How Do Formal Women's Networks Affect Members' Career Advancement and

the Success of their Sponsoring Organization?

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Abstract

Women continue to be underrepresented in senior corporate leadership roles in the United States. For meaningful change to occur, women and leaders in their organizations must work together to confront the issues underlying women's lack of career progress and develop strategies to facilitate women's advancement. This study engaged organizational leaders, women's network leaders, and women's network members in an exploration of the merits of one career development strategy frequently employed by large organizations: the formation of company-sponsored women's networks. This study was grounded in feminist case methodology and the prevailing literature on women's networks in organizations and women's career development and advancement. The guiding question in this study was, "How does involvement in a formal women's network affect members' career advancement and the success of their sponsoring organization?" Study results confirm that participating in a women's network can positively impact women's career success, but advancement as a result of involvement may be limited. Network leaders and members were more likely than organizational leaders to believe the network could directly affect members' advancement. Several strategies to increase the likelihood of advancement through a women's network are discussed. The network's efforts to support women's career success were identified by the participants as primary means of organizational success. The conclusions and recommendations presented are directed toward professional women and organizational leaders who are interested in learning about the role and value of women's networks in organizations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Attracting, motivating, developing, advancing, and retaining talented employees are important areas of research and practice in the field of human resource development (HRD) (Joo & Mclean, 2006). Yet women's continued lack of representation in senior leadership suggests that organizations have an opportunity to do more to develop and advance women. According to Catalyst (2013), a leading research firm working globally to expand opportunities for women in business, women now make up 51.5% of all management, professional, and related occupations in the United States. However, they are still largely concentrated in lower-level positions. In 2013, women held only 15 of the Fortune 500 CEO spots, 14.3% of officer positions, and 16.6% of board seats (Catalyst, 2013). Organizations can initiate many strategies to address the lack of women in leadership roles and sustain a competitive advantage while doing so. The focus of the research is to understand the strategic importance of one career development strategy some organizations have initiated: company-sponsored women's networks.

The study will explore how company-sponsored women's networks may facilitate women's career advancement and the success of their sponsoring organizations. Chapter 1 provides the purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions that will drive the study, a definition of terms, and the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 provides a thorough review of the pertinent literature. Chapter 3 describes the methods and design of the study. Chapter 4 reports the data resulting from the interviews with organizational leaders, network leaders, and network members. Chapter 5 summarizes the survey findings. Chapter 6 presents the study conclusions and discusses the implications of those findings for professional women and organizational leaders who are interested in learning about the role and value of women's networks in organizations.

Advancing Women to Facilitate Organizational Success

The primary purpose of HRD is to foster individual and organizational learning and development to improve organizational performance (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Increasing the number of women in senior leadership roles can enhance organizational success for several reasons. Not only do women represent a significant portion of the talent pool, gender diversity in senior leadership has been found to positively influence organizational performance (Catalyst, 2004; Dreher, 2003). In addition, studies on gender and leadership suggest that women have unique value to contribute as leaders (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2009). Women also mirror the customers that many organizations are targeting and are responsible for making the vast majority of consumer purchasing decisions in the United States (Dychtwald, 2010). Finally, many women are committed to their role as career professionals (Hom & Griffeth, 2000). For example, Galinsky et al. (2009) studied young men and women under the age of 29 and found that there is no longer a difference in their desire for jobs with greater responsibility.

Extensive research confirms the strategic importance of increasing the number of women in corporate leadership. Catalyst (2004) surveyed 353 Fortune 500 companies from 1996 to 2000 to explore the relationship between gender diversity and financial performance and concluded that organizations with greater gender diversity at senior levels received higher measures of return on equity and total return to shareholders. As Ilene Lang, president and CEO of Catalyst explained, organizations must recognize how important women in senior leadership roles are to organizational success:

> You cannot be a successful global business leader without women in your leadership. Catalyst research shows that companies with more women in leadership, on average, outperform those with fewer women, and those with three or more women board directors do even better. It's time businesses take action and leverage the talent that

women bring to the workplace. It's good for women, good for men, and as our
research demonstrates, good for business. (Catalyst, 2009, para. 2)

Further research suggests that failing to recognize the importance of women as a
significant and valuable portion of the leadership talent pool can be detrimental. Dreher (2003)
argued that if women are unable to obtain senior management positions because of gender
discrimination, their motivation and organizational productivity are likely to be adversely
affected. Dreher (2003) also warned that diversity in top-level jobs is necessary to avoid "poor
and costly decisions" that may result from too much homogeneity in leadership perspectives (p.
542). Bierema (1996) concurred, "Organizations must recognize the cost of not investing in
individual development. Unfulfilled employees are less productive and often leave the
organization. The long-term cost of replacement is prohibitive to any employer" (p. 25).
Essentially, organizational efforts to recruit and retain talent are more difficult and more costly
when women are ignored as a critical component of the leadership pipeline.

Why Are There So Few Women in Senior Leadership Roles?

Understanding why there are so few women in corporate leadership roles and
determining what can be done to foster change is complex. Eagly and Carli (2007) explained the
situation by claiming, "It's not the glass ceiling, but the sum of many obstacles along the way" (p.
63). Findings from a 2011 McKinsey & Company survey of 2,500 professional men and women
and interviews with 30 chief diversity officers and experts indicated that a primary reason women
are not advancing into senior leadership is because of a corporate talent pipeline that is "leaky and
blocked" (Murray, 2011, para. 2). According to a McKinsey & Company leader, Vikram
Malhotra, "Qualified women enter the work force in sufficient numbers, but they begin to drop
off at the very first sorting of talent, when they're eligible for their very first management
positions. And it only gets worse after that" (Murray, 2011, para. 2). So what transpires during

this talent sorting process? Could it be that women are restricted by systemic barriers in

organizations that limit the accessibility of senior leadership positions? Or, is it also possible that

women's desire to advance to the highest levels may be shaped by perceptions that it is too

difficult to do so? These perceptions may be based upon women's observations that very few

women occupy executive roles as well as the extent to which these women are available to serve

as role models. This research will explore these issues and their relevance to women and leaders

in organizations (including HRD professionals).

Exploring the Potential of Women's Networks as a Strategy to Advance Women

In her synthesis of women's career development, Bierema (1998) argued that women's

career development is unique and multiple factors contribute to women's lack of career progress.

As a result, there is no "one size fits all" solution to address women's career needs (Bierema,

1998). For meaningful change to occur, women and organizational leaders must direct their

efforts toward uncovering the many issues underlying women's lack of career progress and

develop strategies to address them. The proposed study will contribute to this effort by exploring

the value of one potential solution: company-sponsored women's networks as a strategy to

advance women.

Company-sponsored women's networks are established within organizations to support

women's career development needs (Bierema, 2005; Catalyst, 1999a; Donnelon & Langowitz,

2009; Hersby, Ryan, & Jetten, 2009; Singh, Vinnicombe, & Kumra, 2006). To begin to evaluate

their effectiveness, it is helpful to provide a definition of company-sponsored women's networks,

describe their formation and structure, identify how women's networks may influence women's

career goals and opportunities, and explore perceptions about their value.

At a basic level, company-sponsored women's networks are structured groups within

organizations that are recognized and provided with resources by their organizations to address

women's career development needs. Bierema (2005) described women's networks as company-sponsored and structured groups concerned with women's advancement. Women's in-company networks typically help women build skills and create knowledge to succeed in organization culture. They are sponsored by the employer organization and function to advise senior management, hold networking events, and create mentoring programs (Bierema, 2005, p. 208).

Women's networks may develop through the grassroots efforts of employees (usually women) or as part of broader-based talent-management strategies in organizations. Catalyst (1999a) surveyed 132 large organizations and found that 34% had women's workplace networks. The majority of companies with women's networks indicated that either senior or mid-level women managers initiated them; only 8% of the companies specified that senior-level management was solely responsible for establishing a women's network (Catalyst, 1999a). Nevertheless, research on women's networks suggests that organizational support from senior management is essential (Catalyst, 1999a; Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Hersby et al., 2009).

The process of establishing a women's network can involve several steps. Singh et al. (2006) conducted a study of company-sponsored women's networks in the European offices of 12 large multinational corporations that included in-depth interviews of the 12 women's network leaders and a survey of 164 network members across the organizations. The authors found that such networks develop in similar ways. They often begin by defining members' roles and responsibilities, establishing voting procedures, formulating vision and mission statements, and establishing broad goals. In the more unusual cases where networks are initiated through grassroots efforts, network leaders may need to solicit sponsorship from organizational leaders, such as human resource professionals and senior management (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009). Sponsorship from an organization can involve providing formal recognition and financial support for the network (Bierema, 2005; Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Singh et al., 2006). While

organizations may provide sponsorship, networks often have to continue to be proactive in obtaining funds from HR and the company's business units to support activities (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009). It is essential to recognize that network leaders and committee members invest significant amounts of time beyond their daily job responsibilities to fulfill their network roles (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Hersby et al., 2009; Singh et al., 2006).

Women's networks may attempt to influence women's career success in a variety of ways. Common objectives include providing networking opportunities (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Singh et al., 2006), addressing gender discrimination and entrenched beliefs (Bierema, 2005), facilitating access to mentors and role models (Hersby et al., 2009; Singh et al., 2006), connecting women with opportunities to gain professional experience (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Singh et al., 2006), and using collective influence to shape organizational policies and practices (Hersby et al., 2009; Singh et al., 2006). Donnelon and Langowitz concluded that the greatest advantages for both women and their organizations occur when women's networks focus on utilizing the talents of women and cultivating business opportunities for the organization.

The effectiveness of women's networks as a strategy to increase the number of women in leadership roles is still in question. Advancement of women is often identified as an objective of many women's networks (Bierema, 2005; Catalyst, 1999a; Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Hersby et al., 2009; Hite & McDonald, 1999; Singh et al., 2006); however, some research challenges the extent to which career advancement is a realistic outcome of participating in women's networks (Bierema, 2005; Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1993; Perriton, 2006; Wang, 2009). Perriton (2006) questioned the value of networking connections made through women's networks, arguing that women's networks may lack substance and be just "the latest 'must have' accessory in the campaign to get women past the glass ceiling and into more leadership roles" (p. 101). Donnelon and Langowitz (2009) ascertained that a level of divisiveness exists regarding perceptions of

women's networks. The authors stated, "Women's networks in corporations have existed for more than 25 years, a period when they have sometimes been accepted, tolerated, dismissed, and embraced" (p. 29).

Statement of the Problem

Women's lack of representation in senior corporate leadership roles suggests that organizations have an opportunity to do more to develop and advance women. For meaningful change to occur, women and organizational leaders must work together to confront the issues underlying women's lack of career progress, develop strategies to address the individual and systemic barriers that women face, and assess the effectiveness of current efforts to propel women forward. Establishing a formal women's network is one strategy women and organizations employ to facilitate women's career advancement. Though such networks are prevalent in large organizations, few studies on women's networks exist, and it is still unclear how these networks affect women's career advancement and the success of their sponsoring organization.

Purpose of the Study

This study is designed to explore the beliefs of women's network members and organizational leaders to determine to what extent and in what ways company-sponsored women's networks affect women's career advancement and organizational success. This was accomplished by conducting a case study that incorporated the perspectives of women's network members, women's network leaders, and organizational leaders (e.g., human resource managers and senior leaders familiar with the women's network within their organization). This case study drew comparisons within and across various constituencies within the organization to expand upon existing research on women's networks. Findings will be of interest to members of

women's networks and organizational leaders as they assess the value of investing time and resources into a women's network.

Research Questions

The primary research question in this study is: How do formal women's networks affect members' career advancement and the success of their sponsoring organizations?

The secondary questions include the following:

1. From the perspective of women's network members, how do women's networks affect women's career advancement?

2. From the perspective of organizational leaders, how do women's networks affect women's career advancement?

3. From the perspective of women's network members, how do women's networks affect the success (strategic or otherwise) of their sponsoring organization?

4. From the perspective of organizational leaders, how do women's networks affect the success (strategic or otherwise) of their sponsoring organizations?

Need for the Study

Few studies on company-sponsored women's networks have been conducted, and of those, there is a lack of consensus regarding the value of women's networks. Very little research on women's networks has directly explored the extent to which company-sponsored women's networks affect women's career advancement. In addition, the voices of organizational leaders are not sufficiently represented in existing studies. By examining the perspectives of women's network members and organizational leaders, this study will lead to a richer understanding of the impact of women's networks and provide the opportunity to discover possible connections (or disconnections) among the participants' points of view. As a result, women and organizational leaders will be able to make more informed decisions about the role of a women's network and

the merit of investing time and resources in developing and sustaining one. This study can also inform women and organizational leaders as they consider how women's networks fit with other strategies intended to address women's career development needs.

Need for the Study and the Researcher's Position

Feminist researchers acknowledge the importance of the researcher's own education, experience, and identity because of how it influences the research process and outcomes (Daly, 2007; Ellingson, 1998; Harding, 1987; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). According to Ropers-Huilman and Winters:

> Feminist researchers' discussions of their positionalities might include descriptions of how and why research was approached, how research relationships that developed over time shaped the knowledge that was ultimately constructed, how researchers' life experiences both in and out of the field affected the ways in which research was interpreted, or how their own experiences led them to participate in specific knowledge production processes. (p. 682)

My interest and familiarity with company-sponsored women's networks as a career development and advancement strategy for women began in 2008. At that time, I was hired by a senior woman leader in a large financial services organization to create a formal women's network. I organized and led a collaborative effort within this organization to explore the need for a women's network, establish the network, and build a strong team of women leaders to develop its mission and goals. The network's kick-off event featured four highly successful executive women in the organization. Speaking to more than 150 attendees, these charismatic women leaders shared career journeys and personal strategies that led to their success. I was captivated by the energy and enthusiasm in that room. After the time I spent in this position, the organization boasted an active women's network with hundreds of passionate members. I remain connected to the leadership team and continue to receive updates about the network's growth and success.

Despite having personally experienced the positive impact a women's network can have on its members, my ongoing interactions with women's network members in many different organizations have left me questioning the extent to which women's networks affect women's career advancement. In particular, how might involvement in women's networks increase members' understandings of how to advance, desire to advance, or the likelihood that they will advance? I also am interested in how women's networks contribute to the success of their sponsoring organizations. In particular, what do members and organizational leaders believe are the connections between women's networks and the sponsoring organization's strategic direction?

This research was influenced by my passion for women's leadership development and my familiarity with formal women's networks in organizations. As an assistant professor of business administration, a doctoral student in HRD, and a faculty member at a university with a core mission of educating women to lead and influence, I am an advocate for women to realize their full potential as leaders. I also believe organizations benefit by leveraging the talents of female employees.

