms and found that it creates other elements of bias. They identified two types of biases: in-group bias and out-group bias, and noted that their influence on women in leadership roles was harmful. Westphal and Stern explained that these types of biases occur when people who have a high regard for themselves identify with people who share the same internal traits. As a result, social categories are formed and people are placed into in-groups and out-groups based on gender. Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis (2002) further explained that an in-group can feel threatened by an out-group to the extent that the "threat can be perceived in terms of the in-group's social identity, its goals and values, its position in the hierarchy, even its existence" (p. 586). Fundamentally, these studies all revealed the potentially damaging effect of gender bias on women in leadership roles, or those striving for positions of leadership. By changing the perceptions of women, men and women can better understand the impact of gender bias in decision making.

### **Changing Perceptions of Women**

Changing the perceptions of women in leadership roles may help executives to see women with "fresh eyes" and equal to men in similar roles. According to Schein

(1999), when top executives begin to unlearn old ways of thinking and embrace new perspectives, change will become a natural process as they try to protect their power, personal and professional identities, and social status. In Scharmer's (2008) research, he outlined a model for change that helps organizational leaders abandon old beliefs in order to see emerging possibilities. Scharmer's Theory U model can help organizational leaders become aware of their "blind spot" and explore new territories; this exploration can help leaders to begin a process of changing old perceptions, to allow for a critical rethinking of women in leadership roles.

Changing perceptions of women may also help women fully utilize their talents. As mentioned previously, when men dominate decision making, women are often limited in their job responsibilities (Oakley, 2000; Pichler et al., 2008; Shalvi, 2011). Changing how others perceive women will presumably increase opportunities for women. For example, the number of women considered for promotions may increase, women's salaries may become more competitive with men's salaries, and the number of women involved in business decisions may increase. However, Ragins et al. (1998) warned that while some leaders recognize the need for change, others are gender-blind and may have some difficulty changing their perceptions of women. Schein (1999) believes that changing how others view women will require an examination of key executives' individualistic perspectives, their own experiences, or the experiences shared by their social group. Because there is reason to believe based on the literature that changing perceptions of women is complicated, a greater effort at integrating women in strategic functions seems more plausible. This integration process for women in leadership roles

may give key executives a better understanding of their strategic potential in organizations.

### **The Need for Gender Integration**

Resource-based theory suggests that the integration of women, particularly in HRM, is essential in order for the department and its leaders to be successful in undertaking a strategic role. Yet the literature shows that there is no balance of power in leadership roles (Gooch, 1994). In fact, in a profession such as HR that women have historically dominated, men occupy the majority of positions that have strategic responsibilities (Brandl et al., 2008; Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008). In Gooch's research, she surveyed 149 women who worked on a part-time basis and were interested in entering the Institute of Personnel Management to understand the career experiences of these women. With the data collected, Gooch uncovered that women in Personnel were lacking certain attitudes and skills. The participants she surveyed never attended courses that would build their confidence in power roles, improve assertiveness, or help them manage conflict. Women lacked mentors to support their careers and some had to limit their careers due to family obligations. In terms of equalizing leadership roles, Gooch further discovered that women in HRM have the opportunity to change business practices that favor men in strategic roles. This finding is troublesome because it adds to the belief that women have the ability to change their positions and status within a company. Having the ability does not necessarily indicate that all women will take opportunities to advance themselves in an organization.

Nevertheless, the integration of women into strategic business functions gives many women empowerment and a sense of self-worth. In turn, women who are

empowered may share their aspirations with top members of the organization as a means to move the organization forward. In the new economy, the integration of women may allow organizations to have different perspectives and options to explore. Studies that draw on resource-based theory support the integration of women (Dezsö & Ross, 2012). Many studies have proven that different point of views and perspectives in decision making contribute to success (Gharajedaghi, 1999; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Scharmer, 2007). In competitive environments, organizations have had to shift their thinking and paradigms to remain successful, profitable, and competitive. In looking for new and different ideas, resource-based theory urges organizations to utilize all their human capital resources to achieve a competitive edge (Flamholtz, 1972; Olalla, 1999; Rosli & Mahmood, 2013). This move forward requires organizational leaders to maximize all their human capital and tap into resources that they previously glossed over for reasons like gender bias or stereotyping. Studies have also shown that organizations that integrate women often benefit (Brandl et al., 2008). Organizations will have to adapt and change quickly for continued competitiveness through integration.

Integrating women into business strategy and decision making is the foundation of a successful organization. Daily et al. (1999) warned that organizations could lose the war on female talent if organizational policies and practices do not promote diversity. They further argued that diversity in business decisions allows for greater satisfaction in the formulation and execution of strategy, while positively affecting a firm's profit margin. Yet the integration of women in decision making remains a problem for most organizations. For example, Nielsen and Huse indicated that when men and women are involved in decision making, arguments often lead to counter-arguments, which

ultimately have a negative impact on group dynamics. As a result, differences in how women and men approach business discussions affects the quality of decisions made in board rooms. Organizations supporting the integration of women will have to develop strategies that will lead to effective outcomes.

### **Strategies for Gender Integration**

Strategies for the integration of women in HRM are necessary in order for organizations to reach a competitive advantage. Research shows that organizations that integrate women can benefit from their co-created experiences. According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), co-creation is about innovation and the value created in an organization when all members of the organizations combine their knowledge and experiences to allow for emerging possibilities. They contended that co-creation of value in organizations produces successful outcomes and supports diversity in decision making. Co-creation can also revolutionize an organization and drive competitiveness through innovation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Organizational leaders who understand the importance of co-creation seem to excel among their competitors.

Women who co-create experiences bring fresh ideas to decision making and problem resolution. Through co-creation, women participate in a collaborative engagement with key executives toward a common vision. This experience allows women to support the organization's strategy, goals, and innovation to place the organization at a competitive advantage. Particularly, women in HRM increase their chance to gain credibility with top management when they co-create. Assumably, the more exposure women have in strategic meetings, the more likely it is that executives will hear their voices and implement their suggestions. Researchers corroborated that

men often ignore or disregard women's voices in strategic discussions (Oakley, 2000; Shalvi, 2011). Frigo (2010) believed that key executives play a vital role in co-creating women's experiences and value by building engagement platforms. Will this process require executives to interact more with women in leadership roles and consider their ideas? Resource-based theory asserts, organizations that see women as equal contributors will more than likely reach a competitive edge over their competitors. Geh (2011) posited, "The key to competitive advantage is for firms to be able to sustain the advantages gained from superior resources or superior resource combinations" (p. 28). Key executives who are reluctant to co-create women's experiences may lose the war on competitiveness and innovation as suggested by theories on strategic management.

### **Summary**

This literature review provided an analysis of existing and relevant research on women in leadership roles in HRM. As demonstrated, the research has widely investigated the role HR leaders play in the organization. The findings revealed that most HR leaders have the competencies, skills, education, and business knowledge to become business partners with key executives. Researchers also found that many HR leaders are already involved in business strategy and decision making with CEOs; however, researchers did not identify the gender of the HR leaders seated at the business table in strategic planning meetings with business leaders.

The literature review provides a foundation for the current research; this study did not ignore the significance of gender in HRM as many of the studies have. According to Brandl et al. (2008), there is a need for future research in the area of gender in leadership and strategic decision making. The literature review has shown that women do

participate in some strategic functions and that women can be valued contributors to the field of HRM. Resource-based theory supported the need for women to be recognized as valuable contributors to business strategy and strategic decision making. The theory further explained why diversification in strategic business functions can create a firm's competitive advantage. Simultaneously, the research has also shown that women continue to face discrimination, bias and various other gender-related inequalities that interfere with their ability to gain status within an organization. The literature review informed the reader about how these barriers can affect individual and overall firm performance. The chapter included an outline of some of the barriers to women's advancement, including men's perceptions of women in leadership, and the notion that organizational success depends on the equal treatment of women and men. It is important understand the effects of gender and how barriers limit women's involvement in strategic functions; this information can help women to become equal contributors in business strategy and strategic decisions.

In addition, the literature review showed that there are many gaps that still exist in the research. Particularly, research does not acknowledge the importance of the individual experience with gender in leadership. Perceptions, personal feelings, personal history, day-to-day experiences are deeply personal and unique to each individual; research has failed to include the importance of these constructs in analyzing women's roles in leadership. Because of the ingrained nature of these personal experiences, more qualitative research is needed to explore the unique individual experience and how this experience contributes to women's advancement, success, and acceptance in leadership roles. The current research attempted to fill the gap that exists in the current research. It

included an analysis of the existing research, including a discussion of the various research methodologies, purpose, and an explanation of how the existing literature has informed the current research.

### **Remaining Chapters**

Chapter 3 explains the details about the methodology used for the current research. The following chapter outlines the chosen participant group, the setting, and the approach to the current study. Additionally, the researcher provided a description of the data collection procedures, data analysis methods, and methodological limitations.

## **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to gather information about the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM, how gender affects their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making, and how existing biases (or prejudices) impact the overall effectiveness of a firm's performance. The proposed research was exploratory in nature. A qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach was used in order to gain a deeper understanding of women's participation experiences in these strategic business functions. This type of research is the best method for gathering in-depth information about personal experiences; this method was chosen because the researcher wanted to understand a phenomenon and obtain answers to the research questions. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) support this methodology and contend that it allows the researcher to discover theories and build upon those theories. Therefore, as this researcher wanted to understand the participation experiences of female HR leaders, it made practical sense to employ a qualitative methodology to gather information from the participants.

In addition, this chapter includes a detailed description of how data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Collecting women's testimonies, perspectives, and opinions about their experiences in business strategy and decision making was valuable in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the problem under investigation. The researcher

interpreted the data with a feminist and constructivist approach, to build an understanding of the challenges women HR leaders face in HRM. The data helped answer the research questions.

### **Research Questions**

As indicated previously, the research questions for this study are:

R1. What role do women in leadership positions in HRM fulfill in business strategy and strategic decision making in medium-sized organizations?

R2. What is the participation experience of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making in medium-sized organizations?

R3. How do the contributions of women in leadership roles in HRM, with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making, influence a medium-sized firm's performance?

R4. How does gender bias (or prejudice) affect women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making in medium-sized organizations?

### **Research Design**

This researcher selected a qualitative, phenomenological method in order to gain a deeper understanding of women in leadership roles in HRM, their experiences in business strategy and strategic decision making, and the affects of gender as a possible hindrance to their career responsibilities. According to Sanders (1982), "Phenomenology seeks to make explicit the implicit structure and meanings of human experiences. It is the search for [essences] that cannot be revealed by ordinary observations. Phenomenology is the

study of essential structures of consciousness or experiences” (p. 354). Moreover, phenomenological research, which began with Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher, asserts that people connect their experiences to phenomena that occur around them (Groenewald, 2004). Groenewald argued that these experiences become interpretations of situations, which are based on experiences and phenomena that have occurred. People who based decisions on experiences and interpretations of circumstances seldom looked at the phenomenon as a unique experience. In other words, altered perceptions and experiences are not pure phenomenological research. Hence, to understand the phenomenon from the life experiences of women in HRM, this researcher used a qualitative phenomenological method for this study.

Additionally, according to Bryman (2006), qualitative research gives the researcher the best opportunities for exploring and building upon theories that the researcher develops through phenomenological thinking. The methodology was also utilized and found to be effective by several researchers. For example, a qualitative approach was used in Krider and Ross’ (1997) study in order to gain a deep understanding of women’s experiences and their role as women in Public Relations. Byrd (2009) also used a qualitative method because it allowed her to understand the rich experiences of African American women in leadership roles in predominantly White organizations. Patterson and Bae (2013) improved their understanding about the scarcity of women in leadership roles in Korean firms using this methodology as well. Furthermore, qualitative research was recommended by Bansal and Corley (2011), not only to establish engagement with the phenomenon, but also to validate the research

findings. The advantage of using qualitative research is that the methodology may produce new research questions and explanations (Bansal & Corley, 2011).

