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The career progression of women in state government agencies

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to empirically examine the impact of the utilization of organizational practices on the career progression of women to executive positions in state-level government organizations in the USA.

Design/methodology/approach – The design included an online survey instrument sent to a purposive sample of 600 female administrative agency executives in 50 states. A standard multilinear regression model tests the predictive power of three composite explanatory utilization variables on the dependent variable, career progression of women to upper level management. The composite predictor variables are: utilization of work/family practices; utilization of diversity practices; and utilization of promotional practices.

Findings – Contrary to expectations, the relationship between career progression of women and family-friendly utilization does not appear to be statistically significant. However, the time it takes respondents who utilized family-friendly practices in their organizations to reach upper-level management decreased by 0.037 years. And contrary to expectations, women who utilize promotion practices are more likely to achieve executive-level status, even though it does not necessarily take them less time to do so.

Originality/value – This research is distinct from previous studies in that it considers the relationship between the utilization of practices and women's attainment of executive-level positions.

Keywords Organizational processes, Career development, Women, Public administration, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Women's career progression into executive-level positions continues to lag behind that of their male counterparts in both the private and public sectors. Despite earlier governmental interventions – the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Title VII and Executive Order 11375 – women's career progression has not kept pace with that of men's (Accenture, 2006; Alpern, 1993; Ibarra, 1993; Fagenson, 1993; Stivers, 1993; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Morrison *et al.*, 1995; Morrison, 1996; Olshfski and Caprio, 1996; Tsui and Gutek, 1999; Oakley, 2000).

The problem is that even though women represent 46.5 percent of the workforce, they continue to lag behind male counterparts in reaching upper level positions. For example, in the private sector, most recent statistics reported by Catalyst (2009) suggest that in 2008 only 3 percent of *Fortune* 500 chief executive officers (CEOs) are women; 15.2 percent of *Fortune* 500 Board Seats are held by women and only

15.7 percent of *Fortune* 500 Corporate Officer positions are held by women. Similarly, in the public sector, women's overall share of the top executive, legislative, and judicial positions in 40 percent of the states increased by only 0.01 percentage points in an eight-year period (Women in State Policy Leadership, 1998-2005).

Moreover, while a considerable amount of research addressing gender imbalance has been added to management (Mills and Tancred, 1992; Morrison *et al.*, 1992; Fagenson, 1993; Tsui and Gutek, 1999; Perry-Smith and Blum, 2000; Gersick *et al.*, 2000) and public administration literature (Stivers, 1993; Burton, 1997; Bayes, 1991; Brudney *et al.*, 2000), and several policies have been proposed to thwart impediments to career progression (Morrison *et al.*, 1992; Catalyst, 1998; US Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995), empirical evidence determining whether the implementation of specific practices actually impact women reaching executive positions remains a timely and salient research agenda.

This research is an exploratory study that empirically examines the impact of the utilization of organizational practices on the career progression of women to executive positions in state-level government in the USA. The specific focus is a sample of women who have attained executive status in state-level government agencies. First, previous research on gender inequality, including organizational barriers, policies, and practices, is reviewed. Next, composite policy, practice, and utilization variables commonly associated with the underrepresentation of women in upper-level management (including opportunities for promotion, diversity initiatives, and work/family indicators) are developed, using models that parallel and build on previous research. Based on these models and variables, a survey was developed and sent to women executives in state agencies across the country. Using descriptive and inferential statistics, the impact of the utilization of organizational practices was measured. According to Konnard and Linnehan (1999), even if organizational policies are implemented, such policies may be underutilized due to a lack of knowledge about them and/or fear of making use of them. This research is distinct from previous studies in that it considers the relationship between the utilization of practices and women's attainment of executive-level positions.

Gender-inequality literature: policies, practice, and utilization

Past and current gender-inequality literature in both the public sector (Stivers, 1993; Burton, 1997; Bayes, 1991; Brudney *et al.*, 2000) and private sector (Mills and Tancred, 1992; Morrison *et al.*, 1992; Fagenson, 1993; Tsui and Gutek, 1999; Perry-Smith and Blum, 2000; Gersick *et al.*, 2000) document the inequalities between men and women in upper level management. In the public sector, for example, studies of occupational segregation at the municipal level (Miller *et al.*, 1999), the state level (Daley and Naff, 1998; Brudney *et al.*, 2000) and the federal level (Soni, 2000) identify impediments faced by women similar to those faced by their private-sector counterparts. Further, national (Mills and Tancred, 1992; Morrison *et al.*, 1992; Fagenson, 1993; Tsui and Gutek, 1999; Stivers, 1993, 2000) and international (Burton, 1997; Bayes, 1991) perspectives of organizational studies document the inequalities between men and women in management. Regardless of sector, Bell and Nkomo (1992) add that that gender-inequality literature envelops three fields of inquiry: women as managers (Carli, 1999; Lewis, 1998), differences between male and female behaviors in organizations (Martin, 2000; Chiu, 1998), and organizational barriers to the career