Definitions

1. Formally/Company-sponsored Women's Networks. At the most basic level, company-sponsored women's networks are structured groups within organizations that are recognized and provided with resources by their organizations to support the career success of women in the organization. Formal sponsorship frequently includes a minimal budget to hold events and designated support from senior leaders, one of which may be referred to as an "executive sponsor." The national executive sponsor in the current case was a direct report to the CEO in this Fortune 500 organization.

2. Women's Network Members/Leaders/Committee Members. Women's network members in this study included individuals who identified themselves as members of the Avero Women's Network (AWN). Women's network leaders and committee members in this study are those who identified themselves as having a designated role in the network. Network leaders serve in higher-level roles such as serving as a network chair, chapter chair, or committee chair. Committee members are those who serve in a leadership role below a network leader. Network leaders and committee members were elected to serve in these roles through a process of nomination and member voting system.

3. Organizational leaders (also referred to as executives). Five Avero executives participated in this study. Three of the leaders were employed in the human resources (HR) division. Their job levels ranged from director to executive vice president. A senior vice president in one of the company's functional divisions and an executive vice president of one of largest business sectors in the organization. Fifteen percent of those who participated in the survey described themselves as executives (defined as director level or above on the survey question).

4. Career Advancement. The concept of career advancement is most often described in relation to objective measures such as salary and promotion (Allen et al., 2004; Dreher & Ash, 1990). Women's career aspirations and the types of roles they seek to advance into are also important for understanding career advancement because these factors may influence women's career paths and access to senior roles. Participants shared their own perceptions of what it means to advance. In some cases, advancement was interpreted as a direct promotion, and in others it was an

assessment of personal or professional growth. Reports of advancement on the

survey were based on participants' perceptions of their advancement.

5. Sponsorship. The concept of sponsorship is discussed in this study in three ways.

First, the company's sponsorship of the women's network refers to the company's

formal recognition of the network as part of the organization. Second, networks are

often structured to include executive sponsors; these are executives in the

organization who have agreed to serve as overall champions of the network.

Executive sponsors may provide resources and display their support for the

network within the organization. Finally, the concept of sponsorship is explored to

describe a specific type of mentoring relationship between individuals. Sponsorship

involves a set of behaviors that executives enact when they are willing to advocate

for an individual's career advancement. The concept of sponsorship involves going a

step further than a mentor's role of providing general career advice. Sponsors go out

of their way to advocate for the individual; for example, they may recommend a

woman for key a promotion or highlight a woman's achievements to those who are in

positions of power and influence (Foust-Cummings, Dinolfo, & Kohler, 2011). One

of the key questions asked of participants on the survey is whether or not they had

developed a relationship with one or more colleagues at a higher level in one's

organization who were willing to go out of their way to facilitate their career

advancement. This is referred to in the research findings chapter of the study as "the

sponsorship question." The terms sponsor and advocate are used interchangeably in

this study.

6. Strategic Importance. This study explores the idea of a network's strategic

importance within an organization. According to Donnelon and Langowitz (2009),

operating at a strategic level is based on a network's business leverage and includes

tying the network to an underlying business rationale. For example, women's

networks that incorporate strategic projects (similar to action learning projects

defined below) may help their organizations "think differently about product and

service development, providing innovative input that can influence the company's

offerings and increase revenues" (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009, p. 34.). Participants

in this study viewed the concept of strategic importance to include a broader range of

activities, and there was little focus on leveraging the network to influence the

company's product or service offerings as described by Donnelon and Langowitz

(2009).

7. Action Learning Projects. Two divisions in this organization formed teams to

   participate in business-related projects that they described as "action learning

   projects." The teams of eight included five women and three men who were given a

   specific business-sector project to work on. The projects provided team members

   with an opportunity to address a pertinent business issue and be evaluated by senior

   leaders in the division. The program was designed to help a diverse group of team

   members gain visibility, develop expertise, and become better positioned to advance.

   These types of projects are consistent with Donnelon and Langowitz's (2009)

   description of business development projects. Incorporating business development

   projects was considered by the authors as a way to leverage women's networks

   strategically.

8. Organizational Success. Organizational success from an HRD perspective is most

   often described in relation to measures of organizational performance and

   profitability (Gilley & Gilley, 2003; Swanson & Holton, 2001). An effort was made

in this study to encourage participants to consider the extent to which women's

networks engage in activities that enhance organizational performance, particularly

strategies that are aligned with the organization's overall strategic direction and

goals. Participants were encouraged to offer their own perceptions of organizational

success. Previous studies on women's networks suggested that several women's

network initiatives may impact organizational success including efforts to recruit,

retain, and advance women; expand business opportunities through their involvement

in strategic projects; increase community visibility/organizational citizenship; and

influence organizational policies/practices to support women's career needs.

Theoretical Framework: Feminist Career Development

The feminist career development framework incorporates career development in HRD,

women's career development, and feminist theory. It highlights the importance of understanding

women's career goals and their workplace experiences. Feminist theory is interwoven to

emphasize the value of seeking multiple perspectives and to foster change. Closely tied to this

framework are the unique characteristics associated with feminist research methods (described in

the methodology section of this study).

Career Development in HRD

Career development is recognized as a primary area of practice within HRD (Swanson &

Holton, 2001). Its purpose is to serve the developmental needs of employees to enhance

organizational performance (Swanson & Holton, 2001). According to Wooten and Cobb (1999),

"Contemporary career development involves a wide array of human resource development

programs, including but by no means limited to selection, placement, orientation, training,

transfers, rotation, mentoring, and even organizational exit" (p. 173). Gilley and Gilley (2003)

described career development as "identifying an employee's interests, values, competencies,

activities, and assignments needed to develop skills for future jobs" (p. 103). The types of initiatives that are associated with career development happen at both the organizational and individual levels (Swanson & Holton, 2001).

Investing in career development initiatives can contribute to organizational success in various ways. Benko and Weisberg (2007) reported on two pilot studies of 420 employees at Deloitte & Touche who participated in a new talent management strategy designed to customize their career development. Specifically, they indicated that designing and implementing effective talent management strategies can lead to reductions in turnover and increased employee satisfaction, commitment, and productivity. Further research suggests that organizations mastering career development and the succession planning of diverse employees will have a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining talent (Greer & Virick, 2008; Kochan et al., 2003).

As Kelly and Moen (2007) explained, "HRD professionals are well-positioned to play a role in creating, communicating, and implementing strategies related to the career development needs of employees" (p. 14). Some of the basic assumptions about HRD's role in career development include (a) HRD is an integral part of the career development process, (b) the return on the investment of career development efforts must be considered, (c) career development should not be restricted to a select few, (d) career development involves both formal and informal learning opportunities, and (e) individual life and work priorities change over time, and career development approaches must change as well (Hite & McDonald, 2008).

Women's career development. Theories on women's career development began to emerge in the 1970s in an attempt to explain how women's career development differs from men's. These theories explored individual and social factors influencing women's careers, such as the appropriateness of jobs for women, the opportunities available to women, and the influence

of marriage, pregnancy, children, and age (Gutek & Larwood, 1987). Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise proposed that career aspirations are influenced by gender, and develop from beliefs about career compatibility and career accessibility (Gottfredson, 1996). She argued that "vocational aspirations are a function of people's assessments of what is accessible as well as of what is compatible" (p. 197).

Ample research suggests that gender and socialization continue to influence women's perceptions of career compatibility and career goals (Barsh & Yee, 2011; Bierema, 1998; Eccles, 1986; Gottfredson, 1996; Sturges, 1999; Turner, Conkel, Starkey, & Landgraf, 2010). Eccles argued that in addition to organizational barriers that account for women's lack of career advancement, "Psychological factors also contribute to women's underrepresentation in certain high-level and scientific careers" (p. 15). Research continues to suggest that many women are highly dedicated to their careers, yet advancing to top management may not always be a primary career goal. Barsh and Yee reported from the 2011 McKinsey & Company study that only 31% of female middle managers said they have always aspired to be in top management and only 22% believe that being in top management is worth the cost.

Many factors have been found to influence women's career goals and the desire to advance, including the extent to which a career is perceived to be appropriate for women (Eccles, 1986; Gottfredson, 1996; Turner et al., 2010); the importance of women's social identity (Lalande, Crozier, & Davey, 2000; Osipow, 1983; Super, 1980); women's perceptions of themselves as leaders (Barsh & Yee, 2011; Hall, 2004; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007); and women's views on the meaning of career success (Ferris, 2004; Lalande et al., 2000; Sturges, 1999).

Organizational barriers that make career advancement inaccessible must also be considered to understand women's lack of representation in senior leadership. These barriers include gender discrimination and entrenched beliefs about women's leadership capabilities

(Bierema, 1998, 2003; Bierema & Cseh, 2003; Heilman, 2001); limited access to social networks (Brass, 1985; Burt, 1998; Ibarra, 1992, 1993, 1997; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; McGuire, 2002; Wang, 2009); limited access to role models and mentors (Catalyst, 2002; Davidson, 2002); a lack of policies and practices to support women's career needs (Dreher, 2003; Gutek & Larwood, 1987; Shapiro, Ingols, & Blake-Beard, 2008; Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994); and a lack of particular kinds of professional experience (Barsh & Yee, 2011; Bierema, 2003; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007). Women may also simultaneously confront multiple barriers. In a survey of its global female workforce, IBM discovered that numerous systemic barriers to career advancement were evident across geographies. According to this research, "Survey results consistently identified three top issues: male-dominated culture, lack of mentoring/networking, and difficulty managing work/life" (Ferris, 2004, p. 37).

Feminist Theory and the Experiences of Women in the Workplace

The primary aim of feminist research is to seek knowledge about women's experiences and to increase women's understanding of themselves and the societies that they live in (Bierema & Cseh, 2003; Daly, 2007; DeVault, 1996; Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). DeVault described feminism in this way:

> Feminism is a movement, and a set of beliefs, that problematize gender and inequality. Feminists believe that women have been subordinated through men's greater power, variously expressed in different arenas. They value women's lives and concerns and want to improve women's status. (p. 31)

Critical HRD researchers Bierema and Cseh (2003) thus described a feminist lens: "Quite simply, it means to look at the world from the perspective of honoring the common experiences and histories of women in society. It does not mean excluding or devaluing men" (p. 8). Feminist research is unique, both theoretically and methodologically, because of its approach to understanding the construct of gender and its objective of cultivating meaningful change in the

lives of women and the systems that they inhabit (Harding, 1987). Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2011) explained that feminist researchers are interested in exploring "the ways in which gender norms are maintained or disrupted by current institutional practices" (p. 8). Adopting a feminist approach to research involves embracing certain perspectives about the production of knowledge. For example, Harding (1987) asserted, "traditional epistemologies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility that women could be 'knowers' or agents of knowledge" (p. 3). Feminist researchers are interested in seeking answers to questions that may lead to increased gender consciousness and understanding. For example, Bierema (2003) found that women deal with marginalization in surprising ways. "Although one might assume that working in a patriarchal system would galvanize a woman's feminist perspective and desire to change organizational culture, often the opposite is true" (p. 3). Reinharz (1992) contended, "Feminist researchers deal with dilemmas that have no absolute solutions" (p. 4).

Feminist theory and critical HRD are aligned in recognizing the importance of engaging in research that highlights the experiences of women in the workplace. Feminist researchers conducting critical HRD research are particularly interested in why so few women occupy positions of power and influence in the organizations. Oakley (2000) argued that more research is necessary to understand "who has the power and how it is utilized to either change or maintain the status quo, but also what forces exist that prevent women from fully expressing themselves and their values" (p. 322). Critical research in HRD diverges from traditional career development models by placing an increased emphasis on the importance of managing a diverse workforce and addressing workplace inequalities (Bierema & Cseh, 2003). Bierema (1998) maintained that addressing the lack of representation of women in senior roles requires challenging the status quo and engaging organizational leaders in conversations about organizational policies and practices. Oakley (2000) emphasized the need to develop a meaningful understanding of systemic gender

inequalities. For example, Yong-Lyun and Brunner (2009) investigated gender differences in the career mobility and career paths of educational administrators and found that "many women face discrimination during selection and hiring processes" (p. 103). The authors determined that women's career paths were less vertical and a notable gap existed between women aspiring to senior roles versus those who actually obtained them. Hierarchical and inclusion boundaries as part of the "glass ceiling" were identified as contributing factors (Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009).

Engaging in feminist research requires considering the interests of all involved parties. For example, research suggests that there may be an inherent conflict between focusing on the individual vs. organizational level. As Bierema (1996) explained, focusing too much on the organizational level can be problematic: "The systems perspective poses yet another challenge for HRD: obsession with the system may distract organizations from focusing on the fundamental aspect of organizational learning and development—the individual" (p. 23). Critical HRD researchers challenge HRD's tendency to focus too much on performance, arguing that the needs of individuals, particularly those of underrepresented groups, may be disregarded (Bierema & Cseh, 2003). Bierema (1996) pointed out that "true change evolves only from creating new structures that are more supportive of the desired outcome" (p. 26). Feminist researchers also acknowledge that the perspectives of all women cannot be captured through one voice. Ropers-Huilman (2008) maintained that feminist theory has evolved over the past thirty years, resulting in a heightened awareness that, "any movement seeking to identify its participants merely 'as women' is shortsighted" (p. 35). Harding (1987) argued that there is no "woman" or "woman's experience" and women will have very few experiences that can be generalized because of significant differences, social class, race, and culture. Butler (1990) argued that the feminist "we" has its purpose; yet there is a great deal of underlying complexity that cannot be overlooked, and

when attempting to speak out on behalf of women, there is a risk in overlooking many of those the "we" aims to represent.

Critical feminist inquiry is initiated not only to seek understanding but also to address power relations and advocate for change (Daly, 2007; Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992). Bierema and Cseh (2003) contended that HRD should become more focused on advocating for change in organizations by addressing "issues related to women and other diverse (racial and ethnic) individuals, power relationships, social context, or social and political change" (p. 8). For example, Bierema and Cseh (2003) reviewed more than 600 HRD proceedings papers from 1996 to 2000 to identify the prevalence of research related to gender and race and concluded: "Few studies recognize gender and race/ethnicity as a category of analysis. Nearly absent from the literature are studies concerned with women/diverse people's experience; asymmetrical power arrangements; problems of racism and sexism; and advocacy of social justice and change" (p. 5). Critical HRD researchers challenge HRD's lack of focus on organizational diversity and inequality, and argue that HRD must play a role in creating new models to address inequalities and advocate for change.