### **Constructivist View**

Epistemological beliefs can influence the methodology of the researcher (Bryman, 2006); therefore, the qualitative methodology supported the researcher's feminist perspective and constructivist view of the problem explored. These two approaches allowed the researcher to focus on the real experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM in order to answer the research questions. Accordingly, they allowed the researcher to construct a better understanding of the phenomenon for this group (Kridler & Ross, 1997). Specifically, a constructivist view provided a rich understanding of the phenomenon and allowed the researcher to do more than simply observe and report the findings. As a result, the researcher became totally involved in the process of understanding, in order to interpret and report the findings accurately. Fosnot (1996) affirmed that, "The constructivist view is therefore premised on the belief that a researcher always approaches a problem with a preconceived notion (a default theory) about the nature of the problem, and by implication, a possible solution for it" (as cited in Mir & Watson, 2000, p. 943). A constructive perspective helped further the exploration of gender and its impact on women's contributions to firm performance. This way the researcher did not over-generalize the findings (Mir, & Watson, 2000), but instead, the researcher was able to better understand the phenomenon.

### **Feminist Perspective**

Paired with a constructivist view, the feminist perspective helped strengthen the understanding of the participation experiences of the women in HRM. Wrigley (2002)

argued that from a feminist perspective, female participants established comfort in revealing heartfelt experiences that directly impacted their careers and personal lives. Based on this insight, the researcher viewed the problem under investigation from the perspective of a woman and as a female HR executive; thus, connecting her real life experiences in HRM with the testimonies of the female participants. The researcher also established a broader scope of questions that were posed to participants. A feminist perspective provided the flexibility necessary to generate a richer analysis of the interview data. This flexibility was apparent in Kim's (1997) research. She purported, "Feminist research criticizes non-feminist scholarship, addresses the concerns of women or other traditionally less powerful social groups, and focuses on topics that are usually omitted from traditional research" (Kim, 1997, p. 102). In general, this approach supported the research questions that focused on improving knowledge about women in HRM and their experiences. Feminist research brought transparency to differences in the treatment of men and women in the HR profession and addressed some of the barriers women are facing in leadership roles.

### **Population**

In order to obtain rich information about the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making, accomplished women executives were chosen from a population of HR leaders. The chosen population was a small representation of the larger population of HR leaders, who are included in strategic business decisions with Senior Executives. The smaller population was women who are in HR leadership roles in medium-sized organizations in and around New York. Additionally, though participants were directly from upper

management in HR, the population characteristics were similar with regard to gender roles, leadership positions, and potential gender dynamics within the upper echelons of other organizations (Creswell, 2000). The female participants were recruited because they had insight about or experience with the phenomenon, and because they were able to provide information that supported the feminist perspective for a group of women that is often under-researched. The population and setting were significant and appropriate because in many HR departments, men control strategic functions (Faugoo, 2011; Pichler et al., 2008).

### **Sample and Sample Size**

The sample size for this study was 10 women in leadership roles in HRM. Research suggests that an appropriate sample size for qualitative phenomenological research is between 6 and 30 respondents (Srnrka & Koeszegi, 2007). Francis et al. (2010) contended that a sample size is justified based on the interviewing process and when the data reaches saturation. They suggested 10 to 13 interviews. The sample size of 10 participants was suitable for this qualitative phenomenological study because the narratives and questionnaires provided rich information for a comprehensive analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher drew sufficient information from the 10 participants to reach data saturation. The information gathered from the 10 interviews also provided significant content to make comparisons, analysis, and conclusions. Francis et al. attested that if the sample size is adequate and the interviews elicit the responses that the researcher intended, “it is likely that the content domain of the construct has been adequately populated [or saturated]” (p. 1230).

Two primary sources that supported the sample size in this study are Dispenza, Watson, Chung, and Brack (2012) and Gibson (2004). Although the authors used a small sample size, they were able to gather enough information to analyze and investigate their topics of interest. Swanson and Holton (2005) warned that the accuracy of the sample is more important than the size of the sample. Based on this information, the researcher utilized a questionnaire as an additional source of information to validate the accuracy of the interview content. With an in-depth interview, a questionnaire, observation, and thorough written notes, the researcher gathered more than enough information to answer the research questions effectively.

### **Sample Frame**

The sample frame was a subset of HR leaders, who the researcher selected based on certain characteristics. Specifically, the recruits were women in leadership positions with at least five years of experience in their positions. Leadership roles included the title of HR Director or above (e.g., Vice President of HR, Associate Executive Director of HR, and Executive Director of HR), as shown in Figure 2. Purposive sampling was used to select these women because they met this specific criterion. According to Patton (2002), with purposive sampling the researcher can select women who meet selection criteria or are specialized in a particular expertise. The researcher chose a sample of 10 women from the sample frame of women in HRM. The sample frame was compiled using LinkedIn and other Internet sources. The researcher recruited a slightly larger sample; however, based on the number of contacts received, an exclusion and inclusion criteria was used to narrow the list of women to ten potential participants. For example, if a recruit did not hold a leadership role or occupied a leadership position for five or more

years, she was excluded from participating in the study. In addition, the researcher did not account for specific ethnicity and race during recruitment because the current research focused on gender (Denton & Zeytinoğlu, 1993).

Moreover, while purposive sampling was best suited for the phenomenological approach used in this study (Groenwald, 2004), the whole premise was to gain an in-depth understanding of the problem being explored. Researchers using purposive sampling benefited from the richness of the data collected from interviewees, which was critical in answering the research questions.

Participant	Position	Industry
<b>P1</b>	Vice President of Human Resources	Non-Profit
<b>P2</b>	Director of Human Resources	Non-Profit
<b>P3</b>	Director of Human Resources	For-Profit
<b>P4</b>	Director of Human Resources	Non-Profit
<b>P5</b>	Executive Director of Human Resource	For-Profit
<b>P6</b>	Vice President of Human Resources	For-Profit
<b>P7</b>	Director of Human Resources	Non-Profit
<b>P8</b>	Director of Human Resources	Non-Profit
<b>P9</b>	Director of Human Resources	Non-profit
<b>P10</b>	Associate Executive Director of Human Resources	Non-profit

Figure 2. This table distinguishes the participants by their job titles and industry. All participants were female.

### Contacting Participants

The researcher sent 56 introductory letters or emails to potential candidates explaining the purpose of the research and the reason they were selected for the study.

The researcher followed-up with participants one week later by telephone and/or email. Based on conversations with the executives, some were either too busy to participate or had upcoming travel plans. Eleven women agreed to participate in the study and were sent via email a consent form to complete; however, one of the 11 participants was later eliminated when she did not return the consent form and questionnaire. Moreover, all participants were informed that the study was voluntary and that no adverse consequence will result from participating in the research. In order to protect participants they were assured anonymity and confidentiality and were assured that no harm or distress will come to them for contributing to the study. Participants were not asked to give monetary contributions, nor were they asked to waive any of their legal rights to participate in the research. They also had the option to return the questionnaires and signed consent forms to the researcher by email or hand deliver them to the researcher during the face-to-face interview.

The researcher interviewed six participants over the telephone and four participants were interviewed in person. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher asked the participants if they had any questions about the consent form or the interviewing process. Six of the 10 participants returned their signed consent forms and questionnaires via email and the remaining participants hand-delivered their consent forms to the interviewer. The consent forms and questionnaires that were hand-delivered were scanned into a word document. All the information collected were saved electronically, labeled and saved on a flash drive. All paper copies were safeguarded in a locked cabinet.

## **Instrument and Field Test**

The instruments used for the data collection included an in-depth, semi-structured interview and a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by Westphal and Stern (2007) but was slightly modified to align with the purpose of the study. See Appendix C for a copy of the interview questionnaire. The reason for the questionnaire was to help the researcher remain focused on the questions directly related to the research questions. The questions helped elicit information about the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making. The questions further helped establish the effects of gender on women's involvement in strategic business functions.

In addition, the researcher field tested the questionnaire in spring 2011 to assess the availability of participants, the rate of response to the interviewing process, and to help narrow down appropriate questions for the current research. The field test also established the credibility, transferability, dependability, and trustworthiness of the questions. Respondents who participated in the field test were HR leaders, who had experience in strategic decision making. They also had experiences developing and implementing surveys, such as employee satisfaction surveys. See Appendix B for a copy of the field test questionnaire. The HR participants provided feedback in response to the questions below and appropriate modifications were made to the instrument:

1. Were the questions easy to read and understand?
2. Were the questions relevant to the topic of investigation?
3. Were there any errors in the survey that interfered with comprehension?
4. Was the survey vague and easy to misinterpret?

5. Was information in the survey repetitive?
6. Were there too many questions?
7. Were you satisfied with the structure and design of the survey?

A semi-structured interview guide is another instrument used in this study. The instrument included an original set of interview questions that helped elicit information from the female participants. According to Patton (2002), using an interview guide makes it easier to probe deeper in order to extract relevant information that will help answer the research questions. Probing is common in phenomenological qualitative studies, particularly when the goal is to extract large amounts of data, which can cause a theory to emerge from the data analysis (Creswell, 2000). Participants were asked and responded to 10 direct questions as shown in Appendix D. One reason for asking direct questions was to get to the core of the research in the most straightforward way. A feminist perspective and constructive view of the data collected further allowed for a clear understanding of the challenges these female participants face in their leadership roles.

### **Data Collection**

In qualitative research, interviews are a valuable method of collecting data (Khatri & Budhwar, 2002), especially in a phenomenological and exploratory study. Therefore, the researcher collected data from participants using a semi-structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The data were examined from a feminist and constructivist perspective as previously mentioned. During the data collection process, allowing for flexibility in participants' work schedules was crucial in order to elicit rich and comprehensive testimonies from participants. Tretheway (1999) posited that the interview process should be free flowing to allow for mixed feedback as part of the

natural process. Tretheway pointed out that the benefit of interviewing further stemmed from the data collected from participants' life experiences (Tretheway, 1999). Allowing the participants flexibility gave them more than enough time to share their unique perspectives, point of view, and life experience in strategic business functions.

### **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was used to gather information that supplemented the interview content. The questionnaire provided the researcher with foundational information on which to elaborate and draw inferences. The instrument validated and supported the interview content through triangulation of the data. The reason for the questionnaire was to help the researcher remain focused on the questions directly related to the research questions. The questions elicited information about the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making. The questions further helped to establish the effects of gender on women's involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making.

### **Observations**

The researcher observed the research sites and the surroundings where some of the interviews happened. The researcher documented activity that was relevant to the research before, during, and after each interview. The researcher recorded observations of each participant's behavior throughout the interview process. Direct observation of women's body language and facial expressions was beneficial. The researcher paid particular attention to participants' tone of voice and pauses during questioning over the phone; it helped to illuminate the affects of gender on their level of involvement and their contributions to decision making. Women participants shared personal experiences,

which allowed the researcher to gain deeper insight into their experiences in strategic business functions. The intimacy of the participants' experiences produced sufficient, credible responses that were used to draw inferences and conclusions about the research questions. Conducting the interview further allowed the researcher to gather valuable and meaningful testimonies from participants that were important to the research.

### **Interviews**

Interviews, whether they are conducted in person or over the telephone, are the preferred methodology for qualitative research. For this study, six participants were interviewed over the telephone and four participants were interviewed in person. From the various types of interviews, face-to-face interviews were particularly important because Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick (2003) pointed out that with face-to-face interviews, the interviewer can observe body language and facial expression. They posited that when conducting an interview face-to-face, a participant might be more willing to answer a question carefully than a participant being interviewed over the telephone. However, Holbrook et al. believed that participants who worry about confidentiality are often more certain when they are face-to-face with the interviewer.

The primary concern for the researcher was establishing trust with the participants; without trust, there was a high probability that the interviewees would withhold sensitive information that was vital to the study. Therefore, to establish trust the researcher ensured that introductory letters and introductory emails thoroughly explained the interviewing process. The researcher also had follow-up conversations with participants about confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher was able to gain trust by reassuring participants that their contribution to the research was essential.

With a questionnaire and an interview guide the researcher was successful in collecting data for the research. The questions in the interview guide and the questionnaire were semi-structured to capture rich data from the participants. Corbetta (2003) indicated that the advantage of semi-structured interviews is the flexibility that the instrument permits the researcher. The interview questions included constructs that were significantly representative of the research questions. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “Qualitative research lives and breathes through seeing the context: it is the particularities that produce the generalities, not the reverse” (p. 35). The interview guide was used to prevent the researcher from straying away from the focus of the study (Creswell, 2009). According to Tretheway (1999), during the interview, questions could evolve unexpectedly. For this reason, audio tapes were used to record eight of the interviews; two participants did not consent to the audio-recording. The researcher took handwritten notes for those interviews.