progression of women (Morrison, 1996). For example, organizational barriers such as career development patterns, workplace policies, and lack of mentoring directly affect women's ability to progress in organizations (Guy, 2003). The existence of informal networks, the stereotyping of women's capacity for leadership, and a lack of female role models have been identified as factors preventing women from ascending to board-level and CEO positions in both private and public organizations (*The Economist*, 2005).

Past studies (Morrison *et al.*, 1992; Catalyst, 1996; US Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; Burton, 1997) have also identified several pervasive barriers to the appointment of women to senior professional positions, including working practices, tradition and attitudes, pay differentials, stereotyping, and a lack of both informal networks and "in-line" positions. For instance, an examination of administrative and professional positions in the USA cities by Miller *et al.* (1999) evidenced a direct relationship between occupational segregation and salary inequalities. The relationship between human capital determinants and career success (Kirchmeyer, 1998), women-friendly policies and job satisfaction (Chiu and Ng, 1999), and the influences of stereotypical behaviors (Deal and Stevenson, 1998) have also been documented. Specific case studies also evidence organizational barriers to the career progression of women managers, such as mentor influence in the health-care industry (Walsh and Borkowski, 1999; Wilson *et al.*, 2000) and job satisfaction in the legal profession (Chiu, 1998). Reid *et al.* (2004) examined the continued existence of organizational barriers in state administrative agencies. Their findings led them to conclude that the glass ceiling still persists: women are underrepresented in top-level administrative and professional positions in distributive and regulatory agencies. Somewhat conflicting evidence is reported by Bowling *et al.* (2006), who examined the presence of women agency heads in all 50 states using the lens of active and passive representation. Their findings support Bullard and Wright's (1993) assertion that women circumvented the glass ceiling as a result of better educational, career and organizational foundations than is typical for women in the workplace, such as being appointed by governors and/or heading newer agencies.

Organizational policies and practices

In order to achieve gender equality, organizational policies, including flexible work hours, paid leaves of absence, subsidies for child care, job sharing, home-based employment, mentoring, networking, and finding ways to create a better work-life balance must be encouraged (Rose and Hartmann, 2004; Blau *et al.*, 1998). However, Cooper Jackson's (2001) survey of middle managers suggests that the glass ceiling remains an issue for women. The female respondents in the study did not believe that their organizations had successfully implemented initiatives to help them overcome barriers to career advancement. Similarly, Mattis (2004) found that women left corporate America due to the need for more workplace flexibility, experience with glass ceiling factors, and the lack of challenges on the job.

Utilization

Whether policies and practices are successful depends on how they are perceived by an organization's members (Kottke and Agars, 2006a, b). One perception is that gender-based policies – including family-friendly policies, which are often seen

as directed exclusively at women – are often underutilized (Konnard and Linnehan, 1999). Limited research exists on the utilization of gender-based policies. An exception is Konnard and Linnehan (1999), who explored the rather modest gains in advancement women have made despite many initiatives designed to help them make such gains. The authors maintain that unless underlying organizational processes are addressed and organizational practices are embraced by all members barriers to women's advancement will remain. Although programs exist that aim to improve organizational outcomes, factors other than program usefulness continue to determine whether employees will utilize those programs (Judiesch and Lyness, 1999) including how policies are perceived by an organization's members (Kottke and Agars). Other earlier studies examining the utilization of family-friendly policies maintain that employees are reluctant to participate in such programs if they believe that participation will threaten their career path (Connor *et al.*, 1997; Catalyst, 1998; Gerson, 1993; Powell, 1997; Veiga *et al.*, 2004). Likewise, employees fear that utilizing family-friendly programs may result in a negative assessment of their abilities by others (Gross and McMullen, 1993; Lee, 1997) or that instead of being seen as demonstrating commitment to the organization, they will be stigmatized as prioritizing family responsibilities (Fletcher and Bailyn, 1996).