This research considered the extent to which women's networks are effective in fostering change and creating desired outcomes for members and their organizations. One of the primary purposes of engaging in this research through a feminist lens was to emphasize the importance of intention and collaboration. Findings may be used as a basis for strategic planning and as a benchmark for setting and measuring future goals. My hope is that members and leaders will benefit from developing an increased understanding of one another's views.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The primary objective of the literature search was to identify publications that address the role of women's networks in organizations, and, more specifically, how women's networks may influence women's career trajectories and the impact that they may have on career advancement.

The search began by identifying key words, databases, and academic journals related to the field of human resource development with an emphasis on women's career development. Peer-reviewed journals in the fields of management and human resource development were given priority. Publications were categorized and reviewed based upon my own determination of relevance, as well as using the process of citation analysis. Citation analysis was used to identify authors and works that were most frequently cited in the subject area to ensure that the most applicable and compelling publications were identified (Hart, 1998).

The literature presented begins with a focus on how women's career goals and opportunities may influence women's career advancement, followed by an overview of the few studies on women's networks, and finally, an explanation of how relevant theory and existing research on women's networks provide a rationale for each of the proposed research questions. Several areas of research related to women's networks and women's career success were of interest in this study but beyond the scope of the literature review. Research on employee engagement will be especially important for future research based upon the findings from this study that women's networks are frequently valued for their potential to positively impact employee engagement. Research on employee satisfaction and retention should also be explored.

Women's Career Goals and Opportunities

This review explores several factors that influence women's career choices as well as the structural barriers that may limit their advancement potential. Insights gathered through exploring women's career goals and the opportunities available to them will lead to a greater understanding of the types of issues that women's networks should address.

Women's career preferences and social identity. According to Gottfredson (1996), career choice is "a developmental process beginning in childhood; occupational aspirations reflect people's efforts to implement their self-concepts; and satisfaction with career choice depends on how well that choice fits with self-concept" (p. 181). Gottfredson acknowledged that socialization influences one's behaviors and goals, and career choice is "an attempt to place oneself in the broader social order" (p. 181). Sex-type (the extent to which a career is considered masculine or feminine) is an important individual consideration in determining career compatibility and careers associated with the wrong sex-type are perceived as a threat to self-concept, whereas, same-sex occupations are associated with higher ratings of self-efficacy (Gottfredson, 1996). Individuals will compromise by letting go of their most preferred career choices in order to pursue those that are believed to be more accessible.

When confronted with a situation in which major compromises must be made, individuals are more likely to be willing to accept a position that is less consistent with their interests or desired level of prestige than a highly cross-sextyped job (Gottfredson, 1996). For example, men are more willing to accept a male sextyped job with lower prestige than a highly female sextyped job. Findings from several studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s are consistent with Gottfredson's theoretical propositions about the importance of sex-type in career selection, including Hannah and Kahn's (1989) study of 334 Canadian high school seniors and Lapan and Jingeleski's (1992) study of 112 eighth graders.

Gottfredson (1996) also pointed out that changes in cultural beliefs can expand girls'

career aspirations, and women consider a broader range of cross-gender choices than men do.

Still, recent studies also confirm that young people continue to be drawn to careers that are

perceived to be gender compatible (Ji et al., 2004; Turner et al., 2010). Ji et al. conducted

research on eighth graders to determine the extent to which they were drawn to certain careers

and the findings were consistent with Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise.

Ji et al. concluded that students "may overlook occupations that employ persons not of their own

sex based on how they perceive the support for, or specific barriers, that are inherent in entering

those occupations" (p. 152). Students considered factors such as "support for work and family

values, sex discrimination concerns, whether or not the duties on an occupation are perceived as

gender-appropriate" (p. 152).

Women's careers are also deeply connected to their relationships with others

(Gottfredson, 1996; Osipow, 1983; Super, 1980). Osipow was one of the first scholars to be

recognized for looking at women's career development comprehensively and identifying major

factors that make women's career development unique. He asserted that women's relationship to

work is intricately connected with other roles in their lives and career development models must

be developed to accurately capture women's career experiences. Osipow's contributions have

been viewed by others as central to understanding women's career development (Fitzgerald &

Harmon, 2001). Gottfredson contended that women's career aspirations are shaped by

comparisons with others in their lives, including friends, colleagues, and individuals who are a

part of their social networks. Several studies have been conducted in relation to this aspect of

Gottfredson's theory. For example, Lalande et al. (2000) conducted a qualitative study of female

university students to understand how relational identity may influence women's career

aspirations, and concluded, "There is support for the relational models of psychosocial

development" and "relationships were highly relevant to their decisions and suggests that relationships may be a central organizing factor in women's career development" (p. 200).

The extent to which women view themselves as effective leaders is likely to influence their career advancement goals. Leadership effectiveness can be shaped by a variety of factors such as background, education, cognitive factors, skills, and personality (Hall, 2004). Hall argued that personal identity is "probably the most important aspect of leader and career development" (p. 154). As Hall described, "Leader development can be viewed as the process of increasing the fit between a leader's role requirements and personal identity" (p. 155). Hall also discussed the importance of social identity and its influences on the sense of self, such as membership in a particular group. Litzky and Greenhaus (2007) surveyed 368 working professionals to explore the relationship between gender and aspirations to hold senior management posts and found that many women have lower desired aspirations for promotion to senior roles, due in part to beliefs that they do not possess the personal characteristics required for such positions, and have limited prospects for accessing such roles. The authors maintained, "women are not socialized to envision themselves as senior managers" (p. 651).

Women's views on the meaning of career success. The career literature frequently discusses the term "career success" within the context of both objective and subjective career outcomes. Objective outcomes include measures such as salary and the rate of promotion, and subjective outcomes include measures such as job satisfaction, career satisfaction, and career commitment (Allen et al., 2004; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Sturges, 1999). Individual perceptions of career success may be quite different. Sturges advised that subjective career success measures might be more important to women than objective measures. Eccles (1986) wrote that understanding women's careers requires exploring their expectations for their performance on various achievement measures, as well as the value placed on a given outcome.

For example, career success may be perceived as "a process of personal development which involves interesting and challenging work and balance with the rest of their life" (p. 240). Enke and Ropers-Huilman (2010) studied students from a Catholic women's college and found that the women in this study viewed the meaning of success subjectively; there were some common themes such as goal-orientation, the desire for balance, and the importance of community involvement.

Women's desire to advance may also be influenced by their perceptions of the relationship between career advancement and career success. Gilligan (1987) proposed that many women have mixed feelings between competitive achievement and femininity. On the one hand, they may become concerned that competing with men will lead to negative outcomes such as the "threat of social rejection and the loss of femininity" (Gilligan, 1987, p. 65). Alternatively, they may experience conflicted feelings because they view success as possible only at the expense of others' failures. In either case, Gilligan argued that apprehensions about career success are associated with gender identity. Oakley (2000) stated that power in corporate cultures has been "portrayed as a zero-game, especially in the upper ranks of corporations. The wielding of power may be less attractive to women because this zero-sum ideal of power prevails" (p. 328). Litzky and Greenhaus (2007) also asserted: "women associate ambition for senior management positions with egotism, selfishness, and competitiveness" (p. 651).

Gender discrimination and entrenched beliefs. Though blatant forms of gender discrimination may have largely been reduced, subtle forms persist. Barsh and Yee (2011) concluded, "While companies have worked hard to eliminate overt discrimination, women still face the pernicious force of mindsets that limit opportunity" (p. 4). According to the authors, both male and female managers made assumptions that "woman can't handle certain jobs and also discharge family obligations" (p. 4). Citing several studies on gender and leadership, Eagly

(2007) argued that although women often possess strong leadership capabilities, people are still likely to express a preference for male bosses. Cejka and Eagly (1999) contended that masculine traits may help women advance in male-dominated environments, but feminine personality or physical attributes were more important for success in female-dominated occupations.

Eagly and Carli (2007) described women's experience as a "double-bind" (p. 66). A double bind occurs because femininity may interfere with being viewed as a strong leader, whereas displaying masculine characteristics such as ambition and dominance may also be viewed negatively (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Bierema (2003) argued that women who are able to advance "do so by emulating men and reinforcing patriarchal systems that discriminate against women and people of colour, and, essentially, keep women in their place" (p. 3). Oakley (2000) maintained that male executives might resist accepting women because "the sense of discomfort may originate from the fear of being 'one-upped' by a woman" (p. 328). Such attitudes may stem from men's upbringing and beliefs about traditional gender roles (Oakley, 2000). Women executives may also experience what Oakley described as "tokenism" (p. 329). Tokenism results from women's minority status in executive roles. It can influence group dynamics in organizations, and as a result, women may experience alienation from the dominant group, as well as increased pressure to perform (Oakley, 2000).

Moss-Racusina et al. (2012) conducted a double-blind study of 127 science faculty at research-intensive universities to determine the extent to which gender bias exists in perceptions of students' competencies. Faculty members were asked to rate the quality of applications submitted by male and female students applying for lab manager positions. Findings indicated that male applicants were significantly more likely to be perceived as more capable than female applicants and female students were less likely to be hired. Male and female faculty members expressed the same bias in favor of the male students. The study also evaluated the level of

gender bias among faculty prior to the study. Findings suggested that preceding bias influenced the extent to which female candidates were rated positively. As a result, female students were less likely to be hired. This research suggests that gender bias is still prevalent and women may not have access to the same career opportunities as similarly educated and experienced men (Moss-Racusina et al, 2012).

      Access to social networks. Networking was described by Burke (1993) as the process of contacting and being contacted by people within a social network and maintaining these linkages or relationships. Previous research in the field of HRD also discussed social network theory, which focuses on how networks are related to organizational power and influence. Networking can take place through a variety of activities including building connections with others, joining professional associations, participating in social activities, and seeking high-visibility assignments (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Social network theory is relevant to understanding how a lack of access to the most influential social networks within organizations may limit women's opportunities to advance. Social networks are important for advancement because they provide increased access to career-related information (Granovetter, 1973; Morrison, 2002) and career sponsorship (Burt, 1998; Lin, 1999; Seibert et al., 2001).

      Several studies on gender and social networking indicate that men and women differ in terms of their social network composition, as well as the benefits resulting from network ties. Multiple factors may influence women's access to social networks, including: exclusion (Brass, 1985; Cross & Armstrong, 2008), preference for "like" others (Ibarra, 1992, 1997; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998) and structural constraints (Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1993, 1997; Lin, 1999; McGuire, 2002). Brass (1985) investigated a sample of 76 men and 64 women working in non-supervisory positions in a newspaper publishing company to determine whether network interaction patterns impacted assessments of influence and promotion potential within the

organization. The author found that men and women were equally effective at building social networks, yet both men and women gravitated toward social networks with same-gender individuals. The gender make-up and job level associated with different work groups were also significant factors in network composition. Brass described the phenomena as "Two informal, segregated networks operating in the organization. The result of this segregation was that women were less central to men's networks, in particular the interaction network of the dominant coalition" (p. 339). Women in mixed gender workgroups fared better than those in single-gender groups because they were more likely to occupy critical positions and have access to those who were most influential within the organization.

Ibarra (1993) created a conceptual framework to understand the types of networks women and minority managers were likely to have access to and found that several factors limited their opportunities to build network ties, such as position, the overall representation level of the underrepresented populations, and the individual's turnover/mobility level. Mehra et al. (1998) studied a cohort of 159 MBA students to understand how being part of an underrepresented group influenced network choices and network composition. The authors concluded that women and minorities might be more likely to network with others like themselves because they recognized themselves as outsiders and desired a sense of identity. Women in this study identified exclusion from the dominant network of white males as one reason for developing ties to other women.

Social networks and career advancement. Research indicates that social networks are valuable for a variety of reasons, including securing a job, organizational learning, and promotion. Granovetter (1973) was one of the first scholars to be recognized for determining that developing broad-ranging, diverse networks can increase the likelihood of securing a job by providing individuals with access to non-redundant information. Morrison (2002) found that

networking ties are also related to organizational learning. The author sampled 154 recently hired auditors in a large multinational accounting firm to understand how a newcomer's social network may influence social integration and organizational learning. Findings indicated that those having larger informational networks cutting across diverse organizational business units also reported greater knowledge about their organization's structure, culture, and rules.

Several studies exist exploring the connection between networking ties and promotion. By and large, these studies suggest that connections with those at higher levels in the organization are essential for both men and women to fully leverage their social networks, yet women may face greater challenges than men in forming these connections. Burt (1998) analyzed data from a probability sample of 284 managers employed by a large electronics firm to determine the role of network structures and gender in obtaining promotions. Results indicated that women who developed strong interconnected ties with senior managers were promoted faster than women with similar backgrounds who had less hierarchical networks (Burt, 1998). Burt suggested that ties to high status individuals were especially important for women because women lack legitimacy in the eyes of male leaders. He contended that women might have limited access to building connections with those most central within the organizations (Burt, 1998).

McGuire (2000) also concluded that women and men recognize the value of building connections with high-status employees, yet women, especially women of color, faced the greatest challenges. The author conducted a study of 1,150 full-time workers in a large financial services organization to understand differences between the network structures of men, women, and people of color. The study controlled for several variables including education, tenure, financial designation (indication of accomplishment), rank, and marital/family. Quantitative analysis showed that women were of lower rank in the organization when compared to men, and women of color ranked even lower. Because of their lower rank, women and people of color

were less likely to have influence over corporate resources that could put them in contact with high-status individuals. Women of color experienced the greatest disadvantages in accessing resources, because of their lower status. One encouraging finding from this study was that when women and minorities occupied high-status positions, they were no less likely than white males to have high-status network members. Physical proximity of high-status individuals (i.e., working on the same floor with senior employees) was also an indication of higher-status network members.

Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) used structural equation modeling to identify connections between social networking and career outcomes. Using a sample of 448 employees across a variety of occupations and organizations, the authors found that having developmental network contacts across job functions is directly related to increased access to, and contacts with, those at higher levels, and this has proved to be a more direct path to career sponsorship. Career sponsorship related to all three career success measures identified in the study: salary, promotions, and career satisfaction (Seibert et al., 2001). It was the value of connections at higher levels (not gender) that was a significant factor in determining career outcomes within this study.

Studies exploring gender and women's efforts to increase visibility suggest that women may not be rewarded in the same way as men due to the types of opportunities available to them. Forret and Dougherty (2004) found that the types of assignments men and women have access to may limit the benefits they gain from their social networks. Findings from a sample of 418 male and female business school alumni indicated that efforts to increase visibility were significantly related to the number of promotions and total compensation for men, but not for women (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Increasing internal visibility was described as accepting highly visible work assignments or participating on task forces or committees to prove one's capabilities. Results

showed that increasing internal visibility was significantly related to perceived career success for women, suggesting that women may think their efforts are associated with career progress, when in reality they are not. The authors maintained that one explanation for the differences between men and women may be that "the work assignments, task forces, or committees the women were involved with were of a less prestigious nature than those of the men" (p. 432).