Moreover, all the participants interviewed generated data that were rich with experiences, emotions, and perspectives about the phenomenon being explored. All participants personalized their experiences in order for the interviewer to gain deeper insights into the obstacles confronting them in HRM. In particular, the women who were observed in person visually displayed their expressions about their interactions with Senior Executives. The researcher directly observed the body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice during the interviews to illuminate the affects of gender in HRM. Overall, the methods of data collection in qualitative research made it possible for the researcher to extract valuable meaning from testimonies from all the participants in this study.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began after data were collected and continued throughout the entire research process (Moerrer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The researcher transcribed the tape-recorded data using axial coding (Patel & Riley, 2007). The researcher also typed observation notes and combined that content with the other typed data. Hand-delivered questionnaires and consent forms were scanned and save electronically in a Microsoft word program. For each participant, all data collected from questionnaires and interviews were combined, coded, and copied so that there were three sets of data for each participant – a master copy of all content, a working copy of all content, and a secondary working copy of all content, which was used for analysis.

Once the data were safeguarded, the researcher imported the data into Nvivo software. This software, according to Foy (2004), is ideal for managing large amounts of data collected from the questionnaires and interviews. The utilization of Nvivo software made the data manageable and easier to summarize. One benefit to using Nvivo, according to Foy, is that the data becomes conceptually sound. In addition, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Hussain & Griffiths, 2009). Thematic analysis, according to Hussain and Griffiths, is widely used in qualitative research. The effectiveness of this type of analysis permitted the researcher to identify, analyze, and report patterns and themes in the data in order to solve the research questions. Therefore, as themes and patterns emerged, they were stored in nodes, color coded, and labeled. The researcher composed notes about the emerging themes in order to conceptualize what the participants were saying about their experiences in business strategy and strategic decision making. As a result, the researcher drew inferences about the phenomenon as

the data were analyzed. The findings were thoroughly reviewed several times for accuracy; the researcher continually looked at frequencies of words and recurring themes and uncovered new findings.

The data analysis further involved filtering the information, and performing different analyses in order to understand the data fully (Creswell, 2000). The data analysis and interpretation plan below is a step-by-step process that occurred after the researcher collected testimonies from the participants. This process was adapted from Creswell's concept of data analysis.

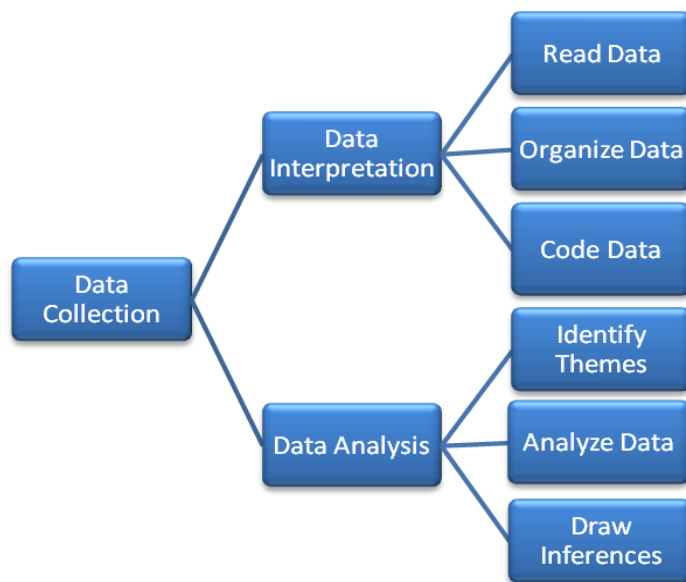


Figure 3. Data Collection Process. This process shows a step-by-step procedure from data collection to data analysis.

Once the researcher collected all data from the participants, the data reduction process began. This process involved open coding. Open coding identified patterns and concepts within large amounts of the data, and examined the similarities and differences

in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Patel & Riley, 2007). With open coding, the researcher was sensitive to emerging issues without disregarding their “empirical implications” or “theoretical sensibility.” With this awareness, it was easier to identify comparisons of the data in order to group the information by category (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Open coding was fundamental to the data analysis process in this research because it permitted the data to be placed in large manageable chunks. Spiggle (1994) indicated that data interpretation is not a set of procedures, but rather an “inference-making tool” (p. 497). For that reason, this researcher carefully reviewed the data and translated the patterns and themes as they emerged from the Nvivo software in order to avoid misinterpretation of the data (Spiggle, 1994). The process did not only produce an emerging theory, but lead to a deeper understanding about the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to their involvement in various strategic functions.

### **Bracketing**

The utilization of bracketing in qualitative research added credibility to the data analysis process. Once all the data were collected from the interviews, the researcher used bracketing, as suggested by Groenewald (2004), to eliminate extraneous information in order to place emphasis on understanding the phenomenon under investigation. Bracketing is a process for identifying content that is consequential and informational to the investigation (Groenewald, 2004). This process required sifting through data several times for information that the researcher could have overlooked in the course of transcribing large amounts of data. Likewise, the bracketing process was effective in

order to illuminate the behaviors of the interviewer in order to minimize bias or unnecessary influence on the outcomes.

### **Coding**

Given the importance of open-coding, coding in general is a key function in data analysis. Theoretical codes were managed into the data analysis process as instructed by (Hernandez, 2009). The researcher coded the data in order to limit the process to one theoretical code. Hernandez advised that these codes are vital when drawing inferences about study findings and are important in the integration of data. Therefore, as themes within the data emerged, the researcher paid careful attention to emerging “pet” codes that could have caused the researcher to disregard data that was relevant to study (Hernandez, 2009).

In addition, during data analysis and as themes and patterns emerged, content analysis was used to identify commonalities in words and phrases as the data were sorted (Parris & Vickers, 2010). Content analysis helped maintained the researcher’s objectivity and attentiveness to biases which could have interfered with the process. As the researcher sorted the data, the examination of themes and patterns that emerged helped the researcher develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Increased reliability was also noted in the themes and other relevant pieces of information that occurred consistently across participants’ testimonies.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Establishing reliability and validity is vital in qualitative research. Yet Golafshani (2003) advised that qualitative researchers who refer to reliability and validity in qualitative works run the risk of having their research assessed as “not good”. The

researcher established reliability and reliability of the study because Patton (2002) warned that data collection, data analysis, and the credibility of the data are critical factors in good qualitative studies. Morse (1999) further argued, “By refusing to acknowledge the centrality of reliability and validity in qualitative methods, qualitative methodologists have inadvertently fostered the default notion that qualitative research must therefore be unreliable and invalid, lacking in rigor, and unscientific” (as cited in Morse et al., 2002). Hence, to establish reliability, the researcher conducted a field test using an email survey. To increase dependability of the data, the researcher used triangulation; this process allowed the researcher to use multiple data collection methods and analyses to achieve credible results (Creswell, 2000). Collecting data in the form of interviews, observations, and written notes triangulated the data.

Furthermore, although validity is not a concept often used in qualitative research, the researcher increased validity by the trustworthiness, credibility, and quality of the research (Golafshani, 2003). Validity was also enhanced by using a field-tested instrument developed by Wesphal and Stern (2007). Content validity was established because the researcher found that the instrument measured the variables and constructs that it was intended to measure (Creswell, 2009). In addition, the way in which participants were selected and how their characteristics influenced outcomes were important to increasing internal validity (Creswell, 2000). Ali and Yusof (2011) affirmed that the quality of qualitative research depends on the trustworthiness of the instrument, the credibility of the data, and the research findings.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers who fail to provide study participants anonymity and confidentiality will more than likely expose them to harm that could result in adverse consequences. To ensure that participants were not harmed during the research process, they were assured anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher used codes starting at P1 and ending at P10 in order to identify the participants and properly safeguard their information. Creswell (2009) warned researchers that ethical issues could occur in the following ways: (1) in writing and disseminating the research, (2) in the research questions, (3) in the statement of the research problem, (4) in the data collection process, (5) in the analysis, and (6) while interpreting the data. Data collected from interviews, observations, and written notes were transcribed, typed or scanned, labeled, and locked in a cabinet until the completion of the study.

Furthermore, at Capella University, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews and approves all studies in an effort to protect participants from any harm as a result of participating in the study. When the researcher received approval from the IRB to conduct the current research, participants were contacted. Each participant that agreed to participate in the study was asked to sign a Consent form. This document explained to the participants that the research was voluntary and that there was no penalty for refusing to participate in the study. Participants were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and could refuse to answer any questions, regardless of the reason.

The next chapter provides a detailed description of the data collection process, including a comprehensive description of participants' experiences, similarities and

differences in women's perceptions, specific responses that addressed the research questions, and other pertinent information gathered from the data collection, member checking, and triangulation processes.

## **CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND RESULTS**

The intent of this qualitative phenomenological study was to collect data from women in leadership roles in human resources that will help CEOs and Senior Executives understand their experiences with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making. It is important to note that although the research is informed, in part, from a feminist perspective, men's exclusion from the study was not influenced by this perspective. Men were excluded from the study because the study's primary focus is on women in HRM. Therefore, from their experiences the study aimed to determine how gender affects their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making, and how this bias (or prejudice) may impact the overall effectiveness of a firm's performance. This chapter provides a detailed description of the data that the researcher collected from female HR leaders, including narrative content about their experiences, themes, patterns, consistencies, and inconsistencies discovered in perceptions. The chapter also provides examples of specific responses that helped answer the research questions, and other pertinent information obtained from the data collection, member checking, and triangulation processes.

### **Data Collection and Description of Interviews**

The instruments the researcher used to collect data from the participants included a questionnaire and an interview. The researcher interviewed six of the participants in person and four over the phone. Of the face-to-face interviews, two interviews were held

in the participants' offices and two interviews were held in the interviewer's office, since the participants did not feel comfortable meeting at their worksites. Because participants met face-to-face, those interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes, while interviews over the phone lasted 20 to 35 minutes. Eight of the interviews were tape recorded and the researcher took detailed notes for two interviews. The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews. All interviews were typed, coded, and saved electronically. The data collected from the interviews and the questionnaires were imported into Nvivo for organization of the data. The researcher established folders and subfolders to store the data and to help organize the materials. As the researcher searched through the data, she highlighted words, phrases, and sentences and dragged the content into nodes, which were created for each theme, color coded, labeled, and then used to code the data.

### **Interpretations of Interviews and Themes**

Data were collected from a questionnaire and an interview. Interview questions were semi-structured in order to elicit in-depth real-life experiences from the participants, and to help answer the research questions. As themes emerged from the narratives gathered from the participants, the information became a rich source for data analysis. The researcher used questionnaire data as an additional source to identify more themes that validated the accuracy of the interview content, which also helped answer the research questions. Participants offered testimonies and information that supported the various themes.

In the following section, the researcher has identified each research question (RQ), followed by the participants' related responses. A brief summary of the findings is

provided at the beginning of each section. A comprehensive analysis of the findings is revealed in Chapter 5.

### **RQ 1 and Themes**

The first research question investigated the role women in leadership positions in HRM fulfill in business strategy and strategic decision making. In describing their involvement in these business functions, a majority of the participants indicated that they play both a leadership and strategic role in their organizations. In the interviews, 10 participants attested that they are included in business strategy and strategic decision making. The women also confirmed that they are seated at the “table” with the CEO or Executive Director and members of the executive team. Their testimonies revealed a clear business partnership between Senior Executives and female HR leaders. Some participants also made it known that they are involved in the development and implementation of business strategy; however, participants indicated that their level of involvement and roles varied. For example, five of the ten participants stated that their role in the implementation of business strategy includes writing, policing, and enforcing the organization’s policies and procedures.

In contrast, three of the ten participants indicated that their roles focused more on “managing people”. They explained that they ensure that departments are properly staffed and that qualified employees are hired in order to drive productivity and innovation. One of the two remaining participants indicated that her role focuses more on the development of strategic plans, while the other participant stated that her role is to keep cost percentages in line. Though the interviews indicated that women are involved in business strategy and strategic decision making, seven out of ten women stated that

there are times when they are excluded from certain business decisions. Two themes began to emerge from the data, namely, inclusion and exclusion from decision making.

