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Leadership best practices for female executives in the Leadership best practices for female executives in the information technology industry

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ABSTRACT

Commitment to gender diversity in the workplace is based on the social responsibility of business leaders. Many industries have achieved gender diversity, while others industries still struggle. Specifically, the information technology (IT) industry has struggled to create a culture of inclusion for women. This study explored the experiences and perceptions of female executives in the IT industry. Specifically, this study focused on identifying the challenges female executives in the IT industry faced and determining the leadership best practices and strategies and measures these female executives implemented to advance to executive-level positions. Additionally, given their experiences, this study sought to record their recommendations for aspiring female executives in the IT industry. Therefore, a qualitative research methodology was aligned to the purpose of examining the meaning assigned to this experience and identifies leadership best practices. The qualitative method depended upon semi-structured interviews conducted on a one-on one basis with the survey participants. In using a one-on-one interview format, an in depth understanding and insight was gathered regarding the leadership best practices of female executives. The significant findings of the study indicated that there was similarity in regard to methods female executives in the IT industry employed to advance to executive-level positions in the IT industry. The most significant elements were taking initiative, staying knowledgeable, perseverance, mentorship and sponsorship, career strategy, expanding one's network, and collaboration. With regard to challenges, the most frequently stated were gender biases, stereotypes, and the glass ceiling. Although the female executives' xv in the IT industry had different measurements of success, they shared the belief that impact and influence, balance, supporting family, recognition, and rewards were important elements for measuring career success.

Introduction:

Female leaders are still the minority in corporate America (Egan, 2015). In the 20th century, women have achieved some equality in the workplace and in management. There was also a decline related to women in technology in management. Data shows that the percentage of women working as computer and information systems managers was 32.3% in 2005, 29.9% in 2010, and 28.6% in 2013 (Catalyst, 2015a). Data from the National Center for Women and Information Technology (as cited in Cody, 2016) showed, 56% of women in technology leave their jobs after working in the industry for 10 to 20 years. In addition, the Center for Talent for Innovation (as cited in Cody, 2016), found that 32% of U.S. women in STEM careers indicated that they plan on leaving the industry within a year (Cody, 2016). However, one trend is that the number of women interested in advancing in the IT industry has increased (Catalyst, 2015a). A massive shift is happening for women in the technology industry. For example, there is an increase of women leaders in the IT industry (King, 2015). This shift in the technology industry will open the door for aspiring female-executives in the IT industry. In spite of the lack of women on corporate boards and among corporate executives and despite the challenges and barriers women encounter in the IT industry, some women still manage to make it up the corporate ladder and become successful business leaders. There are several benefits of having more women in executive-level positions in the IT industry. First, such pioneers will become the change agents for closing the leadership gender gap in the industry. Women in executive-level positions have the ability to identify needed change, create a vision and execute the change, and inspire other members of the company to follow. This study provides

women with a roadmap to help them navigate successfully to executive-level positions in the IT industry. This roadmap will help women overcome the barriers and obstacles that prevent them from ascending up the corporate ladder, especially in a male-dominated industry. In addition, this study will provide leadership best practices and strategies for female executives and aspiring female executive, 9 helping them to advance in the IT industry. Furthermore, this study offers recommendations for IT companies to help close the gender gap in executive-level positions.

Statement of the Problem:

The problem is that women are marginalized in executive-level positions in the IT industry. According to the study, women are mostly promoted through staff roles, and fewer executive-level positions that directly affect the company's finances or core operations. In addition, the research found that the factors that influence the number of female executives in IT include implicit gender biases and the culture within the industry (Gellman & Wells, 2016). There are several suggested solutions to help increase gender diversity in the IT industry. The first suggestion is to improve retention within IT companies. Retention issues stem from what are commonly known as leaky pipelines, which refer to factors like gender discrimination that make women leave the IT industry. The industry needs to take the necessary steps to create a culture in the workplace where more women can thrive at all levels of the organization. The macho tech culture, isolation, work-life issues, and lack of sponsors are some reasons why most mid-career women leave the IT industry. The industry should create a space and culture where everyone can succeed and thrive.