This study goes beyond previous research in two ways: by surveying women who have actually attained an executive position in the public sector, and by determining not only the impact of policies and practices on breaking the glass ceiling but also the degree to which utilization of those practices impacts women's ability to attain upper-level positions.

Research questions

The central research question in this study is:

RQ1. What is the impact of the utilization of organizational practices on the career progression of women to executive positions in the public sector?

Questions around which this study is organized are:

RQ2. What are the organizational policies that impact women advancing to executive-level positions in the public sector?

RQ3. What are the organizational practices that enable women to advance to executive-level positions in the public sector?

Theoretical framework

The overriding theoretical framework that informs this study centers on the gendered organization structure (GOS) theory of gender diversity introduced by Bell and Nkomo (1992) and drawn on subsequently by Cooper Jackson (2001). The gendered organization model further integrates three underlying models that add definition and important aspects of inquiry:

- (1) the promotion opportunity model (Oakley, 2000);
- (2) the inclusionary model of diversity practices (Cooper Jackson, 2001); and
- (3) the work/family partnership model (Perry-Smith and Blum, 2000).

GOS model

The GOS model of gender diversity explains the status and experiences of women (and men) in organizations across organizational culture and organizational structure (Cooper Jackson, 2001). Specifically, according to Cooper Jackson, includes informal networking, diversity, performance evaluations, stereotyping, and preferred leadership. Fagenson (1993) and Cooper Jackson (2001) discuss how organizational structure impedes women's entry to and advancement in the workplace. That structure can include job recruitment, job assignment, mentoring, retention, training, how work and family are balanced by employees, and promotion and reward systems. Moreover, Bajdo and Dickson (2001) found that the greatest predictor of the number of women in management positions resulted from organizations that focus on aspects of organizational culture relating to gender equity practices.

Promotion opportunity model

Promotional policies and practices are designed to foster opportunities traditionally deemed essential for women to rise to executive-level positions. Oakley (2000) summarizes the significance of line experience, performance-based feedback, training, and career development on the ability of women to rise to CEO and other senior-level positions. Walsh and Borkowski (1999) add to the promotion opportunity model by including the effects of gender mentoring on career development.

Inclusionary diversity model

Corporate climate, including informal networks, has been cited as a cultural barrier to breaking the glass ceiling (Cooper Jackson, 2001). According to a report by the US Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), America's corporate climate is still not open to diverse ideas of acceptable behavior. Such barriers can influence women's performance evaluations and potentially contribute to "inhospitable and exclusionary environments" (Ragins *et al.*, 1998). The implications of valuing gender diversity on the representation of women in upper-level management have been studied with respect to both private (Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000) and public (Brudney *et al.*, 2000; Soni, 2000) organizations. Past research on the implementation of diversity policies such as reward systems for achieving inclusionary goals, on communicating the "vision" of valuing cultural and gender diversity through in-house newsletters, and on the existence of active AA/EEO committees, as well as on women's inclusion in informal networks (Cooper Jackson, 2001), has demonstrated their positive impact on women's career progression to executive levels (Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000).

Work/family partnership model

The work/family model presents opportunities for women to balance work and family responsibilities. The implementation of policies that help employees manage nonwork responsibilities such as dependent-care services and flexible-scheduling programs (including various types of family-leave practices) yields a positive effect on the number of women in upper-level management (Perry-Smith and Blum, 2000).

The model that emerges from the theoretical framework and literature review focuses on three composite independent variables:

- (1) utilization of promotional practices;
- (2) utilization of diversity initiatives; and
- (3) utilization of family-friendly practices – which can be assumed to influence the gender imbalance of women in executive-level positions in state-level agencies in the USA.

This builds upon the GOS model, adding the variable of utilization. The following framework may be used to determine whether the number of women in executive-level positions is a function of the research's predictor variables.