**Inclusion.** Participants affirmed that they are usually included in business strategy and strategic decision making; however, some participants stated that they lack specific knowledge for certain strategic meetings. As a result, the CEO uses this unpreparedness as a reason to exclude them from strategic meetings. Specifically, four of the ten participants stated that certain business discussions are not their areas of expertise and felt that being excluded from those meetings made practical sense. Six of the ten participants disagreed and felt that despite limited knowledge in certain business areas, they should be included in all strategic meetings. They argued that being included in all business decisions demonstrates that as executives, they are “true” members of the executive team. Their perspectives assume that, as HR leaders, they should have a “seat” at the business table every time.

One noticeable difference in the interviews is that several of the women executives praised their CEOs or Executive Directors for their high level of involvement in business meetings. They pointed to the understanding and knowledge the CEO or Executive Director has about their role as an HR executive in the organization. To be specific, P1 stated that in strategic meetings, she contributes in many ways, including the formation of new entities. She reported that her organization recently opened two new facilities and she was involved in the formulation of strategic plans that required her to work closely with the executive management team to execute plans successfully. P2 admitted that, depending on the strategic plans being formulated, her involvement is limited. She explained,

The business strategy of our agency is really the business goals of our agency. I am a major player in that I support the strategic and business goals of the agency. This is a nonprofit agency so the programs that we have are the basis for the strategic direction. These programs mainly provide services for a disabled population (P2).

P2 went on to say that she does not play a role in programmatic decisions because those areas are not her area of expertise. She admits that the Executive Director's decision to exclude her from discussions and decisions about programs makes logical sense. Some participants' responses conflicted with P2's position. For example, P4 made it clear that all executives in her company offer their ideas, providing that their ideas apply to their area of expertise. She noted that even though all ideas are welcome, the final outcome is decided by the Vice President.

Additionally, P5 attributed her inclusion in strategic business functions to her partnership with the CEO and Chief Financial Officer (CFO). She clarified that her role is to examine the organization with the CEO and the CFO to make certain that decisions and recommendations are made around "people". P6 added that although she is now attending offsite strategic planning meetings with the senior team, she is not the "big idea" person when decisions are focused on business areas. Nonetheless, she does interject and claims she is learning more about the business. P8 declared that she serves as the strategic "think tank" (P8); she used this depiction of her role to illustrate how heavily involved she is in strategic planning and decision making. According to her statement, the CEO, Chief Operations Officer (COO), CFO, and the HR Director's positions are instrumental in strategic planning; they are the people who formulate strategic initiatives and implement them. P9 and P10 described their involvement with similar strategic value as other participants, though some variation was noticeable in their

level of involvement in business decisions.

**Exclusion from decision making.** Seven out of 10 participants affirmed that although they are included in strategic business functions, there are some strategic business meetings that they are excluded from; however, there was a degree of consensus among some of the participants as to why they are excluded from some strategic decisions. P2 notes,

The Executive Director has the “say all” and is the one who ultimately makes the decisions. There is still a lot of team discussion involved, in that some decisions are carried through and some are not. It really depends on who is overseeing or heading up that specific project. (P2)

P3, P4, and P5 acknowledged that this exclusion happens to them depending on the topic being discussed around the “table”. P5 declared, “When discussions were about the pharmaceutical sciences, only the people who had PhDs would participate in those conversations” (P5). Yet, she agreed that there may have been some meetings, about topics like mergers or buying another small company, which she should have been involved in from the beginning of the discussion. She stated,

There were times I felt I should be in a meeting and then I would wait for my boss to come out the meeting and as I sat in his office I would say to him, “So are you going to fill me in or do I have to hear it from someone else?” There were times when I felt disregarded and it was more like, “We will tell you when you need to know”; an election type of situation. (P5)

The challenge, as P5 perceives it, was making sure that she had done her “homework” when she was included in a meeting that focused on the pharmaceutical sciences; that way, she would be able to speak the business language and answer any questions that were posed to her by the team. Despite navigating through those challenges, she did not always get an invitation to business meetings. She noted that there were times she would

ask her boss if she should have been at a meeting; yet, she also understood that her involvement in meetings depended on what was going on in the business and the topic of discussion.

P6 recounted times when the CEO felt he was involving her in all decisions, yet she was often excluded and not informed of meeting outcomes. Because of her desire to be included, she often brought the problem to the CEO. She said,

I asked him to include me more in strategic meetings, so I could better understand the organization and see where the organization was going. When you are excluded from these meetings, it is embarrassing and the HR leader loses credibility. It also takes a long time to recover whenever the leader is excluded from a discussion, but is asked later to help with the issue discussed in that particular meetings. (P6).

P7 and P10 emphasized that they are excluded when discussions and decisions surround programmatic issues, clinical, fiscal, and funding activities. They affirmed that when decisions are HR related, they are at the “table” and are involved 100%; their involvement is supported by the executive team. While some of the testimonies of the women are not surprising, their attitudes about the exclusion are surprising, which raises questions about their desire to change the status quo. From P6’s perspective, speaking out and affirming the role HR plays in the organization allows the HR leader to gain credibility and recognition in the organization. None of the other participants took the same approach as P6, who demanded inclusion in all strategic decisions, regardless of the topic being discussed.

In summary, these women executives described their involvement (or lack of involvement) in strategic business functions. Participants further affirmed that they are seated at the table as a member of the executive team, although some exclusion happens

when discussions and decisions are unrelated to HR. For the women who were not involved in certain strategic decision making meetings, the reason for the exclusion was clear -the exclusion made practical sense because they did not possess the appropriate knowledge or skill set to be involved. Additional, underlying reasons for the exclusion are addressed in the following sections. Nevertheless, it appears that some women have accepted the exclusion as appropriate, which seems to reinforce the gender bias that has existed for some time.

## **RQ 2 and Themes**

The second research question explored the participation experience of women in leadership positions in HRM with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making. The participants' experiences in business strategy and strategic decision making varied depending on the diversity of the executive team. Eight out of ten participants shared about their experiences of being at the "table" with the CEO/Executive Director and Senior Executives. In general, participants felt that their bosses supported and understood the role HR played in the organization. Participants with female bosses shared more positive experiences than participants who had male bosses. Also, participants with a higher number of females on the executive team had more positive experiences than participants who had fewer men on the executive team. Women felt valued, respected, appreciated, and more importantly, a "true" member of the executive team, when they are included in decision making. In contrast, those who were excluded from certain strategic meetings shared different experiences. A few participants stated that they accepted the exclusion from strategic meetings when discussions were unrelated to HR, while some participants wanted inclusion in meetings so they would have the

opportunity to learn more about the organization. Five out of 10 participants shared their perspectives about how HR is perceived in the organization. Two themes emerged from these interview questions, including (1) experience at the “table”, and (2) perceptions of HR.

**Experiences at the “table.”** While some participants adapted to being excluded from decisions with Senior Executives, others disagreed with their perspectives. P1 stated that her experience with exclusion affected her in stages. She reported that after being in her position for over 20 years, she did not feel “good” when she was excluded but she no longer felt “insulted”. P5 also remarked that when she was excluded from meetings she did not feel appreciated for the work she does in the organization. P6 was more optimistic when she noted her involvement in meetings had increased since “older” executives are retiring and are being replaced by newer executives. She stated, “Exclusion happens, but not as much. In the past, we had more old-school people here. Now I am seeing a difference because the newer workforce sees more value in HR than the people who say we make the rules and that’s it” (P6).

From P9’s perspective, even the leaders who saw HR’s value in the organization still seem to support the exclusion of HR leaders in decision making. Moreover, she rejected the notion that having a woman as a boss fosters positive experiences. She commented that, despite the fact that board meetings are equally as important as strategic meetings, she is excluded from all board meetings. She also maintains that board members are key stakeholders and would be more likely to support HR’s strategic role in the organization if HR leaders participated in board meetings. She goes on to say, “The affect of exclusion at board meetings is real and it leaves you feeling unappreciated.

Many times I just wanted to quit” (P9). P5 concurred saying, “When you are excluded, you are wondering, ‘What the heck am I doing here?’” (P5)

Generally, participants realized and agreed that the exclusion, whenever it happened, left them discredited, undervalued, and lacking confidence as leaders. Though some women admitted that they understood the reason for the exclusion from decisions, and have come to terms with the exclusion, others refused to accept or justify the exclusion. This was apparent in the tone of voice, gesture, and body language of some participants. For example, when participants talked about the experiences of inclusion in strategic business meetings, their voices elevated with glee. From a feminist perspective, this expression of emotion seems to increase self-confidence in women. The participants acknowledged this emotional shift and expressed the experience of inclusion in meetings as a consistently positive one. Participants used words such as valued, respected, appreciated, involved, partner, worthy, accepted, contributor, confidence, and pride to describe their experiences.

As indicated earlier, P1, P2, and P3 emphasized how well-regarded they feel when they are included in strategic meetings. P4 believed that she gained more confidence, respect, and pride in her accomplishments. P5 stated that if she was not involved in a meeting, she assumed that the topic of the meeting was not of importance to her. Though P6 did not share this perspective; she noted that being included in strategic meetings was a struggle under old leadership, but acknowledged that with a new President, a lot has changed. A feminist perspective assumes that over time, women’s visibility and presence in decision making will reduce the struggles they have faced in

decision making. This assumption is supported by participants' reports of positive experiences in strategic business functions.

**Perception of HR.** Five participants felt that how HR is perceived in the organization is associated with their level of involvement (or lack thereof) in business strategy and strategic decision making. P1 attributed her level of involvement in decision making to the Executive Director's perception of her as the "rule" person. She commented, "I do feel that HR, historically, has always been viewed as the Principal's office. We have two unions and so there is, historically, some feeling of animosity about HR" (P1). In contrast, P2 felt that HR is not progressing, is not regarded, or is not heard as much as it could be. P6 agreed by stating,

I think HR tends not to get a lot of value in a lot of organizations. They usually look at who makes the money for the organization, but if HR does not get the right people in place and treat them the right way, and develop them the right way, they are not going to be the leading sales people or the operations people that are making the money. (P6)

In summary, based on the interviews, it is clear that some organizational leaders still see HR as an administrative function. Even though P8 has witnessed HR's transformation in her organization, she remarked,

With new leadership, the CEO takes HR more seriously than his predecessor. So what I am seeing in terms of HR's seat at the table, I am seeing the transition right in front of my eyes and it is amazing. I believe HR is turning into more of a resource for an organization, as opposed to coming out of the back offices and being viewed only as a personnel department. (P8)

Based on P8's experience, evidently, some CEOs are allowing themselves to become part of this transformation. P9 stated that there is a difference in the way she is treated by those who truly understand the role of HR and those who are still in the learning phase.

Perhaps with time, CEOs' acceptance and respect of HR will start a process of change for other CEOs who may be blind to the value HR brings to an organization. Resource-based theory supports the notion of female value within an organization, suggesting that organizations respect women as resources that can help the organization reach a competitive advantage (Olalla, 1999).

### **RQ3 and Themes**

The third research question sought to determine how women's contributions with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making, influence firm's performance. The interviews revealed that as women play a more active role in business strategy and strategic decision making, their contributions influence firm performance; this was the consensus among 10 of the participants. Participants reported that they are directly involved in the management of human capital, and are creating and achieving HR goals that meet business objectives. Women's contributions were compared and contrasted with each other, and showed some variations. Contributions to firm performance varied by organization and included the following: leading the people side of acquisitions, union-avoidance campaigns, talent-acquisition programs, minimizing lawsuits, supporting program needs, designing competitive benefit and pension plans, creating a positive workplace culture, providing comfortable working environments, and managing employee turnover. According to participants, these contributions are (directly or indirectly) tied to the organization's bottom line. Six participants suggested that a strong collaboration between the HR leader and Senior Executives led to positive outcomes. These ideas emerged as the next two themes in data analysis: (1) contribution to firm

performance and (2) collaboration details about how women contribute to firm performance.