Research suggests that building connections with women, as well as men, is important for women's career success. Ibarra (1997) investigated the composition of managerial networks across four Fortune 500 companies and found that women identified as high potential by their organizations were more likely to report that they invested time in building relationships with other women to learn about the challenges that women face and strategies for overcoming them. Cross and Armstrong (2008) conducted a qualitative grounded theory study of a women's networking group comprised 20 female middle managers in Ireland. The women in this group shared their perspectives on how to advance to senior management positions.   The women collectively learned that one important strategy for overcoming barriers to advancement was to obtain a male mentor.

Access to role models and mentors. The concepts of social networking and mentoring are deeply intertwined within the mentoring literature. Mentoring scholars suggest that mentoring takes place through network connections by offering various types of developmental support. Kram (1985) was the first to propose that individuals may rely on multiple people for career development and support, a phenomenon described as "relationship constellations." Higgins and Kram's (2001) integrative literature review tied mentoring and social networking by proposing that mentoring be viewed from a developmental network perspective. The authors described an individual's developmental network as "the set of people a protégé names as taking

an active interest in and action to advance the protégé's career by providing developmental assistance" (p. 268).

Higgins and Kram (2001) argued that the benefits of developmental networks are consistent with those described by Kram (1985). According to the authors, developmental assistance includes "two types of support studied by mentoring scholars: (1) career mentoring support, such as exposure and visibility, sponsorship, and protection, and (2) psycho-social mentoring support, such as friendship, counseling, acceptance and confirmation, and sharing beyond work" (p. 268). Kram and Isabella's (1985) work argued that peers might also serve as mentors. The authors conducted an exploratory investigation of the role of peers in providing mentoring support, and found that peer mentoring offers very similar benefits to those present in other types of mentoring relationships. A unique aspect of peer relationships was that both act as givers and receivers of mentoring support.

Mentoring has been linked to both subjective outcomes such as employee satisfaction and objective career outcomes, such as career advancement and higher salaries (Allen et al., 2004; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Dreher & Cox, 1996). Mentoring from those in positions of power and influence is especially important. Dreher and Ash studied business school graduates (147 women and 173 men) to understand the connections between mentoring, gender, and career outcomes. The authors concluded, "Individuals experiencing extensive mentoring relationships reported receiving more promotions, had higher incomes, and were more satisfied with their pay and benefits than individuals experiencing less extensive mentoring relationships" (p. 539). Foust-Cummings et al. (2011) co-authored a Catalyst study involving interviews with 93 men and women on the mentoring function of career sponsorship and found that sponsorship by senior leaders can make a significant difference in helping women rise to the top. Sponsorship is a form of mentoring; it involves a set of behaviors that executives enact when they are willing to

advocate for an individual's career advancement. For example, they may recommend an individual for a key promotion or highlight a woman's achievements to others who are in positions of power and influence. The report described the importance of sponsorship for women's career advancement this way: "A highly placed, influential mentor, more precisely called a sponsor . . . can propel a protégé to the top of a list or pile of candidates or even eliminate the list itself" (Foust-Cummings et al., 2011, p. 1).

Women mentors and role models have been found to play an important role in facilitating women's career development (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Tharenou, 2005). Mentors may be especially important for women working in male-dominated hierarchies and for women of color, who are even less likely to report having mentors and role models that they can turn to for guidance and support (Catalyst, 1998, 2002; Davidson, 2002). McKeen and Bujaki (2007) conducted an extensive review of literature on gender and mentoring and concluded that, "Mentors help women to succeed by assisting them in identifying and addressing key success factors and in overcoming barriers to success" (p. 200). The review outlined several benefits of mentoring for women including: access to informal networks, learning about performance expectations and appropriate work behaviors, access to challenging work assignments, and overcoming gender stereotypes. The authors also suggested that women's status and an organization's culture might play a role in the ability to develop mentoring relationships, arguing that higher level workers may be more likely to access mentors.

Tharenou (2005) surveyed more than 3,000 male and female workers in Australia to determine the impact of gender on career and psycho-social mentoring. Results suggested that career mentoring support increased women's career advancement more than men's, and women derived more benefits from career mentoring support provided by women. According to the author, "Career support for women from female mentors translates most into advancement,

perhaps because women protégés gain from being sponsored, challenged and coached by someone like themselves who has incurred the particular difficulties women can face" (p. 101). Alternatively, psycho-social mentoring provided by women mentors in this study was negatively associated with women's career advancement. The authors speculated that mentors focused too much on providing psycho-social support (men may be less likely to do so) may fail to offer sufficient career mentoring support to encourage a mentee to pursue advancement (Tharenou (2005). Ragins and McFarlin (1990) also concluded that when women are mentored by women, they are likely to learn more about overcoming barriers to promotion and methods for managing career and family balance.

Organizational policies and practices. Lack of policies to support women's needs within and outside of work may limit women's opportunities for career advancement. Over the past 20 to 30 years, women have chosen to stay in the labor force even if they have small children (Galinsky et al., 2009), and the majority of women with children under one year of age are still part of the labor force (Blau & Kahn, 2007). In 2008, the percentage of mothers who worked for pay was approximately 71% (Galinsky et al., 2009). The longer working hours and higher stress levels associated with career advancement impact both men and women, yet women are more likely than men to experience work-life conflict when they have children (Galinsky et al., 2009). Barsh and Yee (2011) stressed that, "Women don't opt out of the workforce; most cannot afford to" (p. 3). Dreher (2003) analyzed data from 72 Fortune 500 organizations in an effort to identify any relationships between the number of women in lower-level management, work-life policies, and the percentage of senior women in management. The author found that organizations with greater numbers of women in lower-level management and more extensive work-life policies also had higher percentages of senior women managers. Eagly and Carli (2007) contended that marriage and children are related to higher salaries for men, but that is not the case for women.

Kelly and Moen (2007) concluded that when employees have control over when, where, and how much they work, work-life conflicts are reduced and wellness and productivity may increase.

      Professional experience and leadership development. More emphasis on managing the talent pipeline for women is necessary to ensure opportunities to gain valuable work experience are available (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Eagly and Carli (2007) emphasized that women need to have a proven record of accomplishment, and experience in revenue-generating positions in order to be eligible for promotion. Yet, women often take a different path. Hanscome and Cervero (2003) determined that women's entry into executive positions tended to be in staff roles that do not have profit and loss responsibility. In a study of men's and women's career paths in educational administration, Yong-Lyun and Brunner (2009) found that men and women aspiring to become superintendents took very different paths and the extent to which individuals occupy line positions can affect career advancement. Women in this study were less likely to follow a career path focused primarily on securing line positions. Rather, their paths tended to be slower and more horizontal, including a combination of line and staff positions. Line positions were associated with faster advancement potential and typically involved control over organizational power and resources and offered increased visibility (Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009).

      Women may be held to a higher standard in having to demonstrate the competence and qualifications required to succeed in performance-based, male-dominated cultures. Lyness and Thompson (2000) studied a matched sample of 69 female executives and 69 male executives to understand differences in what influenced their abilities to advance. Women in the study were less likely than men to have positions with authority over others, and yet, they were more likely to emphasize the importance of having a strong record of accomplishment. Brigadier General L.E. Reynolds, the first woman to occupy one senior position in the U.S. Marine Corps, recently

communicated this point. When reporters questioned Reynolds about her promotion, she responded, "I am not here by mistake, because it was time to put a girl here. . . . I was the right person for the job" (Whitlock, 2011, para. 4). This response illustrates the inherent inequality of a woman expecting to legitimize why she is fit to lead in a way that a man would not be expected to. Organizations must also consider that women are challenged by attempting to gain the experience they need while fulfilling other roles. For example, Tharenou, Latimer, and Conroy (1994) concluded that "having a spouse and dependents at home reduced women's work experience, but increased men's, with subsequent effects on training and thus advancement" (p. 899).

Leadership development strategies designed to further women's understanding of their leadership capabilities, as well as their personal and social identity, may facilitate women's efforts to move ahead (Hall, 2004). Barsh and Yee (2011) reported that women have certain beliefs about their leadership capabilities that prevent them from moving ahead, such as the need to obtain more skills or that they should wait to be asked to take on more responsibility. Eagly and Carli (2007) argued that women need to have expectations that such positions are achievable.

Women's Network Studies

One of the most important aspects of the literature review was to locate research that directly addressed corporate women's networks in organizations. Eight studies fit the criteria (see Table 1). Four of these studies were the most informative: O'Neil, Hopkins, and Sullivan (2011), a study of the perceptions of women's network members and organizational leaders about the value of a women's network in a privately held company based in the U.S.; Singh et al. (2006), a study of women's network leaders and members based primarily in the European offices of multinationals; Donnelon and Langowitz (2009), a study of women's network leaders based in

the U.S. offices of *Fortune* 500 organizations, and Hersby et al. (2009), a UK-based study

conducted in one large multinational engineering firm.

Table 1

Company-Sponsored Women's Network Studies

Author(s) / year / journal	Research method / sample	Findings / limits
Bierema (2005) *Human Resource Development International*	Qualitative methodology. Multiple focus groups/in-depth interviews. Sample of 10 female executives in one Fortune 500 company. Members established a women's network with sponsorship from senior organizational leaders, Grounded in social network theory and feminism.	Contradictions: the network was viewed as a strategic benefit, a source of support/shared identify, and as potentially career damaging to women. Patriarchal structures, women's lack of gender consciousness, and inaction resulted in the discontinuation of the network. Senior leaders played a key role in the network's development. Limits: Small sample size, privileged access.
Catalyst (1999)	Practitioner Book. A study conducted by Catalyst surveyed leaders of women's networks and organizational leaders in 132 companies across industries (34% reported women's networks).	Few women's networks initiated by senior level management (8%) or HR (10%). Key focus: networking, mentoring, career development, career advancement, diversity issues, and work/family. Limits: lacked detailed methodology and analysis.
Donnelon & Langowitz (2009)	Qualitative study included in-depth interviews with 38 women's network leaders in 32 large corporations across a broad range of industries. 85% of companies in the U.S. 88% Fortune 500 Size ranged from 9,100-320,000 employees.	Connecting women across functions and levels is a core activity. Hierarchy of activities: networking, professional development activities, mentoring, strategic business development. Too few networks operated at a strategic level. No detailed methodology.

(table continues)

Table 1, continued

Hersby, Ryan, & Jetten (2009) *British Journal of Management*	UK survey of 166 women working across job functions in one large multinational engineering firm. European offices. Majority full-time non-managerial aged 31-40. Adopted 5 items from Fowler and O'Gorman's (2005) eight functions of mentoring instrument.	Members expect career and psychosocial mentoring support through the network. Investigated relationships between social structures and perceptions of status enhancement and mobility. Network valued as collective strategy when barriers to individual advancement and collective status enhancement possible. Identity functions valuable when status in question. Limits: Newly formed network. Responses based on perceived value versus actual benefits, lack of detail on how long the network had been in operation at time of study.
O'Neil, Hopkins, & Sullivan (2011) *Career Development International*	Qualitative study of 21 members of a women's network and six executive leaders. Conducted interviews with participants and compared findings from members and leaders using thematic analysis.	There were differences in the perspective of network members and organizational leaders. Members were more likely to view the network as a way to achieve better career paths for women as well as provide a strategic advantage to the organization. Executives were more likely to believe that visible achievements were most important for women's career success where as members identified developmental opportunities. Limits: Lack of generalizability, members self-selected.
Perriton (2006) *Leadership*	Literature review. Overview of social network theory and gender.	Review of social networking literature as it pertains to women's networks. It is essentially a critique of women's networks as a career advancement strategy for women. Women and organizations need to determine how they will benefit given resources available.

(table continues)

Table 1, continued

Singh, Vinnicombe, & Kumra (2006) *Women in Management Review*	Empirical mixed-method study involved in-depth interviews. Interviewed 12 women's network leaders based in the European offices of 12 large multinational companies and triangulated data with an email survey of 164 network members (33% response). Survey included 38% junior or professional staff, 46% in middle management and 16% in senior positions. 11.5% identified themselves as non-white.	Access career information, career development and personal growth, mentors/role models, examples of operating at a strategic level. Viewed women's motivation to be involved from an organizational citizenship perspective. Network members participated in a variety of voluntary extra-role behaviors. Network leaders take a highly business-oriented view. Employers benefitted from citizenship behaviors. Senior leaders drive change. Limits: Network leaders provided contact info for survey, sponsored research.
Wang (2009) New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education	Literature review addressed the value of networking and social capital for women's career development. One article in a special edition focused on the importance of social capital for women.	Women do not have equal access to social capital and do not receive the same benefits from social capital as men. Introducing a women's network may be too simplistic of an approach. Organizations should consider broader strategies to ensure equitable environments for women. Formal women's networks can be part of a strategy to advance women.

Women's Networks and Women's Career Advancement

Bierema (2003) contended that one way organizations can facilitate women's career advancement is to "support women's networks that can create safe spaces and provide the financial and moral resources to support women's actions to promote meaningful change" (p. 10). In keeping with findings from research on factors influencing women's career advancement, research on company-sponsored women's networks will be presented henceforth by discussing how women's networks may influence women's desire to advance and the opportunities available to them. Negative implications of participating in women's networks will also be considered.

Women's Desire to Advance

Investigating how women's sense of identity and perceptions of themselves as leaders may be influenced by involvement in a women's network was an important part of this study. Donnelon and Langowitz (2009) reported on the importance of shared identity in women's networks. The authors explained, "We found that women seek a forum to 'share common identities' and compare their experience with other women" (p. 29). The nature of this sharing of common identities is worthy of future exploration, because the influence of others within the organization can shape women's career goals. Senior women serving as mentors and role models may be especially important for women. Singh et al. (2006) reported that senior women provided an example for younger women to realize that advancement was possible.

Hersby et al. (2009) surveyed 166 women across job functions in the European offices of one large multinational engineering firm with a newly formed women's network to explore women's perceptions of the value of the network. The authors stated that an identity function, described as a sense of belonging as a professional woman, might be an important factor in women's networks. Results of this study indicated that a sense of shared identity was most

valued when women perceived significant barriers to advancement, as well as when women believed that they could collectively work together to improve the status of women.