Methodology, data collection, and variable definition

Online surveys were sent to female heads of administrative agencies in 50 states using the professional online survey system Psychdata. The identified sample frame, *The Council of State Governments State Directory III – Administrative Officials* (The Council of State Governments, 2008), is a biennial publication listing the administrative heads by type of agency (function). The listing of agency heads was current as of May 2008, the year prior to the one in which the survey was conducted. (It takes several months to compile and publish each list). Given the limited population of 1,200 female agency heads, the exploratory nature of the study, and research objective, a purposive non-probability sampling method was used (Singleton and Straits, 2010). Although non-probability sampling poses challenges to variability and controlling for bias, when conducting exploratory research and working with small samples it is best left to expert judgment rather than chance (Singleton and Straits, 2010). Based on the purpose of our study, 779 female agency heads in all 50 states with e-mail addresses were selected; 109 e-mails were returned as undeliverable. The response rate was 9.1 percent, with a total of 61 responses. Given the use of a purposive sample and the exploratory nature of the research, a low response rate is acceptable since the objective is to learn more about the problem and not generalize back to the population (Singleton and Straits, 2010). The survey instrument, which consisted of 33 questions, was designed to measure the utilization of work family practices, diversity and promotion practices on a four-point Likert scale. Survey questions were constructed to reflect the theoretical framework of the study. Demographics were collected regarding the respondents' ethnicity/race, terminal degree, the number of years they had been at their present position, the number of years they had been at their current agency, and the title that best described their position. Data from the survey instrument were entered into SPSS for analysis.

Variable definition

Dependent variable. The dependent variable, career progression of women, is defined as women who have achieved the position of agency head – including director, commissioner or chairperson – at the state level. This definition is a standard classification in past and present gender research (Brudney *et al.*, 2000) For the purposes of this study, this variable is measured by the length of time each respondent was at her agency prior to attaining executive position.

Independent variables. To answer the central RQ1 this study incorporates three composite predictor variables: work family, diversity, and promotional utilizations.

Utilization is defined as practices, programs, and initiatives resulting from policy implementation that are exercised (i.e. used) by agency employees. The utilization of

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promotional practices, family-friendly practices, and diversity practices was also measured using a four-point Likert scale that enabled participants to choose more than one answer. Respondents' answers indicated whether available practices were utilized in their agency. The utilization composite variables were measured using survey questions: promotional utilization included line position, training and development and gender mentoring (Table II); work/family utilization included questions surrounding dependent-care services and flexible work option (Table III); and diversity utilizations included questions regarding diversity initiatives (Table IV).

Results

As illustrated in Table I, the average age of the 61 respondents was 53.6 years; 75 percent of the women were Caucasian, two were Black/African American, two were Hispanic, and one identified herself as Asian. Respondents had been working in their present executive position nearly 12 years, on average, and had reached executive-level position in an average of 7.2 years.

Percentages of women who utilized available programs related to promotion are shown in Table II. Of all programs related to promotion, 88.2 percent of women utilized performance assessment and feedback programs, and leadership-training programs were accessed by 74.1 percent of respondents. All the women reporting the existence

Table I.
Survey respondent
demographics

Age		Ethnicity		%
Average age	53.6	Caucasian		75.0
Median	55.0	Black/African American		4.2
Range	32-71	Hispanic		4.2
		Asian		2.1

Note: $n = 61$

Table II.
Promotional utilization

Line position	%	Training and development programs		Gender mentoring	%
			%		
Rotated job assignments	66.7	Performance assessment and feedback	88.2	Informal networking activities for women (e.g. with male peers at golfing outings)	100
Development programs for women identified as having high potential	100.0	Leadership training	74.1	Formal mentoring programs (e.g. chairpersons volunteering to mentor senior high women)	50
Assignments in line areas	69.2	Management training	73.1	Opportunity to be mentored by men	60
Participation in stretch assignments (i.e. leading key projects and crossing functional teams)	62.5				

of informal networking activities for women (e.g. with male peers at golfing outings) took advantage of the opportunity.

While 50 percent of women who achieved executive-level positions embraced the opportunity to work flexible hours, only 20 percent opted to work part-time and 50 percent utilized telecommuting. One-third of the respondents took paid leave to take care of a dependent (Table III).

Table IV reflects that over 85 percent of respondents have utilized diversity awareness workshops, yet none have participated in awards or recognition activities.

Table V demonstrates that of all three composite indicator policy variables, formal work/family policies have proliferated most widely in state government agencies. A total of 58 percent of women reported that their agencies maintain a formal policy on dependent-care services, and 78.8 percent reported flexible work schedule policies. Policies on gender mentoring lag behind: only 13.8 percent of women reported that their agencies maintain such policies. Although few (6.9 percent) of survey respondents reported that their agencies maintain formal policies on diversity, 85 percent of women have participated in diversity-related workshops.