**Contributing to firm performance.** HR leaders are contributing to firm performance, as reaffirmed by P1 during her discussion about the opening of two new facilities. She articulated,

Had I not led that process and supported it in every way and every ounce I have in terms of work hours, the project would have failed. There were so many errors in areas that do not report to me, yet I had to go in and figure out what we were doing wrong. (P1)

P2 pointed to the importance of recruitment and staffing and affirmed that attracting and retaining staff to provide services for a large Hispanic population allowed her to surpass agency goals. Another noticeable way HR contributes to firm performance was reported by P3 who reported that in retail, HR goals are mission-driven; therefore, HR motivates the stores to achieve the overall organization's goals, which are: percent of sales increase, reduce turnover, and flat selling cost. She asserted that any goal that pertains to HR is one that she achieves consistently. P4 also affirmed that her contributions financially impacted the company and noted,

When our health insurance costs increased, I recommended we increase the employees' medical contributions. It was very low and the company was paying 94% so I recommended a slight increase to the employees to equalize that a bit. That was the financial savings for us. (P4)

P5 insisted that her contributions impacted firm performance in several ways. She believed that each time she introduced a competitive program, reduced turnover, avoided a lawsuit, and successfully downsized a program, the firm benefitted financially. She said, "Compliance is a business strategy, so we have to make sure that we all protect the company. However, implementing a company-wide bonus plan is crucial for recruiting

and retention purposes because without employees you do not really have a company.

(P5)

In addition, P7 stated that because her organization is a nonprofit, employees do not receive high salaries; instead, clear communication, transparency, and constant recognition contribute to employee retention; which is tied to firm performance. She emphasized,

All these factors have increased our retention rate for the past two years. That means Program Directors are happy, we are happy, direct care staff is happy and clients are happy. Overall, it makes for a better working environment...being a not-for-profit, we need that because we do not pay a lot, so we rely on the benefits we offer and the culture we build. (P7)

P8 believed that leading employment policy and many operational policies contributed to firm performance. She was certain that her efforts in union-avoidance campaigns and managing employee turnover added to positive business outcomes. P9 gave a similar response, adding that hiring the best candidates and maintaining fully-staffed programs impact firm performance. She remarked,

Being able to successfully manage the human capital for each department is crucial. You can no longer afford to hire employees who are not committed to the mission and vision of the company. Loss of productivity and performance are detrimental to an organization. Hiring the right people means the company can avoid failing. (P9)

P10 contended that the formulation of policies and procedures results in a positive culture and work environment; thus impacting firm performance. She maintains that,

I have worked with attorneys when things were not going well, to help protect the agencies from lawsuits. Because of my expertise, we are fair to employees. These are employees' lives so how we deal with people and how we treat people is critical to successful business outcomes. We want to treat people how they deserve to be treated because it trickles down to the care of the consumers and the commitment of the employees. (P10)

Clearly, HR leaders had different perspectives about how their unique contributions impacted firm performance. Yet, they all concurred that without their contributions, business or financial objectives would not have been met. While drawing attention to how HR influences firm performance, most participants also linked collaboration and support from Senior Executives to doing their jobs effectively.

**Collaboration.** As researchers suggest, HR leaders need to collaborate with CEOs and Senior Executives in order to help the organization achieve organizational excellence. In describing their business relationship with the CEO and Senior Executives, six of the ten participants attested that collaboration is crucial if HR leaders are to become more engaged in decision making, particularly when meetings are unrelated to HR. In the interview with P1, she elaborated on the successful opening of two facilities, and remarked,

I did this but I would say I did not do it all without my support team and a supportive CEO who 'gets it'. He is amazing and intelligent when it comes to working. He sees what needs to be done strategically, in order to support a growing and moving organization in this decade and century. Whenever I go to him and say, 'this is a possibility and it is going to cost us this amount,' he says, 'if you think we need to do it, go for it'. (P1)

From P1's interview, there is a clear indication that because of the CEO's leadership style, a business partnership exists. P2 believed that a similar partnership exists between HR and the CEO in her organization. She commented, "Keep in mind that I have been here for a long time. We have reached a comfort level that when it comes to issues with HR, there is no one else to come to but me" (P2). P4 echoed this statement but added, "I consider myself an advisor to the CEO. He consults with me regularly on many matters

relating to HR, and he runs some financial issues by me as well. I contribute by giving my opinion and advice” (P4).

The continued assessment of a partnership between HR and the CEO led P5 to compare the former CEO to the current CEO in her company.

There were certain things the first CEO did not get. The second CEO, I think, did not foster trust and that is just something that happens in companies sometimes. This broke down some of the communication to some degree. Working under two totally different CEOs’ styles of leadership were two really different experiences. Both had good and both had not-so-good styles, but I cannot say if there was anything specific that interfered with my progress. (P5)

P5 believed that the CEO was making a greater effort to give her a more prominent role with Senior Executives. She also felt that the CEO was recognizing HR’s value creation.

P7, P8, and P9, who were supervised by female Executive Directors, believed a partnership already existed with their bosses. P8 noted,

In 18 years I have been in HR, I am very proud to finally work for a female CEO. This is the first time and it is different and it feels different. She is more understanding and we speak the same language and I like it. Maybe this is why HR or this role has such an important seat at the table but I do not know. Maybe there is a different value on HR, or maybe there are no longer the old-school thoughts and practices. (P8)

Conversely, P9 viewed her boss as a micro-manager, although she claimed they have a strong business partnership. She said that her Executive Director regards her suggestions, whether they are related or unrelated to HR. She said,

After long debates around the table, she turns to me and asks me what do. I think that 90% of the time, my decision is the one that closes the discussions. Is that her leadership style? Is it trust? Credibility? Or is it simply the confidence she has gained in me as the HR leader? I would like to believe it is all, but I do not know for certain. (P9)

Acknowledgement of the support CEOs or Executive Directors give participants seems to help them do their jobs effectively. Support from the leader also strongly reinforces collaboration among HR executives and other Senior Executives. In contrast, CEOs or Executives Directors who do not support or collaborate with HR leaders might encounter decreased performance and productivity.

#### **RQ4 and Themes**

The final research question explored how gender bias (or prejudice) affects female HR leaders with regard to their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making. Although the literature suggests that there is a need for more women in decision making (Neilsen & Huse, 2010), the testimonies of participants confirmed that women in HRM are included in decision making. At this point, it is interesting to note the gender dynamics within the worksites of the participants. Specifically, two of the ten worksites consisted of more males than females on the executive team, and seven of the 10 CEOs/Executive Directors were males. Five participants shared their encounters with Senior Executives, claiming that they do not often receive credit for their ideas. Evidence of gender bias (or prejudice) was uncovered during the interviews.

Seven of the 10 participants experienced gender bias from both internal and outside influences. Two of the ten participants reported that they experienced negative attitudes and biased remarks from other female executives. One participant claimed that when she wanted to advance in the company, her boss kept her from advancing. This Queen Bee Syndrome, according to research, often hinders the career progression of women. Some participants also talked about stereotypes and explained that when it came

time to demonstrate their competencies, their actions were often perceived as “feminine”. As a result, some women were reluctant to fully perform in business meetings. They expressed discomfort by saying, “I have to be careful with how I word things,” or “I know it was my idea but I do not speak out when someone else owns it,” or “I feel comfortable speaking on topics that are unrelated to HR.”

Moreover, seven participants talked about situations where they had to assert themselves in order to fit in or have their voices heard. In four of the 10 interviews, women reported that they were members of an out-group. An out-group according to (Hewstone et al., 2002) is a group that does not identify with another group based on the group’s characteristics, ideologies, values, and their upbringing. Direct evidence of bias is revealed in the themes that emerged from participants’ interviews in the next section. The themes suggest that some women have come to terms with bias in their organization, while others still struggle with the inequality. These themes relating to bias include: (1) That was my Idea, (2) Gender Interfering with Progress, (3) Asserting Self (or oneself), and (4) Out-group.

**That was my idea.** The phenomenon of women presenting ideas and having men take credit for those ideas is manifested in management hierarchies, even though most organizations support gender equality. Though this statement is not supported by all the participants, some participants experienced this phenomenon in decision making. A common concern for some of the women was that they did not receive credit for the ideas they proposed at strategic meetings. P2 recalled one experience with an outside broker where she made a specific request and he denied the request. After elevating the problem

to her boss (the CFO), the request was granted to the CFO. She attributed the outcome of the situation as an example of gender bias and explained,

I was making a specific request/report to be done and the response from the broker to me was that it could not be done. After a series of conversations, I elevated it to the CFO because I report to him. The CFO reviewed the entire issue with the broker and at the end of several conversations, it was done. I was not happy with that and I said to the broker, 'Why is it that I requested the same information as the CFO and you did not give it to me? However, when the CFO requested the information, you gave it to him. Is it because he has a deeper voice than my voice?' Although he claimed there was not, I thought that there was a bit of a gender issue there. (P2)

P5 added,

I would sometimes say, 'We should think about doing something like this,' and then I will leave it alone and let it percolate... and then there will be times when somebody or the CEO would say, 'You know we can do something like this,' and it would be my idea and I would sit there and say, 'are you kidding me?', but those things happen to everybody. (P5)

P7 also shared a similar experience and pointed out that her female boss sometimes takes the credit for her ideas. "I've seen a variety of things that happened with the suggestions and ideas that I proposed. It is humorous because if you planted a seed, you want everyone to know that you planted that seed...one idea generates another idea". (P7)

Though the CEO or Executive Director's intention does not seem to be willful, women are clearly affected personally and professionally by these experiences. This was evident in P6's interview when she declared, "I feel I have to work harder to be visible, as opposed to some of the other folks" (P6). Moreover, to understand women's experiences in depth, P8 stated that because she is a woman, sometimes she does not get the opportunity to speak in strategic meetings. She described a meeting where three female executives and one male executive were present. According to her, although the

male executive was the only man in the room, he out-spoke everybody at the table because he was louder and had a deeper voice. She raised the question, “Now, is it because of who he was, or was it because he is the guy in the room, or is it this alpha dog thing? She continued to say, “He just takes over and it’s like we just sat there like good little women and listened and waited our turn to speak” (P8). P8’s perspective adds to the evidence that many people perceive the characteristics of men as the dominant gender characteristics in decision making. Though this dominance did not appear to be a concern for many of the women in this study, or at least, they seemed to accept and endure the dominance, some of the women were affected by prejudice.

**Gender interfering with progress.** Seven participants revealed during the interviews that gender bias or prejudice, whether covert or overt, interfered with their progress in the organization. P5 experienced this prejudice in her role as Executive Director of HR. She pointed out, “There were times when I felt that I did not have the same recognition, in terms of job titles, salary, compensation, other stock options, and other types of benefits as other VPs. That did have a significant impact on me (P5). Though P5 and other participants testified that gender bias or prejudice exists in their organizations, two of the ten participants claimed that women in positions of power interfered with their progress, not men. According to P8, her former female boss attempted to block her progress immediately after she received her MBA degree. She recalled,

Oh no, you know your place! You are never going to reach the top anyway because the top is only for males. You are a woman and you are going to wind up having kids one day and you are never going to make it to the top, so we are happy where you are. (P8)

From a feminist perspective, this attitude displayed by women executives towards other women is concerning. Research explains this phenomenon as a female-to-female gender bias called the Queen Bee Syndrome. P8 felt that her former boss actually believes that women should stay home and have kids and accept the notion that men belong at the top of the organization. If P8's assumption is right, the fight for gender equality is more challenging than expected for women in business. Women who block progress for other women impede efforts for equal opportunity at the top. This raises the issue as to whether or not these women are cognizant of the harm that they are causing other women, and whether or not women executives are receptive to helping other women succeed.

P1 expressed discomfort with this phenomenon as she discussed advancement interference from another female executive. She reported that even though she holds the VP position in HR and is the expert, most HR decisions are made jointly with the COO, who is female. Conversely, P4 also makes HR decisions jointly with the COO, who is also female, but does so voluntarily because she does not feel comfortable making decisions (e.g., employee termination) alone.

P7, who was the youngest participant, believed her age may be interfering with how she progresses in the agency. Because she is the youngest member of the executive team, the group assumes that they have more experience, and as a result, progress is an "uphill battle" for her. The remaining participants were over the age of 40 and did not mention age as a factor that interfered with their progress.