Review of Literature:

Research on strategic leadership is comparable to, however profoundly distinct from, positions of less status and less authority in an organization. Indeed, research on strategic leadership has revealed that leadership at the highest levels varies in five fundamental ways. Specifically, senior level leaders: 1. Establish strategy for the organization. 2. Construct organizational structures and policies. 3. Serve a symbolic role, particularly in large organizations where they serve the public. 4. Indirectly affect lower level management through hiring practices and promotions, etc. 5. Participate in more diverse activities (Hiller & Beauchesne, 2014). An analysis of strategic leadership theory indicates that transformational leadership is a fundamental feature, indicating that this form of leadership is the most frequently studied theory—possibly because of the emergence of transformational leadership as a public leadership theory, focusing on executives from the political realm (Burns, 1978). However, transactional, trait, situational, charismatic, and leader- 41 member exchange theories also exist in strategic leadership (Meuser et al., 2016). This scope suggests that rather than a distinct executive leadership theory with its own dimensions and scales, this stream of research relies heavily on other leadership areas and alters those ideologies to the unique features of leadership at the executive level. Strategic leadership focuses on information processing and decision-making, cognitions, and contextual theories, but excludes teamwork. Hence, research into leadership at the strategic level is centered on interacting more with organizational components, leaders responding, and adapting as shown by the strong connection to team leadership, rather than individual followers. Strategic leadership theory reflects the top leaders' role in important decision-making on behalf of the organization (e.g., corporate strategic planning). Situational leadership and leadership flexibility are secondary theories for strategic leadership, suggesting that researchers are interested in how senior-level leaders change to address situational contingencies and organizational stakeholder expectations. Interpersonal, rather than intrapersonal, practices appear to hold a prominent role for understanding strategic leadership. Researchers appear to be more concerned with how strategic leaders (Meuser et al., 2016): ● Behave, implement influence, and reward and punish; ● Allocate and/or share leadership activities/responsibilities; and ● Consider organizational and environmental challenges. These leadership phenomena are linked by multilevel processes, as leaders influence, and are influenced by, a changing social-relational environment to create innovation and change within multifaceted organizational systems (Meuser et al., 2016).

Gender Diversity in Information Technology

There is an increase in diversity in nearly all sectors of the economy, the underrepresentation of women in technology companies is still problematic. Diversity in the IT industry still a major issue; this assertion is supported by disturbing statistics, which indicate that women represent only 30% of the workforce in the technology field. Moreover, women represent only 9% of management positions and represent only 14% of C-Suite positions in global technology companies. As emphasized in the Anita Borg Institute report (as cited in Worthen, 2009), the effects of this situation that tech companies are at risk of losing underrepresented talent. Lack of diversity at the top levels hinders talent recruitment and retention. Also, tech companies are in danger of losing the benefits of diverse gender perspectives in decision-making and problem-solving. Furthermore, the problem is with biased hiring, promotion, training opportunities, evaluation practices, and salary levels. For instance, women with qualifications that are equal to or higher than those of men tend to be paid lower salaries than their male.

Research Design

This qualitative study's unit of analysis was a female executive that work in the IT industry. The participants were purposefully selected for the proposed study. The research study attempted to identify leadership best practices of female executives in technology industry.

Sample size:

In qualitative research, the goal is to choose respondents that are likely to produce rich and deep levels of understanding. For the purpose of this study, female executives were defined as female executives who currently hold senior level positions (director or above) within their organization in the IT industry. From this population, a sample of 15 female executives in the IT industry was invited to participate in the study. In addition, a sampling strategy was used to select participants based on probability sampling. Qualitative research defines a sample as a representative of the desired population being studied. Probability sampling includes various sampling methods.

Data Collection

Data collection procedures included establishing boundaries for the research study, collecting data through interviews, and creating the steps for recording the data. Data collection involves selecting participants, the number of participants, and the types of data to be collected. This qualitative research design approach allowed for data collection involving unstructured and generally open-ended questions intentionally used to obtain opinions and perspective from the participants (Creswell, 2013). Interviewing is a research tool used to collect data through verbal communication. Interviews can be adjusted to diverse situations, allow in-depth explanation and permit further investigation. Interviews were conducted with 15 women in executive level positions in the IT industry.

Conclusion:

The advancement of women in the IT industry has been a challenge. Overcoming this challenge will result in a successful model for leadership best practices and strategies that will help aspiring female executives in the IT industry. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop an understanding of leadership best practices employed by female executives in the IT industry. In pursuit of achieving this understanding, the following research questions were asked: 1. What leadership best practices and strategies do female executives use in the IT industry? 2. What challenges do female executives face in the IT industry? 3. How do female executives measure their success in the IT industry? 4. What recommendations would female executives make to aspiring female executives in the IT industry? These four research questions were answered by asking 17 participants nine interview questions with the aim of learning what tools female executive leaders utilize to advance in the IT industry. In addition, the participants' perceptions of the IT industry were sought. Research participants identified leadership best practices and strategies, then frequent themes were identified in the data. These themes were then explained and discussed in detail thoroughly in this chapter. This

study took a comprehensive look at the leadership best practices of female executives in the IT industry to identify strategies to help guide aspiring female executives in the IT industry.

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