Women's networks may also enable women to come together to explore their leadership capabilities and potential. Singh et al. (2006) found that women's networks could create professional development opportunities for women to evaluate their leadership potential and advancement aspirations. An example of one such development program was called "Moving from Can I? to I Can!" (Singh et al., 2006, p. 7). The purpose of this targeted development program was to encourage women to be more confident and assertive in their career advancement efforts. Senior women in this study also reported that they put effort into helping more junior women get ahead and into making their organizations more responsive to the needs of women employees.

Women's Opportunities to Advance

Facilitating women's career advancement is often identified as an important objective of women's networks. Some of the strategies women's networks employ for doing so include addressing gender discrimination and entrenched beliefs in organizations, expanding networking connections across the organization, providing access to mentors and role models, providing women with professional experience and professional development, and collectively influencing organizational policies and practices.

Fostering inclusive environments within their organizations is a critical starting point for women's networks to begin to influence women's opportunities for advancement. This can take place by encouraging conversations about gender differences and the importance of equality (Bierema, 2005; Hersby et al., 2009). Bierema proposed that women's networks must operate with an understanding of gender issues in order to raise awareness of the status of women and what can or should be done to address any concerns. Hersby et al. exclaimed, "This notion of

women's networks as a vehicle for collective action is essential if networks are to address the gender inequalities they are set up to counter" (p. 416).

The extent to which the networking connections made through women's networks influence women's career advancement is unclear. As Donnelon and Langowitz (2009) explained, "At their core, the goal of all women's networks is to connect individual women to one another" (p. 29). Women's networks may also serve as "early alert systems for members regarding job openings, business contacts, and career development strategies" (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009, p. 30). Singh et al. (2006) determined that members of women's networks placed a great deal of importance on the desire to expand their social networks to include others across their organizations that they would not have otherwise met. The unique value of connecting women with other women was highlighted. "Members seemed to really appreciate networking with other women, perhaps because of the limited opportunities to meet female colleagues on a regular basis in some male-dominated parts of the businesses" (Singh et al., 2006, p. 471).

O'Neil et al. (2011) concluded that members were more likely to perceive the women's network as an advancement strategy, whereas executives identified diversity promotion as a primary network result. Members most commonly identified developmental opportunities as a factor that enabled women's career success, while executives focused on the need for women to demonstrate visible achievements. Members and executives were in agreement on the role of individual members to facilitate advancement. According to the authors, "Both members of the women's network and the executive leadership team placed the responsibility for women's career advancement upon the individual; the firm's male dominated culture and organizational constraints were not emphasized" (O'Neil et al., 2011, p. 733).

It is possible women's networks can influence women's advancement by providing members with connections or information that leads to new career opportunities. Alternatively, the relationships developed may serve more subjective career needs such as the desire for friendship, shared identity, and emotional support. Both types of networking connections are of value. Rock and Garavan's (2006) review on developmental networks described an individual in a "friend" network as someone who can "provide valuable support because of his or her capacity to empathize with the learner, provide examples of obstacles that can be overcome, and bolster the confidence of the learner" (p. 349). Rath's (2006) research on the importance of work friendships also suggested that individuals who identify having close friendships at work are more engaged than those who do not. One women's network leader in Singh et al. (2006) reported that there were instances when women were able to move into new positions as a result of connections made through the network. Whether or not the new positions were vertical or lateral moves was not specified in this study.

An important area of investigation in future research is to continue to explore the types of mentoring that take place through women's networks and the role of senior women in providing mentoring and role modeling. Studies on women's networks identify mentoring as one important role that women's networks may serve (Bierema, 2005; Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Hersby et al., 2009; Singh et al., 2006). Only one women's network study incorporated a mentoring instrument to understand the specific types of mentoring support women's network members expected to receive from their involvement. Hersby et al. concluded that women identified both career and psycho-social functions as potential benefits (the study did not actually measure whether or not any mentoring benefits were realized). The authors also contended that an identity function, described as a sense of belonging as a professional woman, might be considered as a third function of mentoring support. Junior women endorsed both types of mentoring functions at

higher rates than senior or intermediate-level women. Hersby et al. predicted that the success of

women's networks would be impacted by the level of involvement of senior women. According

to the authors:

> It is senior women who act as important role models for female employees and
> learning from, and interacting with, these senior successful women may be one
> reason that junior women wish to join a network. In addition, the presence and
> support of more senior women can legitimize and encourage membership in the
> network. (p. 426)

Women's networks may play a role in strengthening the capabilities of women to move

into the leadership pipeline by providing opportunities for learning and development. Singh et al.

(2006) provided examples of professional development activities such as strategies to overcome

career barriers, effective networking strategies, improving communication skills, and building

interviewing skills. Singh et al. concluded that network events were found to foster greater

organizational learning not only for members but also for senior leaders who may have the

opportunity to act as coaches and mentors.

Women aspiring to obtain senior leadership roles must also differentiate themselves by

engaging in opportunities that enhance may enhance their credibility, professional skills, and

specific expertise. Donnelon and Langowitz (2009) argued that women's networks are most

effective when they engage women in strategic business development activities that enhance their

professional experience. Singh et al. (2006) concluded that one strategy members employed to

increase their professional experience was to take on a leadership role within a women's network:

"As they organize events or take on new committee roles, they would develop their own

managerial potential" (p. 477). Singh et al. and Donnelon and Langowitz also suggested that the

most strategic networks engaged in activities that provide women with challenging work

assignments that can enhance their work experience. For example, women's networks may

become involved in designing new products or targeting new market segments (Donnelon &

Langowitz, 2009). Singh et al. explained that women were "motivated by the opportunities for their own enhanced visibility, which provides improved career, influence or centrality prospects" (p. 477).

Finally, women's networks can advocate for policies and practices that support women's career advancement and/or eliminate those that may hinder success. For example, Singh et al. (2006) described how one women's network was able to collectively influence policy changes around maternity leave by presenting the business benefits of longer-term paid leave. How such policies could influence women's career advancement or the success of the organization was not discussed. Future research should consider how such policies may influence women's career paths and the efforts to recruit and retain women.

Negative Effects of Women's Networks

Women and organizations should also consider any potential negative effects of women's networks and their impact on women's advancement. Three primary concerns appeared in the literature. First, women may contribute valuable time and resources without meaningful returns; second, women's networks lack diversity beyond gender; and third, women may face negative repercussions because of their involvement.

Several studies addressed concerns that women are time constrained and have limited resources to dedicate to women's networks (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Perriton, 2006; Singh et al., 2006; Wang, 2009). Women generally volunteer their time to reach network goals, and as a result, women must be especially conscientious about how they allocate their time and energy. Hite and McDonald (1999) and Bierema (2005) concluded that one reason a network might fail is that women are already too overloaded with responsibility and do not have time to dedicate to network initiatives. As Bierema explained, women struggled to "take on one more challenge given the pressures they felt in their jobs, particularly when the personal career costs seemed

high" (p. 215). Donnelon and Langowitz noted, "In a number of companies, during tough times the initiatives stalled or resources were hard to get. Corporate support for the network was often de-prioritized in these situations" (p. 34). Perriton challenged women who are focused on building networks to advance their careers to consider if they may be better off dedicating resources to seeking sponsorship from high-status men. She encouraged women to consider what they have to gain by joining a network, and whether or not they are seeking subjective career outcomes (social support) or objective career outcomes (career advancement).

The extent to which women's networks support the needs of all women within an organization or operate to serve a select few is still unclear. Few demographic statistics were reported in the women's network studies reviewed, making it difficult to gather an accurate picture of the characteristics of women who participate in women's networks as well as the demographic characteristics of employees in the organizations overall. Singh et al. (2006) surveyed 164 members of women's networks across five companies and found that only 11.5% identified themselves as non-white. Why so few women of color were involved in the network was not addressed in the study. Catalyst (1999a) determined that companies with women's networks also offered these employee networks: African American (62%), Asian American (33%), Latino (42%), and gay and lesbian (40%) networks. The most common networks in these companies were women's networks, followed by African American networks.

A final concern identified in the literature was that women's networks and their members may experience repercussions as a result of participation. Bierema (2005) provided an example of how network members were concerned that their level of influence may diminish by participating in a women's network. The executive women who participated in the study discussed the potential negative career consequences of participation, including being viewed as needing "extra help" or that the network involved "male bashing" (Bierema, 2005). Bierema

concluded that women's networks may actually reproduce patriarchy rather than erode it. Singh et al. (2006) reported that network leaders may need to overcome perceptions that women's networks are only focused on women's issues rather than meaningful business activities.

Women's Networks and Organizational Success

Many of the benefits women's network members may obtain from participating have implications for organizational success, overall. Research shows that there are connections between the establishment of women's networks and the ability to effectively recruit, develop, and retain women, expand business opportunities, and demonstrate commitment to the broader community.

Women's network leaders in Singh et al. (2006) discussed how women's networks can positively influence recruiting and retaining women. According to the authors:

> Most network leaders mentioned the positive impact on retention. Some specified recruitment and better talent management, as well as better communication flows across divisions, and integration of women, leading to increased commitment, which again should impact retention. With women keen to improve themselves, the companies gained a better-equipped workforce. (p. 8)

Singh et al. (2006) also stated that some networks are able to consult with organizational leaders about the talent management processes. The authors argued:

> What it's not is a substitute for superb HR practices, but it is a group that is determined to do its own bit, to research reasons why the pipeline doesn't work as well as it should, and the reasons why we don't actually have women at senior level. (p. 5)

This research suggests that the most strategic networks take a highly business-oriented approach to ensure their goals are aligned with women's career development needs and organizational business objectives. An example of the types of activities networks engaged in to increase visibility included women's efforts to "drive to recruit more female business banking managers, create new opportunities, products and services to attract and secure female clients"

(Singh et al., 2006, p. 465). Donnelon and Langowitz (2009) also explored the value of women's networks operating at a strategic level. The study described the level of power and influence that the women's network had in one participant's company: "The value of the women's initiative is so well-understood here that we are no longer asked internally to calculate the return on investment in it. For us, the real business case is that we can't grow without it" (p. 6).

Although no studies on women's networks provided measures of the actual advancement of women as a result of their participation, positive relationships between the existence of a women's network and women's career advancement have been acknowledged by organizations. For example, Thomas (2004) studied IBM's employee-constituency groups and reported that the company experienced significant increases in women in senior leadership, as well as increased profitability, with the help of the women's network. The types of projects that the women's network worked on were directly related to growing IBM's core businesses. Thomas provided an example of how IBM grew its revenue generated from multi-cultural and women-owned business customers from $10 million in 1998 to $300 million in 2001 with the help of the women's constituency group.

Women's networks may also focus on supporting others and giving back to the community rather than on individual success and career advancement. Singh et al. (2006) explained that women's motivation for becoming involved in women's networks could be understood from an organizational citizenship perspective. Network members may participate in a variety of voluntary extra-role behaviors, such as encouraging others in the organization to do their best, putting the needs of the organization before their own, and engaging in opportunities for self-development (Singh et al., 2006). An additional strategy women's networks may employ to increase organizational success is to lobby for policies and practices that address women's career needs. As discussed previously, Singh et al. provided an example of how one women's

network influenced maternity leave policy by presenting the business benefits of longer paid leave.

The role of organizational leaders and their beliefs regarding the value of women's networks is not fully understood. Existing studies on women's networks suggest that it cannot be assumed that organizational leaders are in favor of women's networks or that their support will lead to a successful network. Bierema (2005) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 women executives who participated in a women's network to determine what impact the network had on its members and their organization. The women's network in this study was created by the organization's senior human resources executive and was supported by the CEO. The mission was to "provide a focus for ongoing leadership, advocacy, and support for the development of women in business" (Bierema, 2005, p. 212). Despite senior-level support, this network was ultimately disbanded due to members' concerns that the network was perceived negatively, as well as the level of effort required by the women to sustain it (Bierema, 2005).

Findings from Catalyst (1999a) indicated that managers and women's network leaders had similar understandings of the role of women's networks within their organizations. The top four roles identified were listed in the same order by both network leaders and managers; they included providing networking and support, advising management, career development, and acting as a vehicle for organizational change (Catalyst, 1999a). Catalyst (1999a) found that women's network leaders were more likely than managers familiar with the network in their organizations to express concern that men in their organizations viewed the network negatively. Catalyst (1999a) also questioned women's network leaders and managers about their perceptions of how networks were perceived within their organizations. A small percentage of management responses suggested that they perceived a connection between the network and women's career advancement. Eleven percent of managers indicated that one role the network served was

"providing management with the names of high-potential women for developmental or advancement opportunities" (Catalyst, 1999a, p. 168). The same percentage of managers indicated that the leadership experiences women's network members gained through involvement were viewed positively (Catalyst, 1999a). Managers also identified some of the challenges of establishing and maintaining women's networks, including: a lack of understanding about the network, males being threatened, a lack of member diversity, concerns about the effectiveness of the network, and a lack of management support (Catalyst, 1999a).

Hite and McDonald (1999) provided some insight regarding the perspectives of leaders in organizations who are not women's network insiders. In this study of 68 executive women working in a large international services organization, every executive woman within the company was considered a member, whether or not she had been involved in the women's network. Thirty-four percent of the women executives indicated they were not active within the network. The study explored why some women chose to participate in such networks, what kind of learning took place, the usefulness of women's networks as a social support system, and the role of women's networks in prompting women's career progression (Hite & McDonald, 1999). The authors identified key philosophical differences between those arguing for and against the network, with one segment of the women believing strongly that women's networks are necessary to support women personally and professionally, and the other believing that segregating women from the rest of the organization did not serve the needs of members or the organization. One of the most frequently cited reasons for becoming involved was "I wanted to support the advancement of women in the organization" (Hite & McDonald, 1999, p. 1057). Interestingly, the survey question receiving the least amount of support for why she became involved was the question, "I thought I would advance my career" (Hite & McDonald, 1999, p. 1057). The executive women in this organization were working on deciding whether to "revive, revise, or

remove this network," because they did not have consistent opinions about its purpose and value (Hite & McDonald, 1999, p. 1060).

O'Neil, Hopkins, and Sullivan (2011) investigated the impact of a women's network on women's career advancement and profitability in one large privately held organization with a company-sponsored women's network. The researchers interviewed 21 women's network members and six members of the executive leadership team to understand differences about the purpose of network factors that influence women's career success and organizational success. The authors concluded that members were more likely to perceive the network as an advancement strategy, whereas executives identified diversity promotion as a primary network result.

Singh et al. (2006) and Donnelon and Langowitz (2009) concluded that organizations and women benefit most when women's networks are operating at a strategic level. Operating at a strategic level was based on the network's business leverage included tying the network to an underlying business rationale; for example, engaging in strategic projects that are intended to have a specific business outcome (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009). Women's networks that incorporate strategic projects may help their organizations "think differently about product and service development, providing innovative input that can influence the company's offerings and increase revenues''(Donnelong & Langowitz, 2009, p. 34).