P10 did mention that dealing with different opinions of the group is a challenge for her. She explained that as the Associate Executive of HR, she is responsible for

ensuring that things are being done legally. Yet when others in the group (males and females) share their opinions about what should be done when HR issues are being discussed, she feels challenged. P9 affirmed that she has also experienced several struggles with members of the executive team regarding HR-related issues. She remarked, “Although I have the knowledge and expertise, they always seem to have the solutions to the problems; solutions that can get us in deep trouble legally” (P9). The women in the study made it known that with these types of dilemmas, they find themselves defending their credibility in a field that they dominate.

**Asserting self (or oneself).** Seven of the participants felt that in order to be taken seriously, or to progress in the organization, they have to assert themselves and let their female voices be heard in business meetings. P1 said her “radical approach” has helped in her collaborative efforts with outside influences. She felt that she is often “too blunt” in business meetings, but when this happens she re-evaluates her actions. In the same breath, she confessed that during self-evaluation, she realizes that she could have said things differently, more politely or in a more politically-correct way. “I must say that I have not always been the most loved person” (P1). In describing how she is assertive, P2 declared, “I am very upfront. If I am not happy with what I’ve seen I would speak out. I am direct and firm but polite, and I speak in a nice way but I make my point clear” (P2). To better understand the importance of being assertive as a female executive, P6 remarked, “I had to assert myself in order to get support from people when I was not getting it. I would go in and tell him (the CEO) that I needed him to tell department heads to get me information” (P6). P7 testified that because of her age, it was sometimes

necessary to be assertive in order to make the Executive Director cognizant of her ability to manage situations.

There are times that I have to assert myself and be a bit more aggressive. For example, there was a staffing situation and after we spoke to the parties involved, my director felt that I would have reacted differently if it was a male employee versus a female employee situation. That bothered me and I said that I would have handled this investigation exactly the same way. I think standing up appropriately showed her, and indicated to her that she shouldn't second guess me. I stood my ground because I knew I was right. (P7)

In another situation, P8 shared, "Sometimes when it is your area of expertise or there are employment or labor issues and others are trying to make decisions, I have to step in and say, "No, you are not doing that because the law says so" (P8). P9 talked about how she asserts herself in order to avoid misconceptions about her role as the HR leader.

I assert myself because it is the only way HR will gain credibility and develop trust to make informed decisions. Many times I had members of the management team go to the Executive Director to undermine my decisions. I say, 'no,' not only to gain respect, but more importantly, when I know that saying yes would result in some type of lawsuit or litigation. (P9)

Explanations of these women's assertiveness in business meetings provided a better understanding of their experiences at the top of the organization. From the feminist perspective, giving a voice to women and allowing them to be assertive is critical in breaking barriers and dispelling stereotypes. For some of these women, being assertive is not enough to change a stereotype that prevents organizational leaders from seeing women as gentle and non-combative human beings who can lead effectively.

**Out-group.** Throughout the interviews, women discussed how they were treated within their organizations; their experiences were very different. Though six of the ten participants indicated that they were treated fairly in their current organizations, four

women mentioned that even though they are members of the executive team, they are treated differently than their male counterparts. This differential treatment caused participants to question the importance of their role as HR leaders and their credibility.

P2 described the first five years in her position by saying,

I wanted to be involved in everything because I was trying to prove myself. If I was not included, I did not feel good about myself, but not necessarily insulted. But later on (keeping in mind that I have been at this agency for 20 plus years) and the HR director for 13 years, now I am fine with the exclusion. I feel as though I am at the point in my life and my career that I pretty much have proven myself. So if there are decisions that are made specifically for the program that I do not need to be involved in, I am totally fine with that. (P2)

P2's acceptance with the exclusion is not supported by P6, who bluntly stated that she was the only female on the executive team that did not have the job title of Senior VP.

Though she did not believe that these positions were purposely assigned to all men on the team, as the VP she could not convince her boss to change her title to be aligned with the other male executives. She recalls numerous times when the team held meetings and excluded her, even though the topics were HR related. A similar story was shared by P5; she stated that as a member of the executive team, she was the only non-VP. Everyone else was either a VP or Senior VP. Based on her experience, assigning job titles did not appear to be gender related since there were two other women on the team; it appeared to be domain related. For that reason, the HR leader did not get a VP or Senior VP title.

She stated, "My boss said that he thought I should be a VP but the CEO felt it was not necessary. I was at the children's table, but there were times when we had senior team meetings and the entire agenda was about human resources" (P5). P8 mentioned that in her former organization HR was not valued as much as in her current organization. As a

result, informing her about meetings was an “after thought”. For example, co-workers would say, “Hey, listen, this is what we are doing, so can you give me your two cents? Her response would be, “Yes, great.” (P8)

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the experiences of women in executive roles in HRM with regard to their involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making. Data were collected and analyzed from face-to-face and telephone interviews and a questionnaire. The data collected were transcribed, typed, coded, and sorted for themes, patterns, consistencies, and inconsistencies. Chapter 5 discusses the important findings from the study, including themes, new insights about the phenomenon, and provides a strategy to help CEOs and Senior Leaders see women in HRM with fresh eyes and from a new perspective. Additionally, Chapter 5 details the limitations of the current study, and provides recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to illuminate the participation experiences of women in leadership roles in HRM. In doing so, Chapters 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 provided a strong foundation that allowed the researcher to explore how gender affects their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making, and how this bias (or prejudice) affects the overall effectiveness of a firm's performance. Chapter 4 revealed in-depth narratives, perceptions, and perspectives of women executives with regard to their experiences at the "table" with CEOs and Senior Executives. This chapter discusses the important findings from the study, including emerging themes, and new understandings. This chapter further provides a strategy to help CEOs and Senior Leaders see women in HRM with fresh eyes and from a new perspective. The chapter details the implications and limitations of the current study, and provides recommendations for future research.

### **Discussion and Findings**

The information collected from participants was examined from a feminist and constructivist perspective. The results revealed that women are involved in business strategy and strategic decision making; however, their level of involvement in these business functions varied by the gender of the CEO/Executive Director, leadership style, and knowledge about HR. Women also indicated that, depending on the topic being discussed in strategic meetings, they are either included or excluded from meetings. For

example, an overwhelming majority of participants shared that when decision making was directly related to HR functions, they were included in the decision-making process, their input was valued, and their ideas were often considered and implemented. In contrast, some participants reported that when meetings were related to program issues, finances, or new ventures, they were often excluded from meetings, making it very challenging for them to function effectively in their role as HR leaders. Two participants who indicated that they were never excluded from strategic decisions attributed their high level of involvement to the CEO/Executive Director, who understands their role and the role of HR department. Evidence shows that because HR has a more strategic focus than in the past, CEOs are more observant and accepting of this paradigm shift. Resource-based theory suggests that CEOs embrace the changing role of women executives in HR in order to maximize their talents and capabilities to help drive the organization's competitiveness.

Whether the participants' experiences were based on their level within the organization, the industry, the structure of the organization, or leadership traits of the CEO/Executive Director, several women felt undervalued, unappreciated, unimportant, and insignificant when they were excluded from decisions. As a result, many women felt that being male had more "perks" than being female. For example, one participant stated that all Senior VPs in the company were men. Another participant stated that she was the only non-VP on the executive team of all men. The women also experienced bias from other female executives that left them feeling betrayed. Approaching the data from a feminist perspective has helped this researcher to illuminate the problems with gender bias and inequalities. These barriers interfere with women's advancement and the overall

growth of the company. The feminist approach has also given these women the opportunity to share their stories. The approach also allowed the world to hear their voices on an important phenomenon. In addition, the constructivist perspective has helped to build an understanding of the role of women in strategic planning. This understanding is then built upon by gathering personal stories and linking the unique experiences of these women with research and successful business practices. Women have demonstrated through their stories that they are asserting themselves in order to get more air time in strategic meetings. In most cases this assertiveness has given them more participation in decision making processes. Thus, their contributions to business strategy and decision making result in positive outcomes and continue to expand.

### **RQ1 Findings**

In solving the first research question that sought to identify what role women in leadership roles in HRM fulfill in business strategy and strategic decision making; two themes emerged that provided insight about the roles of the participants: inclusion and exclusion from decision making. The themes helped illustrate the experiences of the participants when they were included or excluded from strategic business functions with Senior Executives. The participant responses showed their inclusion and exclusion in meetings varied, and depended on several factors about their organization and its leaders.

**Inclusion.** The first theme is an indication that women in leadership roles in HRM are being included in business strategy and strategic decision making. According to the study findings, women in HRM are recognized as members of the Executive Team and are seated at the “table” with the CEO/ Executive Director and other Senior Executives. These women affirmed that their input in decision making is valued and

their suggestions and ideas are often implemented. In women's experiences, they felt recognized as valuable contributors to the organizations. Women explained that they are given strategic functions to manage. Some participants affirmed that their level of involvement in business meetings is high, while others felt that they could be included more in business-related discussions and decisions.

Moreover, the participants attributed their involvement in strategic business functions to the CEO/Executive Director's knowledge and understanding of the role and responsibility of the HR leader and the department. Many of the participants assumed that business leaders are recognizing the importance of sharing business decisions with HR leaders, regardless of gender. Ulrich et al. (2009) indicated that organizations need to better understand the competencies of HR leaders, specifically the growing number of female HR leaders. This understanding can help maximize female talents in both business strategy and strategic decision making. Generally, participants felt that their skills and capabilities are utilized in business meetings.

**Exclusion from decision making.** The second theme that emerged revealed that some of the CEOs/Executive Directors do not see the importance of having the HR leader at certain business meetings. These CEOs/Executive Directors often exclude HR leaders from business matters, even though some discussions are directly related to HR. This exclusion leaves women feeling embarrassed, unappreciated, and devalued. Through their narratives, participants became cognizant of the gender bias or prejudice that plays a role in the exclusion. As a result, participants who are excluded from meetings either fought harder to be included more in decision making, or accepted the exclusion. The

feminist perspective raises awareness of this gender inequality women experience and point out that gender issues persist in decision making within management hierarchies.

## **RQ2 Findings**

The second research question was meant to increase understanding about the participation experience of women in leadership roles in HRM with regard to business strategy and strategic decision, and the interview content revealed two themes: Experience at the Table and Perception of HR.

**Experience at the “table”.** The experiences women shared in business meetings with Senior Executives varied because of several factors. Depending on the diversity of the executive team, the gender of the leader, or support of HR, participants noted that their experiences were either positive or negative. One participant shared that her experiences were positive on an executive team where the Executive Director was the only male. Participants with male-dominated executive teams had more negative experiences than those that had a diverse team. Negative experiences at the table led one participant to say that her credibility as an HR expert is often challenged by the executive team. Other women stated that the exclusion, in and of itself, is a negative experience. This exclusion left women feeling unappreciative and undervalued.

One assumption for the exclusion is based on women’s experiences; participants believed that some CEOs/Executive Directors saw the role of women in HRM as insignificant compared to other roles in the organization, such as finance. Another assumption is that although women have reached the upper echelon of organizations, they are still not trusted by leaders to be decision makers. Evidence from the interviews

supports these assumptions; participants revealed that, in some cases, women are treated differently than their male counterparts.

In addition, some women wondered whether or not their bosses knew exactly what they do in HR. In P9's interview, she made the comment, "My boss supports me, but she does not truly know the extent of the work I do in HR" (P9). The experiences of the women showed that some women are treated differently than male executives on the team, while others are treated as "true" members of the team. Why is it that some female HR leaders are fully accepted as members of the executive team while others are never completely accepted? Is the lack of acceptance a gender-related issue, or an HR-related issue? Women's experiences at the "table," whether negative or positive, show that their participation in business meetings is limited.

**Perception of HR.** The second theme that emerged from the second research question revealed that the CEO/Executives' perceptions of HR varied. The findings suggest that leaders, who see the strategic value of HR and the strategic role the HR leader plays, are more than likely to include HR leaders in strategic business functions. Participants who are fully included noted that they felt appreciated, happy, respected, and valued. Some of these women also pointed out that the inclusion gave them an opportunity to learn more about the company, while others stated that it gives them a feeling of belonging. Women want to be acknowledged as significant in the decision making processes in organizations. They want the CEO and Senior Executives to tap into their knowledge more, and fully utilize them as valuable resources. According to resource-based theory, organizational leaders who see women as resources can help the organization reach a competitive advantage (Olalla, 1999). Based on the information

shared by the participants, it appears that some CEOs are allowing themselves to become part of this transformation. With time, it is expected that the CEOs' acceptance of HR will start a process of change for other CEOs who may be blind to the value HR brings to an organization.