The next phase of this project used a standard multiple regression analysis, which was performed to model the relationships between the dependent variable – career progression of women to upper-level management – and the three composite explanatory variables. The most important statistically significant finding to emerge is that women who utilized the diversity initiatives offered by their organizations decreased the amount of time it took them to achieve executive-level status, by 0.243 years ($B = -0.243$, $p = 0.065$). Contrary to expectations, the relationship between career progression of women and family-friendly utilization does not appear to be statistically significant. However, the time it took respondents who did utilize family-friendly practices to reach upper-level management decreased by 0.037 years. In addition, while women who utilized promotion practices were more likely to achieve executive-level status, it did not necessarily take them less time to do so. Table VI illustrates these results.

Dependent-care services	%	Flexible work options	%
Childcare services	0.0	Telecommuting	50
Dependent-care services other than childcare available	0.0	Option to work part-time	20
Paid leave to take care of a dependent	33.3	Flexible work hours	50
Reimbursement for dependent-care services	33.3	Job sharing	36.5

Table III.
Work/family utilization

	%
Diversity awareness workshops	85.2
Diversity awards or recognition	0.0
An active AA/EEO committee office	25
Targeted recruiting of women for nonmanagerial positions	42.9
Diversity efforts that are given exposure both inside and outside the agency (e.g. newsletters)	55.6

Table IV.
Diversity initiatives
utilization

Table V.
Policy formulated,
practice implemented and
utilization

Indicator	Percentage of policy formulated, formal	Percentage of policy formulated, informal	Practice	Utilization	Percentage utilization of practices
Line position	25.86	5.17	9	6	66.7
Rotated job assignments					
Development programs for "high-potential" women			2	2	100.0
Assignments in line areas			13	9	69.2
Participation in stretch assignments (e.g. leading key projects and cross-functional teams)					
Training and career development	27.59	31.03	24	15	62.5
Performance assessment and feedback			34	30	88.2
Leadership training			27	20	74.1
Management training			26	19	73.1
Other			11	7	63.6
Gender mentoring	13.79	1.72			
Informal networking activities for women (e.g. with male peers at golfing outings)			5	8	160.0
Formal mentoring programs (e.g. chairpersons volunteering to mentor senior high women)			2	1	50.0
Opportunity to be mentored by men			5	3	60.0
Targeted recruiting for nonmanagerial positions			7	3	42.9
Diversity efforts that are given exposure both inside and outside the agency (e.g. newsletters)			18	10	55.6
Other			5	15	300.0
Dependent care services	50.00	14.20			
Childcare services			5	0	0.0
Dependent care services other than childcare			4	0	0.0
Paid leave to take care of a dependent			30	10	33.3
Reimbursement for dependent care services			9	3	33.3
Flexible work	78.50	14.30			
Telecommuting			20	10	50.0
The option to work part time			20	4	20.0
Flexible work hours			36	18	50.0
Job sharing			11	4	36.4

Discussion

Legislation was enacted to help women overcome impediments and facilitate their career progression into executive-level positions. These legislative actions have indeed fostered the implementation of many organizational policies aimed at promoting women past the pervasive glass ceiling. Arguably, it was suggested that despite the enactment of these policies, women continue to be underrepresented in upper-level executive positions. Previous studies of organizational barriers, policies, and practices related to gender inequality and the glass ceiling examined:

- middle managers' perceptions of organizational policies and practices in the private sector;
- the passive and active representation of women in state agencies;
- the type of agencies at which women make it to the top; and
- the extent to which women are represented in the top-level administrative and professional positions in state bureaucracies.

Our study went beyond previous research and built upon the GOS model by examining utilization in two ways: by surveying women who have actually attained an executive position in the public sector, and by determining not only the impact of policies and practices on breaking the glass ceiling but also the degree to which utilization of those practices impacts women's ability to attain upper-level positions. In this research, we identified several barriers to career progression with particular focus on the utilization of organizational practices. To control barriers to women's career progression, organizational policies and practices are increasingly being fashioned and implemented; this study questioned the impact of the utilization of those practices.