An essential aspect of understanding how women's networks may benefit organizations is recognizing that network leaders and committee members invest significant amounts of time outside of their daily job responsibilities to fulfill their network roles and contribute to organizational success (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Singh et al., 2006). The perspectives of organizational leaders are necessary to understand how organizational success may be impacted by the efforts of women's networks to influence organizational policies and practices. Some of the managers in Catalyst's (1999a) study identified serving as an "advisor to management" and a

"vehicle for organizational change" as two roles of women's networks (p. 168). HRD, women's network members, and organizational leaders would benefit from more input from organizational leaders regarding the types of initiatives that women's networks do (or should) engage in to influence policies and practices.

Chapter 3: Feminist Case Study Methodology

Harding (1987) described a methodology as "a theory and analysis of how research does and should proceed" (p. 3). Case study research is a common type of research method used in organizational research to study systems, individuals, programs, or events. This chapter provides a summary of the case study research methodology incorporated in this study. It begins with an introduction of the theoretical underpinnings of feminist case study design followed by a detailed description of the processes embedded in the case: participant selection strategies, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, validity issues, and design limitations.

Case Study Design

Case studies are unique in that they focus on contemporary issues in real life, have specific limits or boundaries related to addressing a research problem, are situated within a larger system, and involve investigating multiple variables (Ellinger et al., 2005). According to Ellinger et al., case studies involve several steps:

> Identifying the research problem, purpose, and research questions, using the literature, selecting and bounding the case, designing the study, considering issues of validity and reliability in designing case study research, collecting data, analyzing data, integrating the study findings, interpreting findings and drawing conclusions, and writing and reporting the findings. (p. 333)

Case studies may be based upon an individual story or an attempt to draw cross-case comparisons. Daly (2007) explained that case study researchers must articulate why a case study is unique by considering "what sets the story apart from other stories" (p. 116). A single-case study design was selected for this research in order to formulate an in-depth understanding of one company-sponsored women's network within one large multinational organization. Single-case study designs are appropriate in situations where the objective is to "confirm, challenge, or extend" theory (Yin, 2003, p. 40). Yin suggested that a single-case study design may also be of value in situations where the person or organization of interest can inform the experiences of

similar individuals or institutions. Findings from this study may be of value in formulating new theoretical propositions about the role of women's networks in large organizations; keeping in mind, no two women's networks will be precisely alike. Yin offered several guidelines for conducting case study research. These include (a) distinguishing primary research questions that incorporate "how" or "why," (b) narrowing the scope of a project based on established theoretical propositions, (c) identifying a unit of analysis that corresponds with the study's research questions and takes into consideration relevant previous research, (d) linking data collection to theoretical propositions, (e) identifying patterns and considering rival explanations, and (f) establishing a criteria for interpreting findings.

Feminist approaches to conducting case study research. DeVault (1996) explored the extent to which feminist methods of social research should be seen as unique and concluded feminist research "does identify a distinctive approach to the investigation of social life and organization" (p. 83). She called attention to important characteristics of feminist research including the desire to uncover the voices and experiences of women as well as the researcher's responsibility to the research participants and the organization. Important ethical issues that were considered prior to engaging in this research included: (a) incorporating an ethic of care while conducting this research that was consistent with IRB expectations and approval; (b) developing an awareness of traditional hierarchical relationships in the organization and the power imbalances that may result, was of particular importance in the current study due to the overt power distances between network members, network leaders, and organizational leaders; and (c) providing ample self-disclosure to the participants regarding my background and motivations for conducting the study.

Reinharz (1992) was an advocate for feminist case study research. In her book on feminist research methods in social research she stated, "Case studies of effective organizations

and women's experience in them are necessary both as models for future generations and as the raw data of future secondary analyses, comparative research, and cross-cultural studies" (p. 166). She described one of the objectives of feminist case study research in this way, "Particular initiatives on behalf of women can illuminate why certain strategies succeed and others fail, or why certain movements 'catch on' more than others" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 173). The author's remarks are relevant to this study because existing research on women's networks suggests these groups may be challenged with establishing and maintaining momentum. Reinharz also stressed the importance of considering the experiences of women from a variety of diverse backgrounds. The current study attempted to accomplish this by exploring how demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, geographic location, or occupation may influence members' experiences.

Lastly, feminist case study research is undertaken to enact change. As Middleton (1993) explained, feminist research "can bring about change in the way people perceive their lives and may, in fact, stimulate them to make changes" (p. 74). It should be noted that the role of the researcher in this study is not to effect change. However, it is hoped that engaging in this research will encourage participants to embrace the findings and advocate for positive change.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity compels the researcher to be responsible for how one's own experiences influence the process and outcome of the research. Daly (2007) described a postmodern approach to participating in research relationships in this way: "Rather than researchers trying to remain separate, distant, and objective, they are more likely to engage fully with their own experiences, reactions, and disclosures" (p. 140). Harding (1987) explained that the researcher should be "placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research" (p. 9). My role was to use my past understanding and expertise to guide the inquiry, then set aside any preconceptions during the data collection and analysis phase of the study, while later reflecting on the entire

research process and clearly identifying how theory may or may not be consistent with the study findings. Feminist inquiry offers a variety of approaches to help researchers stay conscious of their bias resulting from their role as participants and observers of the knowledge-creation process. The strategies used in this study are discussed in the validity and trustworthiness section of this methodology.

Data Collection

Feminist research often incorporates the same data collection methods found in other social science research, yet the way researchers go about building an understanding of women's experiences is unique. As Daly (2007) explained, researchers may find themselves on "a continuum upon which we position ourselves at different points" (p. 141). I chose to position myself as a partner with the organization and the study participants throughout the research process. There were several opportunities for mutual connections to develop during the interview conversations, and this impacted the data collection and interpretation that followed. The approach to engaging in this phase of the research was aligned with Middleton's (1993) explanation of how feminist data collection and analysis challenges the concept of interpreting data as a "scientifically detached observer." She believed that a researcher's efforts to assist participants with the analysis of their own experiences was a benefit she hoped to provide, while still working to ensure the women's experiences were not distorted and that they did not feel alienated in the process (Middleton, 1993).

One of the strengths of case study research is the ability to allow for comparison through the use of multiple evidence sources (f, 2003). Creswell (2009) maintained that using both qualitative and quantitative methods "is more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research" (p. 4). The primary data source in this

study was 16 in-depth interviews with network members and organizational leaders. A survey of network members was also included to capture broader perspectives of network members and corporate leaders. The survey included both quantitative and open-ended questions. These two evidence sources provided the opportunity for comparisons to be made between the 16 individuals who participated in the interviews and the broader population, which included all employees registered on the network's membership directory. The directory also contained the names and contact information for some individuals who did not consider themselves members (as reported in the survey findings).

Participant Selection Strategies

After receiving approval from the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), organizational leaders and women's network leaders from multiple Fortune 500 organizations in the region were invited to participate in the study. My approach to engaging in conversations with organizations about this research was to propose the study a collaborative effort that would first and foremost be of value to the organization and its women's network members. Meetings with senior leaders in HR and leaders of women's networks from five Fortune 500 organizations with a significant presence in the region resulted from networking connections I had established through my involvement in a women's council networking group. This group was formed to connect leaders of women's networks with one another to share best practices and engage in professional development activities. I had been involved in this networking group for several years prior to the initiation of this study and I worked with many of these organizations in consulting and advising roles. Based on my knowledge of women's networks within organizations, I established the following criteria to guide in the selection of a company that would be an appropriate partner: (1) the network operated within a company with an average or above-average representation of women in board member and officer-level

positions, verifiable through public reporting. Catalyst (2009) research suggested that three or more female board members provide the critical mass necessary for women to have a meaningful impact on the organization. The presence and support of senior women leaders has been found to be important in previous studies on women's networks and women's career advancement, (2) the network was formally sponsored by the organization. Sponsorship indicates leaders in the organization recognize the network as part of the organization's structure and provide support in some way, (3) the network had over 100 members with approximately 25% or more members described by network leaders as active or very active, (4) the network provided activities and opportunities for member interaction at a minimum of once per month, (5) career advancement or leadership development for women was identified as a goal of the network (6) the network had a formal operating structure including an established leadership team with roles clearly defined, (7) the network had been in place for at least two years.

Finding organizations to work with proved to be more challenging than originally anticipated. Representatives were reluctant to participate in this research. Some spoke candidly about these views, explaining that they did not see value in a study that would confirm what they already knew and which would result in little change. Others responded that they were interested in participating but that the timing was not right for one reason or another. Leaders in one organization responded that they were aware of the issues and already working to increase the value of their women's networks. However, they were not interested in establishing any benchmarks to help them measure future success. The company I partnered with to conduct this research was not an organization that I had worked with in the past, but the organization did fit well with my selection criteria. This Fortune 500 organization had an above average representation of women on its leadership team. Women occupied 20% of the corporate officer positions, nearly 15% of the executive vice president roles, and 25% of the board member

appointments. The women's network had been established and formally sponsored by the organization several years prior to the study. The network membership directory included a list of over 1,000 registered members representing several chapters across the country. The frequency of network meetings and events varied by chapter, however, the two largest and most active chapters organized events on a monthly basis. The network's mission did not specify career advancement as one of its primary objectives, but it did discuss career development and mentoring. The network was supported by a formal organizational structure that included network leaders, an advisory board of organizational leaders, and an executive sponsor.

Contact with the participating organization began with an email request to discuss the project with one of the company's two female executive vice presidents. The female executive I made initial contact with was in charge of leading one of the company's business sectors. She had recently been hired by the organization. Her background included senior leadership roles in human resources, and she was a self-professed strong advocate for supporting women's leadership development and advancement initiatives. She expressed her interest in the project and garnered support from other senior leaders, including the president of the company. She requested a director in human resources to meet with me to discuss the project. The director was also relatively new to the organization. The fact that both primary gatekeepers were new to the organization was beneficial to making the project possible. Both women saw this is an opportunity to evaluate the organization's talent management strategies at a strategic level.

After expressing interest in the project, the human resources director I met with worked to gain broader support among organizational leaders. Securing this support, she announced the company's intention to participate and assigned a project manager (pseudonym Laura) as the primary contact. Working as the project manager provided Laura with a unique opportunity to gain some visibility in the organization at a time when she had expressed her desire to advance.

Believing Laura would do well in this role, the director offered her this opportunity as a way to

broaden her skill-set and expand her professional network within the organization. Most of the

project execution was coordinated through Laura. Her role included providing research feedback

from Avero executives and the AWN leaders, coordinating the distribution of the survey, and

scheduling all interviews. Together, the following project plan was developed:

Table 2

Project Timeline

Week	Step
1	Completed a confidentiality agreement with the organization.
2	Company representatives (selected by the HR) reviewed and provided feedback on the survey and interview questions.
3	Recommendations for interview participants were developed in partnership with talent management leaders and the network's advisory board members.
4	Piloted the survey with a group of 10 Avero employees. The group was invited by the director of talent management and included those who had provided initial input on the survey questions.
5	Developed and distributed pre-survey communication to network members to inform them about upcoming research.
6	Confirmed organizational leader and network leader interview candidates and scheduled interviews.
7	Pilot feedback about the level of question clarity and the length of time to complete the survey was positive. Incorporated feedback from the pilot survey and gained approval from the director of talent management for the final version. Conducted interviews.
8–10	Distributed the survey to 1,300 participants across geographies (Appendix E). The invitation to participate was distributed by one of the AWN's national co-chairs (Appendix B). Completed interviews.
10–13	Analyzed interview findings. Analyzed survey findings.
14	Presented findings to the national co-chair, project manager, and talent management leader. Incorporated feedback.
15	Presented findings to organizational leaders and network leaders representing all chapters.

The interview participants were selected in partnership with the director of talent and

organizational development after sharing my request to include HR professionals involved with

network, executive sponsors (women and men), organizational leaders outside of the network,

and women's network leaders. After consulting with company representatives and advisors at the University of Minnesota, it was decided that all employees who completed the AWN survey should receive an invitation to participate in the interview portion of the study and a purposeful sample of volunteers would be selected to be interviewed (Appendix B). To prevent any association between identity and the survey responses reported, participants received the invitation to participate in an interview until after their survey responses had been submitted. Twenty-five AWN members who completed the survey (approximately 10%) expressed an interest in participating. From the list of 25, 12 individuals were randomly selected. These 12 individuals were contacted via email by the company's project manager and eight confirmed their willingness to participate. Five AWN members from office headquarters, and three from regional offices, were interviewed. An effort was made to include the perspectives of members from both the main office and regional chapters, but the views incorporated in this study are not intended in any way to be representative of the overall population.

A study overview, the interview questions, and interview consent forms were distributed to each participant in advance. Interview consent forms were reviewed at the beginning of each interview. To ensure participant anonymity, each member was asked to select a space where they could privately share their perspectives. All interviews were conducted at mutually agreeable times and locations during work hours. The interviews took place in person or by telephone. The shortest interview was 35 minutes; the longest was 70 minutes. The interviews with Avero executives and AWN leaders occurred in the following order based upon their availability: Jackie; Stephanie; Sue; Danielle; Jody; Lisa; Kevin; and Scott. Network member interviews occurred in the order in which they are presented within Chapter 4.

Data Analysis

As Ellinger et al. (2005) explained, the purpose of case study analysis is to "identify, sort through, and pattern relationships, dynamics, or other phenomena of interest within a bounded system" (p. 341). Case studies seek to identify common patterns or interactions that may arise from multiple data sources, while also considering that multiple interpretations of the same story are possible. A general analytic strategy consistent with Yin (2003) was followed to guide data collection and analysis. Two evidence sources were the focus of data analysis: quantitative findings from the survey and qualitative findings from interview transcripts. The analysis of the interview findings occurred during and immediately following each interview. Analyzing the survey findings took place after the interview analysis was complete. This two-step process was helpful to organize and manage the data. Focusing solely on the interview conversations was a necessary step for me to gather a meaningful understanding of the rich perspectives of each participant and the relationships among them. Once that step was complete, a review of the quantitative data began. After a basic analysis of the quantitative data was complete, iterative cycles of analysis of all the data continued. Insights from the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative research were compared to formulate the study conclusions.