Some participants felt that HR is undervalued because CEOs/Executive Directors do not understand the role of the HR leader or the department. As a result, participants suggested that Senior Executives often attempt to resolve HR issues without consulting the HR leader. When this happens, HR leaders are upset and embarrassed about the outcomes. Unsatisfactory outcomes may cause women to question themselves or their ability to perform as leaders. In other circumstances, they simply "surrender". In the example shared by one participant, she now embraces exclusion from meetings, after many years of trying to prove her worth in the organization. Another participant stated that she works harder than her male counterparts, just to be included.

Undoubtedly, these women have demonstrated that without an understanding of the relationship between HR and the CEO/Executive Director, an organization may be left behind in a changing environment. Ulrich (1998) outlined a new mandate for HRM, and advised CEOs that transformative change in HR is a joint effort between the HR leader and Senior Executives. This mandate also means that CEOs/Executive Directors can no longer be blinded by their perceptions of HR. Instead, they should see HR leaders with "fresh eyes" and co-create their experiences as a means to revolutionize the organization.

### **RQ3 Findings**

The third research question investigated how the contributions of women in leadership positions in HRM, with regard to business strategy and strategic decision making, influence a medium-sized firm's performance. Two themes that emerged related to that question were: Contributing to Firm Performance and Collaboration.

**Contribution to firm performance.** The first theme suggests that women are contributing to firm performance; however, how much they are contributing and how they perform was not detailed in that theme. From the interviews, women are impacting firm performance in many different ways. Their contributions have impacted the organization's performance, effectiveness, and bottom line. Some participants noted that because of their HR contributions, employees are happy, which contributes to lower turnover, high performance, and increased productivity. The findings in this study support resource-based theory, because women are a resource that impacts the organization's performance. Though participants gave different reasons for how they contribute to firm performance, without their skills and expertise in HR, organizations could face unpredictable challenges.

**Collaboration.** The second theme that emerged from the third research question revealed that, in most of the organizations, there is collaboration in decision making between the CEO/Executive Director and the HR leader. Because of this collaboration, a majority of the participants are able to do their job effectively. The findings suggest that this collaboration has more to do with mutual support for organizational success, rather than Senior Executives adapting to HR being in the corporate suite. In addition, gender did not appear to be a barrier for some women who felt that Senior Executives supported

their efforts and were comfortable working closely with them on strategic tasks. CEOs/Executive Directors also seem to recognize that collaboration in decision making is essential if organizations want new perspectives that will move the organization forward. With this understanding it is more than likely that HR leaders will see more collaboration and partnerships with Senior Executives in 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations; this will help narrow the gender gap in decision making. Female HR leaders, in particular, may also have a level playing field with their male counterparts. Furthermore, men and women may begin to see each other in non-stereotypical roles. Perhaps, this will lead to organizational transformations.

#### **RQ4 Findings**

The final research question was designed to uncover how gender bias (or prejudice) affects women in leadership positions in HRM with regard to their level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making. This research question produced four themes: That was my Idea, Gender Interfering with Progress, Asserting Self, and Out-group. These themes are connected, and show the impact of gender bias or prejudice in organizational hierarchies. Consequently, findings revealed that the effects of gender are emotionally harmful to women and ultimately hinder their performance and productivity.

**That was my idea.** The first theme is an indication that women give their ideas in decision making and some of these ideas are accepted and implemented while others are ignored. Examples shared by participants showed resentment towards their peers for “stealing” their ideas; although their ideas were ignored by members of the executive team, there were times when ideas were later reintroduced by their male counterparts,

accepted as original ideas, and then implemented. Participants who experienced the phenomenon felt a sense of betrayal and awkwardness. One participant said that, even when women outnumbered men around the “table”, the men still had the loudest voices. The inference drawn is that in hierarchies where men (and women) have more power and status than other women, discriminatory behaviors against women may be present and problematic.

**Gender interfering with progress.** The second theme revealed that gender interferes with women’s progress and performance. The findings of the study suggest that participants often discovered (either through direct acknowledgement by their superiors or by covert actions of their organizations) that they have reached a plateau within the company. The covert actions included lack of autonomy for HR decision making, inferior compensation packages, and in some cases, disparity in salaries between female and male executives. As indicated previously, two participants experienced bias at the hands of female executives, who left them with feelings of betrayal. In general, the women felt that while they have risen above the high expectations set for them by their peers, new and different challenges are being presented by other female executives. These challenges create inhospitable work climates for women, which ultimately slows the progression for women.

Most participants expressed an overall intangible feeling of gender bias due to a lack of recognition in the organization. According to one participant, because she is not a Senior VP, her photo did not appear on the company’s website; this kind of disloyalty among executives is particularly harmful to women who feel that they are not “truly” a

part of the group because of gender. Further research could explore the severity of this disloyalty and the levels of its manifestation.

**Asserting the self (or oneself).** The third theme indicated that some participants had to assert themselves in order to have their voices heard. The assertive behaviors that these women displayed were frequently used to guide the organization from potential liabilities. Participants felt that they needed to be more assertive than their male counterparts to get the same results. They described themselves as not being popular with their peers because of the extent that they had to go to do their jobs effectively. One participant had to go directly to the CEO to get other department heads to provide her with information she needed. Assertiveness is often perceived as a masculine trait, and women who try to be assertive may be perceived negatively. Eagly and Carli (2007) affirmed that women who change their behaviors only to be perceived as “masculine”, experienced resentment from male colleagues. Women face a dilemma; when they do not assert themselves they may be perceived as weak or passive, yet when they do assert themselves, others criticize them for having an attitude. What can a woman do in order to be heard effectively and perceived as professional at the same time? Resource-based theory suggests that these women be given the same opportunities as their male counterparts to demonstrate their competencies.

**Out-group.** The study also uncovered that some participants felt that they were divided into an out-group, particularly in cases where the executive team is male dominated. The results indicated that participants felt uniformed, unimportant, and sometimes segregated, due to gender and position within the management hierarchy. One respondent reported feeling as though she was seated at the “children’s table” when she

attended important business meetings. Others reported being uninformed about decisions regarding HR until long after initial decisions were made. One participant noted that only Senior VPs were allowed to go to off-site locations to conduct business meetings. This divide led to varied reactions from participants. For example, one participant embraced being part of an out-group. She claimed that because of her experience and knowledge in the company, the exclusion allowed her to focus more on her job responsibilities. As a result, she was more attentive to HR matters that would directly impact organizational effectiveness and performance. Other participants were concerned with acceptance and exposure, so being an out-group mattered to them – they viewed their position negatively.

In summary, the common theme in the participants' responses is that the CEO and Senior Executives did not provide women with necessary information and equal opportunities to perform their jobs. It appears that boundaries are set for these women and they are denied certain privileges because they are women. Sometimes, when a woman experiences the pressure associated with wanting to belong, she may try to alter her identity for “positive distinctiveness” within a particular group. This can cause her to lose touch with herself and adapt her behaviors so that she is accepted by the group. Though some participants talked about being more assertive in order to be heard, none of the women mentioned that they had to alter their characteristics or behaviors to be fully accepted into the group.

### **Co-creation as a Strategy**

Despite the strides made by women in leadership roles in HRM, it is apparent that challenges still persist for these women in decision making. To minimize these

challenges, the researcher proposes co-creation as a strategy to help CEOs and Senior Executives view female HR leaders with “fresh eyes”. Co-creating experiences is critical for maximization of effectiveness and competitiveness (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Organizations that co-create value could discover a new way to compete through mixed gender interactions. Scharmer and Kauefer (2010) argued that transformative change is a process of innovation and change. When connected to the information base of individuals responsible for implementing and executing the change, the result is sustainable and successful. Researchers (e.g., Gharajedaghi, 1999, and Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), supported the need for change and new learning in organizations in the new economy. They attested that organizations are facing new global challenges that affect globalization, innovation, information technology, and digitization. With these changes, resource-based theorists advise organizational leaders to tap into the knowledge base of women and maximize their strengths for a competitive advantage (Olalla, 1999).

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) proposed co-creation to reinvigorate an organization. Women in leadership roles in HRM can add tremendous value to the organization through co-creation experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). According to Ulrich (1998), HR professionals have learned new competencies that should allow key executives to see them as valuable contributors to the organization. This progression puts women in a better position to collaborate with CEOs and explore emerging opportunities to achieve organizational excellence. They are equipped with business knowledge and are prepared to lead HR functions through the transformation forecasted for HR organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ulrich, 1998). Yeung et al. (1994) contended that improving how HR delivers services and meeting business goals are

responsibilities of the HR leader in the new economy. Rynes et al. (2002) affirmed that HR business practices are tied to organizational performance. HR leaders are expected to be change agents who, through co-creation, can improve the organization's capacity to transform (Ulrich, 1998).

Moreover, Scharmer (2008) declared that organizational leaders can no longer be blind to the co-creation value women bring to organizations. This transformation requires women to be part of the co-creation and value extraction process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). When women's skills, ideas, and knowledge are utilized, business processes are more effective. Prahalad and Krishnan (2008) contended that organizations that want to innovate should not rely on archived knowledge. They affirmed that leveraging new knowledge is necessary to build capabilities for innovation. Leaders, who accept that women are exceptional leaders (Eagly et al., 2003) and mentor and develop them, will see emerging possibilities. Organizational leaders who transform their views about women will also see women through new perspectives (Ulrich, 1998). Once leaders transform, they cannot go back to underutilizing the skills of women. Ulrich (1998) asserted that HR's transformation is the primary responsibility of the CEO and members of the management hierarchy. This change necessitates co-creating value with HR leaders.

### **Implications**

The role of women in HRM is changing and CEOs must embrace this change to allow positive outcomes to happen. This study has implications for organizations, women, HR leaders, CEOs, and Senior Executive who are impacted by HR's transformation. From the interviews conducted with HR leaders, they believed that

CEOs who understood their role and strategic function were more willing to engage them in strategic talks and decisions with other Senior Executives. One implication is that as CEOs become more knowledgeable of HR, women's level of involvement in decision making will likely increase. Another implication is that if educational programs are tailored to CEOs, programs could enhance their knowledge about how HR can make business outcomes happen. A third implication is that if HR leaders find new ways to make their skills, talents, and capabilities more transparent to CEOs, they could become fully accepted as business partners. Ulrich et al. (2012) noted that HR professionals should bear the responsibility for being the "best thinkers" in the firm regarding the human and organizational side of the business. They proclaimed,

They should be the corporate thought leaders in framing the HR strategy through which the people and organization may be positioned to create competitive advantage. They ensure that people and organizations are created and sustained to optimally deliver value to external and internal stakeholders by implementing the business strategy. They partner with line executives in the fulfillment of these responsibilities by engaging line executives in developing, approving, and implementing human and organizational agendas. To fulfill these purposes, HR professionals must have the knowledge, insights, skills, and experience that are most relevant for the companies and competitive markets within which they add value (Ulrich et al., 2012, p.1)

These implications could influence awareness, especially across organizations globally, where in management hierarchies female HR leaders are often challenged to demonstrate standard competencies.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to the current research. First, women were recruited from for-profit and non-profit organizations and included 10 participants with unique experiences; however, their experiences may be different from the larger population of

women in HRM. A second limitation in the study was the sampling strategy. Because the ideal participants held senior-level positions in HRM, using purposive sampling made it very difficult to recruit participants. Using snowball sampling more than likely would have allowed for easier recruitment. Women at the top level of the hierarchy were not willing to share their time, experiences, and expertise; therefore, with referrals from other executives, women may have been more inclined to participate in the study. Also, encouraging referrals for participation may have allowed women to feel more comfortable sharing information without fear or hesitation. The final limitation in the study was the geographical location for the research sites. Although the researcher contacted 56 organizations in search of participants, the geographical location posed a limitation for the study. A majority of mid-sized firms did not have corporate offices close to the HR department. As a result, finding research sites with an HR department was very time-consuming.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The data collected from the interviews demonstrated that women are involved in business strategy and strategic decision making, their contributions do influence firm performance, and gender is both a key factor and a challenge impacting their progress in business meetings. Based on findings, three recommendations were made for future research. The first recommendation encourages researchers to conduct a study to determine how women in leadership roles in HRM actually perform in strategic business meetings. This research provided some understanding of female involvement, but it does not measure the level of their performance. Further research, either qualitative or quantitative in nature, could provide additional information and statistical measures about

how women in other professions perform in strategic function. It is also recommended that the impact women's contributions have on a firm's performance be explored in more depth. As indicated by the findings, women attributed a number of different factors to firm performance. They impacted firm performance by reducing turnover, avoiding or reducing lawsuits, offering competitive pension and benefit plans, managing people, hiring quality staff, treating employees fairly, increasing sales percentages, maintaining compliance, managing mergers and acquisitions, as well as downsizing. Because there are various factors contributing to firm performance, depending on the organization, future research is necessary to investigate which factors have the greatest impact on firm performance.