As previous research has determined, valuing gender diversity is an integral indicator of the representation of women in upper-level management in both the public and private sectors (Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000; Brudney *et al.*, 2000; Soni, 2000). Although family-friendly policies had been formalized in more than 50 percent of the state agencies investigated, the results of the utilization model were not statistically significant. The results of the regression model support the literature, including Tower and Alkadry (2008) in explaining the low utilization of family-friendly policies despite the existence of formal policies in a high percentage of workplaces. In accounting for low utilizations, it is possible that employees may be reluctant to participate in such programs if they believe that participation will threaten their career path (Connor *et al.*, 1997; Catalyst, 1998; Gerson, 1993; Powell, 1997; Veiga *et al.*, 2004). Likewise, our

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE_B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Dependent variable: career progression independent variables</i>					
Constant	4.991	1.764		2.830	0.006
Family-friendly utilization	− 0.005	1.066	− 0.005	− 0.037	0.971
Diversity utilization	− 0.243	0.892	− 0.243	1.880	0.065*
Promotion utilization	0.167	0.524	0.167	1.223	0.226

Notes: **p* = 0.065; *n* = 61; model 1: career progression = *a* + *B*₁(family – friendly utilization) + *B*₂(diversity utilization) + *B*₃(promotion utilization)

Table VI.
Regression model

findings can may also suggest, as maintained by Gross and McMullen (1993) and Lee (1997), that employees fear that utilizing family-friendly programs may result in a negative assessment of their abilities by others or that instead of being seen as demonstrating commitment to the organization as Fletcher and Bailyn (1996) maintain, they will be stigmatized as prioritizing family responsibilities.

Contrary to expectations, however, the statistical data did not support the contention that women who utilized family-friendly and promotion practices would reach executive level positions in less time. As discussed by Konnard and Linnehan (1999), these results might be explained by the ongoing perception at that organizational level that view such policies as only women's issues, rather than a matter for society at large. At the organizational level, values, policies and practices related to gender equity need to be institutionalized into the culture as a first step in women's advancement. This finding underscores the importance of developing a national gender policy in order to refocus the benefits and purpose of gender-based policies from only women – to society in general. A gender policy discourse on the national level, instead of on a state per state or organizational level, may facilitate such a broader societal transformation.

Our findings highlight the necessity of looking beyond practices and policies and focusing on organizational culture and society in order to increase the utilization of certain practices deemed crucial to closing the gender gap. As argued by Guy (2003), the glass ceiling persists due to societal barriers. Women's career progression will not be achieved in isolation of these barriers. Of critical consequence is the future of a sustainable, diverse, competent workforce that is necessary to be competitive in a global market.

Theoretical and practical implications

The implications of our research are both theoretical and practical. More research on the utilization of gender practices is needed. Are practices being utilized? Is so, why? If not, why not? Although policies – and the implementation of policies – are important to stimulating organizational and behavioral change, we have shown that it is not sufficient simply to have a formal or informal policy, or even a formalized program, in an agency. The influence of both internal organizational factors and external societal factors on the impediments to utilization needs to be examined theoretically.

Practitioners need to think of the gender gap not simply as a policy issue but as an organizational culture issue. Our study shows that policy and programs cannot be effectively implemented without considering cultural and societal barriers that influence successful utilization. Employees should be encouraged, if not required, to utilize programs.

Limitations and future research

Results of this first step toward determining the impact of the utilization of organizational practices on women's career progression is not without limitations. First is the small sample of executive-level women in state public sector agencies. Given the use of a purposive sampling design and the exploratory nature of the research, the main objective is to learn more about the problem, rather than infer back to the population. While it is common in social science literature to use a 5 percent significance level, given the exploratory nature of the study and the purposive sampling method, using a 6 percent significance level, while compromising generalizability back

to the population from which the respondents were drawn, does not compromise the importance of the research. Further, our significance test may also overstate the accuracy of results, given that it only considers random error and cannot consider biases resulting from non-random errors.

Further, the low response rate may be attributed to the use of the *CSG Directory*, which limited contact information to selected administrative agencies, and an online survey instrument. A mixed-method approach using traditional paper surveys or structured telephone interviews would reach a larger number of women; it would also be a valuable contribution to future research. In addition, interviews would aid in better understanding why women utilize – or do not utilize – certain policies, and what specifically needs to be done to address the career progression of women to executive-level positions.

Future research should extend across gender and sector. The career progression of women to executive status in the workplace is a societal issue, and the implementation of policies and the creation of programs have implications for all members of our society. If the importance of career progression to executive-level positions is understood and defined as a societal issue that impacts men as well as women, we are hopeful that barriers that impede women's opportunities and perpetuate the under-utilization of practices, as discussed in this study, will render the "gender gap" extinct.

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