Interview Analysis

The interview analysis process adopted for this study was based upon Ruona's (2005) qualitative data analysis process, as well as guidance from Ellinger et al. (2005) during the constant comparison phase of the analysis. Ruona described data analysis as the process of organizing information that involves complex evaluation and interpretation. The author recommended a qualitative data analysis process involving "(1) sensing themes, (2) constant comparison, (3) recursiveness, (4) inductive and deductive thinking, and (5) interpretation to generate meaning" (p. 236). Ellinger et al. proposed that researchers consider using a data

analysis process that involves entering into "iterative cycles of data collection, analysis of some kind, and in qualitative designs, use of insights from the analysis to guide the next steps of data collection" (p. 341). Ellinger et al. identified three important components of case study analysis: coding the data to answer research questions, coding the data to pull apart the story to understand underlying dynamics, and integrating different kinds of data to align with the study's conceptual framework. Ellinger et al. suggested that these three steps frequently overlap. That was the case during the data analysis phase of this particular study.

The analysis phase of the research began at the time of the first interview and insights gathered guided each consecutive interview. The insights from each conversation helped to refine the interview protocol. For example, conversations about incorporating sponsorship and projects that may be helpful for members to gain experience and visibility were more in-depth with senior leaders. Needing to understand members' perspectives about the level of middle management support for the network intensified as members shared their concerns. The process of sensing themes began with careful listening throughout the interview conversations. Note taking, however, was kept to a minimum so that I could focus on listening to participants.

Each interview conversation was documented with a hard-copy template of the interview protocol. The blank template included a list of the interview questions with writing space in between for field notes, as well as reminders of potential probing questions that may be relevant under each main topic. The body language, tone of voice, and any hesitation or self-correction were monitored in order to maintain the highest level of care for the participants' comfort level while they shared their experiences.

The process of constant comparison involved transferring key insights from each conversation to one of six master lists. There were two lists (one for effects on advancement and one for effects on organizational success) for each group of participants (organizational leader,

network leader, and network member). Tables 12-14 (pp. 173-175) resulted from this step by

step analysis process. Guidance from Ellinger et al. (2005) was relevant during this phase of the

analysis, which involved going back to each individual transcript to compare key concepts that

had been documented on the master list with the overall conversation. Emerging themes were

documented on the master list and highlighted on each of the interview transcripts. As the

analysis shifted to comparing the data across the three groups, the master lists and the transcripts

were re-reviewed to ensure that ideas emerging across groups were sufficiently accounted for.

This process of analyzing and reanalyzing interviews and field notes continued in order to

identify inconsistencies and further understand the data. Taking time for reflection between each

interview and throughout the analysis process (recursiveness) enhanced my ability to accurately

interpret the findings. DeVault (1990) cautioned that it is possible to forget or overlook important

interpretations in the analysis and to report research phases without ample reflection. To

accomplish what Daly (2007) described as "the ways in which a researcher critically monitors

and understands the role of the self in the research endeavor" (p. 188), I used an audio recorder to

capture my thoughts and reflections throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the

research. I interpreted Harding's (1987) explanation of how a researcher's background and

experiences may "frame the picture that she/he attempts to paint" (p. 9) as an important reminder

that I needed to balance the desire to fit what I had learned from my past experience and existing

studies on women's networks with the goal of accurately representing the participants' voices and

intentions without preconceived notions. Daly's assessment that researchers engaging in feminist

research acknowledge their own experiences rather than try to remain separate and distant from

research was applicable throughout the study. The final steps in the analysis process involved

integrating the findings and aligning them with relevant theory to derive reasonable conclusions.

Survey Analysis

The overall purpose of the survey analysis was to determine if connections could be made between the perceptions of those who participated in the interview conversations and the AWN members across the organization that were unable to participate in an interview. Incorporating multiple sources of data strengthened the overall conclusions by providing the opportunity to reinforce or question the interview findings (the primary focus of this study). The survey analysis focused on exploring the participants' perceptions of the role of the network (primary purpose), the value to members (primary benefits including advancement), how the network contributed to the success of the organization, and the level of organizational support for the network. Findings from the survey were reported based on the level of agreement found across various groups. Demographic and work history variables were also explored to understand the composition of network members and determine if there were any relationships between these characteristics and the level of involvement or reported benefits.

A similar qualitative strategy based on Ellinger et al. (2005) was adopted to analyze the open-ended questions on the survey. It involved coding the data to answer research questions, comparing the data to relevant interview findings, and integrating the two sets of data to align with the study's conceptual framework. Statistical tests were used as appropriate to explore important relationships that may inform the qualitative findings. The research questions and the analysis used to explore the variables relating to the network's purpose, benefits, members' career advancement, and the level of network support within the organization are discussed in the survey findings chapter; variables were compared across different chapters, network roles, and occupational categories. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine significant differences in members' mean responses across four categories: chapter location, network role, participant occupation, and the level of network involvement (activity). The survey questions

that addressed network purpose and benefits were further examined individually, across the same categories. Chi-square tests were used in tandem with cross-tabulations to determine if there were significant differences in how groups of participants reported involvement benefits. Binary logistic regression was used to determine the types of involvement (IVs) that would predict whether or not a participant would report having a sponsor (DV) (Appendix F-2) or advancement (DV) (Appendix F-1). Linear regression was used to address how the benefits of involvement (IVs) may predict the probability that a participant would report having an increased desire (DV) (Appendix F-4) or ability (DV) to advance (Appendix F-3). Linear regression was also used to determine what variables may predict perceptions that the network was strategically important (Appendix F-5).

For simple comparisons and consistency in how the findings were shared with the organization, the data are frequently reported based on the percent of respondents who answered positively (where positively is defined as: those who "strongly agreed" plus those who "agreed" for questions using the 5-point Likert scale and for those who answered "yes" to the yes/no questions). Organizational leaders expressed an interest in looking at the two highest ratings to gain a sense of how the participants' general levels of agreement varied across the areas of inquiry.

Validity and Trustworthiness Criteria

Validity and trustworthiness in this study were enhanced through careful documentation of the research processes as well as consistent efforts to incorporate an ethic of care that is consistent with a feminist case study methodology. One of the principle aspects of engaging in this research through a feminist lens was to acknowledge the importance of intention and collaboration. Providing ample self-disclosure about my background and intentions as well as inviting input from my research partners within the company throughout the research process

enabled me to establish trusting relationships with them. Making sure that the research objectives were aligned with the needs of the organization and study participants was a primary focal point throughout the research process. Attentiveness to group dynamics and maintaining an awareness of the traditional hierarchical relationships and power distances were of particular importance in the current study. For example, I carefully contemplated the value of reporting remarks that may be viewed as controversial by some individuals in the organization, and if so, how to present the data in a way that would not lead to unnecessary misunderstanding or divisiveness.

Ensuring valid and reliable results required carefully documenting each of the procedures and the steps involved in each procedure (Creswell, 2009). Yin (2003) addressed issues of validity and reliability by identifying four tests that may be relevant to case study research. These include construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Construct validity can be challenging in primarily qualitative case study research where the key constructs are intentionally open to interpretation. Construct validity was addressed in the survey by defining the constructs (Appendices E and F), incorporating diverse perspectives from multiple sources, and clearly documenting the sources of input. Essentially, what participants described as a certain construct acted as the basis for the reporting. For example, definitions of career advancement and organizational success were based on the participants' own interpretations.

To address internal validity the survey questions were reviewed by faculty advisors and organizational employees who were familiar with the network and piloted with a group of 10 Avero employees. The pilot group included the organizational employees who had provided input on the initial questions to ensure that the survey reflected their feedback. For sampling purposes, the entire membership population was included because the organization wanted to give all members the opportunity to express their views. The 261 employees (20%) who did complete the survey offered a diverse range of perspectives based upon significant differences in

their level of involvement in the network, type of network role (including non-members),

geographic location (primarily two), job level/occupation, age, length of employment at Avero,

and the business sectors they worked in. The expectation was that participants had the knowledge

required to answer the questions, but there were no forced responses. Participants could choose

to skip any question. The partially completed surveys were included in the analysis. Efforts to

increase survey validity involved asking participants to report specific occurrences and

connecting those occurrences with the interview findings and the initial theoretical assumptions

upon which the survey was based. Through this process, predicted results were confirmed or

alternative patterns or explanations were identified and explored.

External validity is associated with the extent to which findings can be generalized (Yin,

2003). Some of the study findings proved to be statistically significant using a variety of

statistical tests (Appendix F). Reliability in this study concerned organizing and categorizing the

data collection and analysis processes in ways that could be used in the future to produce similar

results. Yin suggested that multiple data collection techniques (as incorporated in this case study

design) can increase the reliability of the data collected. Exploring connections or disconnections

between existing theories on women's career development, studies on women's networks, and the

multiple data sources included in this study was also of value for the reliability of this case study

design.

Research Design Limitations

This is primarily a qualitative case study based upon a select group of individuals in one

organization. The intent was to explore the participants' self-reported beliefs about the women's

network in their company so that comparisons can be drawn across the population of members

and leaders in the organization. The findings from this study resulted from the opinions of the

participants, and their views are not intended to be representative of the perspectives of others in

the network who chose not to participate or others in the company. The questions included in the survey were not intended to represent a valid scale (one that has been previously tested and accepted as measuring a particular construct). Every effort was made to ensure that participants' views were represented accurately, and yet it is important to acknowledge that this study was influenced by my passion for women's career advancement and past experience working with women's networks in organizations.

Chapter 4: Interview Findings

This chapter presents findings from the 16 interviews with Avero employees. The chapter begins with an overview of the formally sponsored women's network within this organization. Second, the findings from the interview conversations with organizational leaders (also referred to as executives), network leaders, and network members are reported. The key themes arising within each of the three groups (organizational leaders, network leaders, and network members) are reported individually and summarized by research question at the end of each section. The chapter concludes with summary tables outlining the overarching themes across the three groups to address the primary research question: How do formal women's networks affect members' career advancement and the success of their sponsoring organizations?

History of the Avero Women's Network (AWN)

Referred to as Avero Inc., the company represented in this case is a large multinational organization headquartered in the Midwest. The women's network formally sponsored by Avero, referred to in this case as the AWN, was conceived in 2005 by executive women who worked for the organization. This group of women attended a networking event sponsored by an industry network that was established to further the career development and advancement of women within this particular industry. Women across a variety of organizations, including many women representing companies that Avero considered to be customers, attended this event. The women were so inspired by the event that they discussed the possibility of creating something similar for women working for Avero.

In late 2005, a group of female employees from across the U.S. gathered at the company's office headquarters to engage in a conversation about women's leadership in the organization. The meeting was organized by executive women working at Avero's headquarters. The purpose of the meeting was to initiate a grassroots effort within the company to form the

AWN. The structure of the women's network was inspired by an industry network's model.

Over the next four years, several chapters formed throughout the company (covering a broad

geographic area). At the time of this study, the AWN had more than 1,000 members in several

chapters across the U.S. The network had not been introduced to Avero divisions outside of the

United States. Any employee who supported the AWN's mission was welcome to join, but

leadership roles were typically earmarked for women only in order to maximize the number of

women who would be able to develop new leadership skills.

 The internal company documentation describing the AWN referred to it as a resource for

women in the company to fulfill their personal and professional goals. The network set out to

accomplish this by providing members with access to mentoring, professional development,

community involvement activities, and support from others. A review of the internal

communication pieces determined that the focus of this network was on women's career

fulfillment rather than leadership development or career advancement. This was an important

first step in exploring how the network's practices were aligned with members' career

advancement and the organization's overall success.

 From beginning to end, the process of conducting this study was done in collaboration

with the organization. Pseudonyms are used to identify the name of the company, the women's

network, and each of the participants. The findings summaries are presented by role in the

following way: Avero leaders' perspectives, AWN leaders' perspectives, and AWN members'

perspectives.

Organizational Leaders

 Five Avero executives participated in this study. Three of the leaders were employed in

the human resources (HR) division. Their job levels range from director to executive vice

president. A senior vice president in one of the company's functional divisions and an executive

vice president of one of largest business sectors in the organization also participated. All of them

served as AWN advisors (a small group of executives who volunteered to act as advisors and

supporters of the AWN). Four of the leaders were based at the company headquarters and one

was based at the company's largest regional office (the R2 office). The AWN chapter located

within the largest regional office is abbreviated in this study as the R2 chapter (the second largest

chapter) to simplify the reporting.

Organizational Leader/Executive #1: Stephanie

Stephanie served in a senior leadership role within the HR function. Stephanie had been

with the organization for less than two years. She brought with her a high level of knowledge and

understanding about the value of women's leadership networks through her prior role in an

organization with a women's network. She was one of five executives on the AWN Advisory

Board.

Stephanie's position in HR required her to be actively involved in the AWN. Her

primary roles in the network were to offer guidance related to AWN activities. Stephanie is

passionate about connecting women to professional development opportunities. When I asked

her about the purpose of the AWN, Stephanie responded, "Hopefully several [things]. To

connect women at [the company] to each other, to build a sense of community, and to provide

opportunities for skill-building, networking, and learning." She believed the opportunities for the

development of women who serve in leadership roles is especially important.

Stephanie: Members' Career Advancement

Stephanie and I discussed the general ways that women's networks could engage

members such as: networking; peer support; career coaching; advancement and advocacy; and

finally, at the highest level, business development. She was comfortable thinking about the AWN

within this conceptual framework. Based on her past experience, she confidently stated, "I don't

think we are in the advancement and business advisor space." I asked Stephanie if she believed

the AWN could impact a member's career advancement and she hesitantly responded:

> It feels like an indirect impact. If the development experiences through the AWN are sort of seen as resume builders in the context of potential new opportunities, then I think yes. I don't think the AWN is in the space of more active sponsorship. You know where you are really scanning the pool of women and putting them in candidate spaces and then actually moving them into different roles and then sort of tracking that movement as part of the AWN. We are not there.

Stephanie discussed the importance of the AWN's leadership roles and her desire to be

more deliberate about placing women into specific leadership development opportunities that

would be most beneficial to them individually.

The value of having executives serving in a more active role to support AWN members'

advancement was also important to Stephanie. "I'd love to see us get in the space of more active

sponsoring. That's something you put on the executive level members," Stephanie explained.

Stephanie and I exchanged ideas about the types of activities executives sponsors might engage in

to facilitate women's career advancement. Highlighting a woman's achievements to other

executives, or recommending a woman for a key assignment are examples of the types of

strategies we discussed.

Recognizing the need for more senior women (and men) to actively engage in sponsoring

members of the network, a small group of senior women at Avero, including Stephanie and Sue,

had recently started meeting informally to ponder the issue. The group was in the early stages of

identifying ways they could encourage other leaders to become stronger advocates for advancing

women in the company. Stephanie said the previous focus had been on encouraging leaders to

"just show up."