The third recommendation is based on findings about the gender of the CEO or Executive Director and the impact on the HR leader's level of involvement in strategic decisions. Some participants felt that women CEOs or Executive Directors involved them more in business decisions than male CEOs or Executive Directors. One participant commented,

In the 18 years I have been in HR, I am proud to work for a female CEO. This is the first time and it is different - it feels different. She is more understanding, we speak the same language, and I like it. Maybe this is why HR or this role has such an important seat at the table, but I do not know. (P8)

Future research can investigate whether women's level of involvement is influenced by the gender of the organizational leader. Investigating this topic would be beneficial to women in HR who desire to play a more integral role in decision making.

## **Conclusion**

This phenomenological, qualitative study analyzed the experiences of 10 women in leadership roles in HRM, to discover their participation experiences in business strategy and strategic decision making. In addition, the researcher examined the participant's level of involvement to gain insight about how their contributions (or lack thereof) may impact a firm's performance. Women in this study used a questionnaire and interviews to talk about their experiences at the "table" with the CEO or Executive Director and other Senior Executives. The unique experiences of these women conjured up feelings and emotions of gender bias and prejudice experienced by these women in the organization hierarchy. Clearly, women connected their experience with gender to exclusion from strategic business meetings. Their experiences with exclusion show that women's credibility as experts in the field of HR is being questioned. Women who do not get support at the "table" must be more assertive in order to be heard and taken seriously. Consequently, women in HRM may be perceived as having leadership traits that do not fit the common characteristics of an HR leader. CEOs and executives must accept women with assertive traits, and utilize their talents toward new and successful business development.

This study contributes to the field of Human Resources Management and Organizational Management by helping to identify the role women play in strategic business decisions, and the barriers they face in having full inclusion in strategic decisions. The findings are a significant contribution to future researchers who seek to improve firm performance, specifically with regard to strategic planning and decision making. The findings also have practical applications that can impact firm practices and

female contributions, which could contribute to improved firm performance. Resource-based theory outlines several reasons why CEOs and Senior Executives should value the ideas and talents of women in HRM. Understanding the financial impact of women's contributions on firm performance can directly influence how women in HRM are perceived by organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## APPENDIX A. STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK

### Academic Honesty Policy

Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy ([3.01.01](#)) holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person's ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of *plagiarism* are discussed in the Policy:

Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others' work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person's ideas, including another learner's, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)

Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Capella University's Research Misconduct Policy ([3.03.06](#)) holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.

### Statement of Original Work and Signature

I have read, understood, and abided by Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy ([3.01.01](#)) and Research Misconduct Policy ([3.03.06](#)), including the Policy Statements, Rationale, and Definitions.

I attest that this dissertation or capstone project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the *APA Publication Manual*.

Learner name  
and date

Heather R. Waitman, May 2014

Mentor name  
and school

Martin Lees, Ph.D, Capella University

## APPENDIX B

### FIELD TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

The Interview questionnaire was adapted from “Flattery will get you everywhere (especially if you are a male Caucasian): How ingratiation, boardroom behavior, and demographic minority status affect additional board appointments at U.S. Companies” by J. D. Westphal and I. Stern, 2007, *Academy of Management Journal*, 50, p. 267-288. Copyright 2007 by the Academy of Management Journal. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

1. What is your age?

- Under 40
- 40 – 49
- 50 – 59
- 60 – 69
- 70 and older

2. What is the highest degree you have earned?

- School Diploma
- Associate Degree / A.A / A.S.
- Bachelors Degree / B.A. / B.S.
- Masters Degree or Professional degree
- Doctorate Degree

3. What position do you current hold in your organization?

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4. How long have you been in your current position?

- 2 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11 – 15 years
- More than 16 years

5. What is the size of your organization?

- Less than 100 employees
- 100 - 499
- 500 – 1000
- 1000– 5000
- More than 5000

6. Describe the responsibilities of the HR leader with regard to strategic planning, strategic decision-making, and policy issues.

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7. Describe the business partnership or relationship between Senior Executives and the HR leader.

8. How do the organization's Senior Executives foster the integration of male and female executives within the management hierarchy?

9. In your opinion, how does Senior Executives support diversity in various strategic business functions, including decision making?

10. In talking to [Senior Executives], have they ever expressed agreement with [the HR leader's] viewpoint on a strategic issue, even when they did not completely share [her] opinion? Please explain.
11. In speaking with [Senior Executives], have they ever pointed out attitudes and/or opinions you have in common? Please specify.
12. In talking to [Senior Executives], have they disagreed with [the HR leader's] point of view on a strategic issue? Please explain.
13. Have Senior Executives ever complemented [the HR leader] about [her] insight on a particular strategic issue? If yes, how did he praise her?
14. Have Senior Executives ever complemented [the HR leader] regarding [her] contributions to the decision making process? If yes, what were some of the compliments?
15. Has the HR leader ever requested information from the CEO or Senior Executives for the purpose of evaluating management's progress in implementing the firm's corporate strategy? If yes, how was the information shared with the HR leader?
16. At any time, has the HR leader sought information from the CEO or another Senior Executive for the purpose of evaluating the performance of top management? If yes, what was the outcome?
17. At any time, has the HR leader constructively criticized a strategic proposal put forth by senior management [for approval]? If yes, what was the outcome?
18. Has the HR director ever suggested revisions to a strategic proposal put forth by senior management [for approval]? Were the suggestions accepted or rejected?
19. In strategic business meetings, has the HR leader provided input or advice on strategic issues at the request of the CEO and/or Senior Executives? How were those inputs received?
20. In strategic business meetings, has the HR leader provided information about the strategic actions, policies, and/or practices of other firms? If so, what impact did this have on business practices?
21. At the request of the CEO— has the HR leader provided information or expertise in regards to formulating a strategy or policy issue? What impact did this have on the firm's performance?
22. In your opinion, has the HR leader acted as a consultant or counsel to Senior Executives on strategy and/or policy issues?

**Part 2**

**Instructions:** Please take a moment to evaluate the overall delivery and communication of the survey you just responded to above.

**Field Pre-test Feedback Scoring Guide**

<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Was the survey easy to read and understand?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was the information in the survey relevant to the topic being investigated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did the survey provide sufficient relevant information?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Were there errors in the survey that interfered with comprehension?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was the information in the survey vague and easy to misinterpret?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was information in the survey repetitive?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was the survey too long?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Were you satisfied with the structure and design of the survey?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

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## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

The Interview questionnaire was adapted from “Flattery will get you everywhere (especially if you are a male Caucasian): How ingratiation, boardroom behavior, and demographic minority status affect additional board appointments at U.S. Companies” by J. D. Westphal and I. Stern, 2007, Academy of Management Journal, 50, p. 267-288. Copyright 2007 by the Academy of Management Journal. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

1-	<b>What is your age?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Under 40 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-49 <input type="checkbox"/> 50-59 <input type="checkbox"/> 60-69 <input type="checkbox"/> 70 and older
2-	<b>What is the highest degree you have earned?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> School Diploma <input type="checkbox"/> Associate Degree / A.A. / A.S. <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelors Degree / B.A. / B.S. <input type="checkbox"/> Masters Degree or Professional degree <input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate Degree
3-	<b>What position do you currently hold in your organization?</b>  
4-	<b>How long have you been in your current position?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 2-9 years <input type="checkbox"/> 10-14 years <input type="checkbox"/> 15-19 years <input type="checkbox"/> More than 20 years
5-	<b>What is the size of your organization?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 100 employees <input type="checkbox"/> 100 - 499 <input type="checkbox"/> 500 - 1000 <input type="checkbox"/> More than 5000
6-	<b>Describe the responsibilities of the HR leader with regard to strategic planning, strategic decision-making, and policy issues.</b>  
7-	<b>Describe the business partnership or relationship between Senior Executives and the HR leader.</b>  

8-	<p><b>How do the organization's Senior Executives foster the integration of male and female executives within the management hierarchy?</b></p>
9-	<p><b>In your opinion, how does Senior Executives support diversity in various strategic business functions, including decision making?</b></p>
10-	<p><b>In talking to [Senior Executives], have they ever expressed agreement with [the HR leader's] viewpoint on a strategic issue, even when they did not completely share [her] opinion? Please explain.</b></p>
11-	<p><b>In speaking with [Senior Executives], have they ever pointed out attitudes and/or opinions you have in common? Please specify.</b></p>
12-	<p><b>In talking to [Senior Executives], have they disagreed with [the HR leader's] point of view on a strategic issue? Please explain.</b></p>
13-	<p><b>Have Senior Executives ever complemented [the HR leader] about [her] insight on a particular strategic issue? If yes, how did they praise her?</b></p>
14-	<p><b>Have Senior Executives ever complemented [the HR leader] regarding [her] contributions to the decision making? If yes, what were some of the compliments?</b></p>
15-	<p><b>Has the HR leader ever requested information from the CEO or Senior Executives for the purpose of evaluating management's progress in implementing the firm's corporate strategy? If yes, how was the information shared with the HR leader?</b></p>
16-	<p><b>At any time, has the HR leader sought information from the CEO or another Senior Executives for the purpose of evaluating the performance of top management? If yes, what was the outcome?</b></p>
17-	<p><b>At any time, has the HR leader constructively criticized a strategic proposal put forth by senior management [for approval]? If yes, what was the outcome?</b></p>

18-	<p><b>Has the HR leader ever suggested revisions to a strategic proposal put forth by senior management [for approval]? Were the suggestions accepted or rejected?</b></p>
19-	<p><b>In strategic business meetings, has the HR leader provided input or advice on strategic issues at the request of the CEO and/or Senior Executives? How were those inputs received?</b></p>
20-	<p><b>In strategic business meetings, has the HR leader provided information about the strategic actions, policies, and/or practices of other firms? If so, what impact did this have on business practices?</b></p>
21-	<p><b>At the request of the CEO, has the HR leader provided information or expertise in regards to formulating a strategy or policy issue? What impact did this have on the firm's performance?</b></p>
22-	<p><b>In your opinion, has the HR leader acted as a consultant or counsel to Senior Executives on strategy and/or policy issues?</b></p>

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/GUIDE

1. What are some of the strategic responsibilities you have acquired since you have obtained your higher-level position? What kinds of responsibilities have Senior Executives fail to grant to you?
2. What is your experience working with Senior Executives in the management hierarchy?
  - a) What experiences have interfered with your progress?
  - b) What experiences have supported your progress?
3. Are you involved in business strategy and strategic decision making?
4. What role do you play in business strategy and strategic decision making?
5. What is your level of involvement in business strategy and strategic decision making?
6. What is your level of involvement in the development and implementation of business strategy?
7. Have Senior Executives ever excluded you from decision making?
  - a) If yes, how have the experiences of exclusion affected you personally and professionally?
  - b) If no, how has the experience of inclusion affected you personally and professionally?
8. What happens to suggestions/ideas you propose in strategic business meetings?
9. How do Senior Executives acknowledge and recognize you for your contributions to business strategy and strategic business decisions?
10. Have your contributions to business strategy and strategic decision making contributed to successful business outcomes? If so, how?