Stephanie emphasized the significance of the development opportunities available to

network members through the annual professional women's development day. The AWN has

sponsored this annual event at both the headquarters and the R2 regional chapter. Stephanie's

enthusiasm was notable as she described this keynote event:

> They do a great job with it. The CEO kicks it off. The Business Line President and the Executive Sponsor will be there as well. We've also got an external speaker. . . . They work really hard to bring in some senior people, the so called "heavy hitters" in terms of speakers who can provide that senior perspective and also at the same time to emphasize the corporate importance of the AWN. There are also different sessions. One may be on performance management, presentation and communication, or skill-building.

Stephanie shared the positive feedback she had received from members about the value

of the event. She explained that female members always looked forward to it. "It's a few

hundred people, and it always sells out. It's free. I mean they always fill up the seats," she

explained. She believed members especially appreciated opportunities to learn from (and interact

with) Avero's senior women leaders.

Stephanie: Organizational Success

Our conversation shifted to considering how the AWN may benefit the organization as a

whole. Stephanie explained that she believed the AWN indirectly contributes to Avero's success,

principally by increasing the level of engagement of women within the organization. She

explained that by having the AWN, there was an increased sense of community and a sense of

connection among members. She continued, "If that leads, in particular, to women wanting to

stay at the company longer than they otherwise would have and or have a higher sense of

commitment to [the company] than you get higher output." Stephanie contended that higher

levels of productivity and contribution "absolutely" contribute to the company's success. She

also discussed the importance of the AWN's role in building the organization's (positive)

reputation. Through its outward facing role in community engagement, the AWN impacted the

company brand in a positive way.

Stephanie's perception of the AWN's strategic importance was considered within the context of a business development focus. This was likely due to her previous experience working within an organization that leveraged its women's network to engage both new and existing customers. She explained, "I think we have a ways to go to connect it more explicitly to a customer lens. . . . I don't see the AWN alive in that context." She believed there was an opportunity for the AWN to do more to connect with customers and become more involved in recruiting women to work for Avero. The AWN currently worked with HR to welcome interns and new hires into the organization, but there were already discussions about potentially engaging AWN members earlier in the recruiting process. The goal of this initiative would be to encourage women to work for the company, particularly those at senior levels.

I asked Stephanie if she had any thoughts on what the AWN could do to increase its value to both members and the organization. She believed that both company leaders and AWN leaders could be more purposeful in how they assigned individuals to serve in leadership roles. Matching members with specific leadership development opportunities in this way may help to leverage the member's skill set and better support her career objectives. She discussed the downside of decision-making practices in an all-volunteer organization where positions are often filled by anyone who is willing to do the work rather than by deliberately matching someone's skill set and career goals with an existing development opportunity. Stephanie again recognized the need for more involvement and advocacy from senior leadership. She discussed specific pilot programs happening outside of the AWN to engage in this process of identifying, selecting, developing, and tracking women's movements within the organization. For example, two divisions were sponsoring teams to participate in business-related projects that they had described as "action learning projects." The teams of women and men who were given a specific business-sector project to work on. The projects provided team members with an opportunity to address a

pertinent business issue and be evaluated by senior leaders in the division. The program was

designed to help a diverse group of team members gain visibility, develop expertise, and become

better positioned to advance. Stephanie was excited about the initiative and hoped it could be

expanded to other areas of the firm; the AWN was one possible area. "We've said let's try

something and see if we can get it to grow," she explained.

Organizational Leader/Executive #2: Sue

As a senior vice president leading one of the company's functional divisions, Sue is one

of the most senior women in the organization. Sue was part of the original group of women who

organized the AWN in 2004-2005. Her role in the network included serving as a former

executive sponsor and current AWN Advisory Board member. As an executive sponsor, Sue

served as a champion of the AWN; her role included allocating financial resources, fostering

executive support, and acting as an advocate for the network. Sue is very passionate about

women's career advancement and she expressed her enthusiasm and appreciation for the

company's willingness to engage in this research. As an AWN champion, she believed it was

critical to have executive-level women engaged. Sue made it a priority to participate in AWN

events and encouraged both male and female executives to become involved as often as possible.

Sue also contributed as an advisor to the AWN leaders who planned the annual development day.

Sue believed that the AWN's purpose was to provide women with networking opportunities, a

sense of belonging, and help with advancing their careers.

Sue: Members' Career Advancement

When I asked Sue to share her perspective on how the AWN may affect members' career

advancement, she passionately expressed her position:

> To me, it should be about advancing women, and in my view, we have lost sight of
> this. We are into the bake sales and clothing drives. We have a metric around the
> clothing drive: how many articles we submitted. Where are the metrics on how we

develop women? We have a professional development day. Are we seeing advancement there? I don't think we've measured advancement or anything! Right now, it's just a bunch of women running around doing all this good stuff and nobody knows we're doing it and are we really advancing? It goes back to your point about what is the objective of the AWN.

I could sense the frustration in her voice as she responded. It felt as if Sue appreciated having someone listen to her describe the challenges she faced as she attempted to leverage the AWN to advance women. Sue was becoming increasingly impatient with the company's progress in developing women to succeed and advance within the company. When asked if she knew of anyone who had advanced as a result of their involvement in the AWN, she discussed a recent promotion of an executive woman who had been an advisory board member and active supporter of the AWN. Sue believed her willingness to "step up" to support the AWN likely gave her increased visibility with other corporate leaders, but she also did not believe her involvement in the network played a significant role in the promotion.

Sue had many good ideas about how to make the AWN more effective, but her comments suggested there was not a clear sense of direction among senior leaders regarding how to move forward. She described efforts to incorporate mentoring and questioned the extent to which it was effective. Sue made the distinction between mentoring and sponsorship, with sponsorship involving more active advocacy (on the part of the sponsor) to facilitate advancement. Sponsorship is important to Sue and she believed corporate executives should be acting as more direct advocates of women and their career advancement. Sue believed that there was a real lack of understanding within the organization over what it simply means to "sponsor." Sue had educated her entire team about the value of sponsorship and she worked at the highest organizational levels to engage both male and female leaders in discussions about the need to do more to advance women. She provided an example of her outreach to the company's newest female board member. "I had a chance to do some orientation with her and she was fabulous,"

Sue explained. Her conversations with the new board member led her to believe that the board was expecting the company to do more to advance women. However, Sue did not believe the company had the necessary systems and processes in place to do so at that time.

Sue was well informed on organizational strategies to advance women and committed to moving some of these strategies forward.   Sue suggested creating metrics to track women's advancement and identify the types of development opportunities that are most likely to facilitate such advancement. Based on her observations of an industry network's use of metrics, Sue believed it was possible to identify connections between the types of competencies women developed and their likelihood of advancement. She was excited to explore how the AWN could adopt similar measures. Sue identified the need to have more senior women engaged in network activities, and she also recognized that senior men needed to be involved. Sue was actively working with the other advisory board members to determine the best ways to accomplish this. Sue was not aware of any specific examples of women advancing as a result of their involvement within the AWN, but her position was clear. The AWN "can't hurt!"

Sue: Organizational Success

When I asked about how the AWN influenced organizational success as a whole, Sue explained:

> First of all, I think we get higher levels of engagement. Engagement is important in every company. Good engagement equals better results. This definitely does not hurt for engagement. Second, we are trying to develop skills. Lately, it's been around professional development and how to do a good job creating a professional development plan. But, you know, it's like how could it even be more? Right? Like if we could connect it. It could be the voice of women at a higher level. That would be very strategic.

Her response offered an example of how the AWN could have a positive impact on members' advancement and organizational success simultaneously. When I asked Sue to think

about how the AWN may engage in activities that would directly impact the organization's profitability, she responded by saying:

> Today, I can't connect anything right straight to that. Today. We've talked about this because I am on the [she mentions her leadership role in the industry networking group for women] and companies like [she refers to many of their large global customers] could share their stories about advancing women.

Sue believed there were many opportunities for the AWN to be more strategic, but that the company was not making progress at an acceptable rate. Sue candidly expressed what she had been suggesting throughout our conversation:

> We have such an opportunity. If we could just get our heads around what the AWN is really about. I'm even OK if it's about networking. If we just recognize it. Then I would be less frustrated. We're doing all this stuff to focus on advancement and I'm not sure the two connect . . . if we could connect, there would be so much more power.

Sue went on to explain some of the challenges of making the AWN more powerful. She focused on what she described as a frustrating lack of organizational infrastructure and the necessary resources to support AWN success. "It's hard, because no one is responsible. That's why you have a few women that just want to help in their free time," Sue explained. She talked about a large global customer that had a committee of senior leaders put in place to make certain the company was making progress with advancing women. "We need to get [the President and the CEO] really comfortable. We'd love to bring our customers in to say they did it and we can do it, too," she asserted.

Organizational Leader/Executive #3: Lisa

Lisa is a director in the human resources division. She was also one of the first women to become involved in the AWN. She described her participation in that founding event and how the focus was on making the organization a better place for women to work. Lisa explained:

> At the end of the two day meeting, [the CEO] came back and we proposed what we wanted to do. We had crafted our vision statement, our mission statement, kind of our high level organization and asked for his permission to proceed. He said yes.

Lisa described her many leadership roles in the AWN, including: chapter chair, mentoring committee chair, development committee participant, and speaker at the AWN's annual professional development event. Her current leadership role involves helping to start new chapters of the AWN across the country and, hopefully, internationally as well. When I asked what she believed the purpose of the AWN was, Lisa quoted the mission back to me and further explained her belief that the AWN was about offering a place where women could feel safe, meet other like-minded people, and feel like they can access opportunities to develop themselves in a safe environment. I asked Lisa to explain what "safe" meant to her. She replied:

> For example, if someone wanted to safely practice their leadership skills, they can volunteer to be on one of the committees. There's one example I remember where someone was so afraid to speak in public and so she forced herself to at least ask a question during a meeting at first, and this went on for some time, and that was her only goal: just to be brave enough to ask the question.

This example was surprising to me on multiple levels. My previous conversations with Avero leaders focused on how the AWN could be leveraged to advance women into leadership roles and expand the company's business objectives. I was now listening to Lisa describing a story of how one member had accomplished her highly personal goal of asking a question during an AWN meeting. Based on her example, I felt it was important to gain Lisa's perspective on the target audience within the organization. She responded that the audience was likely women at lower levels in the organization. I recognized that the AWN has been charged with many different roles and that it had a vast representation of women at very different points in their careers. With such a broad constituency, I also understood that it was difficult to adequately address the needs of all members. After meeting with Lisa, it became clear why there seemed to be so much confusion about what the AWN is and what it ultimately should be. Stephanie and

Sue had argued there was an opportunity to make the AWN a much more strategic part of the

company's efforts to advance women, which seemed like an aggressive goal based on what I was

learning about the history of women's representation in the organization. Yet, Lisa was

describing the network as safe place for women to create a sense of belonging. I questioned

whether or not it could be both.

Lisa went on to describe how much she appreciated the support of the AWN among

leaders in the organization. "I was really pleased at an event we had last year when I looked

around the room and we did have so many directors and vice presidents there, because we want to

show that all women can participate," she explained. Lisa was now emphasizing the importance

of senior leadership buy-in and the notion that all women should feel that the AWN had

something to offer. I surmised that if the network focused too much on supporting the needs of

women like the one Lisa described then it may risk alienating those who were serious about

advancing within the organization. Likewise, I realized that if the AWN focused solely on

leadership and advancement, others may be left behind.

Lisa: Members' Career Advancement

I was eager to hear Lisa's perspective on the role of the AWN in advancing women

within the organization. She believed that the AWN could impact advancement, but she

tempered this by explaining advancement could be seen in many different ways (e.g.,

advancement does not necessarily equal a promotion). Lisa gave several examples of how the

opportunity to develop new skills may be considered a form of advancement. She shared an

example of how her own skill development through the network did lead to an advancement

opportunity:

> For me, it really gave me an opportunity as well. I was practicing my facilitation
> skills. . . . I knew I wanted to hone those skills so I volunteered to speak at meetings

as well. And so that just gave me another area to practice and hone my skills. I do think some of my exposure through the AWN led to my next job.

Lisa talked about the increased exposure she had with her current boss in particular, "I kept crossing paths with [her current boss] and one day he said, 'You know, maybe you need to come work on my team.'"

Lisa discussed the value of other members' experiences developing connections that led to new career opportunities, as well as the visibility that members gained through participating in a leadership role. She described the committee work focused on planning the annual event as "really high profile." Recalling Lisa talking about her leadership role on the mentoring committee, I asked her about the role of mentoring within the AWN. Lisa mentioned the need to re-design the mentoring program to upgrade its effectiveness. Lisa responded, "I would say we struggled probably the most in supporting a mentoring program, because it takes a lot of effort, and we're doing this as volunteers. I think when we do it on a small scale we can manage it."

Given her experience with leading the mentoring committee, I asked Lisa if she had any thoughts on the differences between mentoring and sponsorship. She believed that, in comparison to mentors, sponsors are more active advocates for an individual's career advancement. Obtaining a sponsor was different from obtaining a mentor and required more effort on the part of the participant. She believed sponsorship should play an important role in facilitating women's career advancement within the company, but she was not certain how this principle could be embedded within the AWN. "You can't just go out and ask somebody to be your sponsor . . . we all have to put our best selves forward so we can earn a sponsor someday," Lisa explained. "I think that we [as a company] probably need to do a lot of education about what sponsorship really is and how people can play that role." Lisa raised the need to educate others in the company about the role of sponsorship and how people can serve in that role.

Lisa: Organizational Success

Lisa believed the AWN contributed to organizational success in a variety of ways. She

discussed its value in engaging women and serving as a catalyst to foster change. When asked

how the AWN may be strategically important to the organization, Lisa didn't hesitate to reply:

> I'll give you a real-life example of [it] being strategically important. Two years ago,
> we announced a [company merger]. And we [as the AWN] soon found out that they
> did not have employee networks. We were like, oh my gosh, we've got to let them
> know what we have. And so we worked together . . . and it gave people something
> positive to connect with during all this uncertainty, and it really helped them. So I
> would say that's where we could very strategically help in times of a big change.

This example, however, could apply equally well to any organization operating in a

business environment where large changes have become more the norm than the exception. Lisa

also discussed how the AWN was involved in helping the company effectively address diversity

as an organizational issue. "I know right now we have a couple members of the AWN that are

actually participating in a new diversity steering committee, and so I think that's really a

testament to valuing the voice of AWN members," she explained. I was interested in Lisa's

perspective regarding the extent to which the AWN should engage in projects, like the action

learning pilots that are underway in other parts of the organization, as a way to provide visibility

and enhance skill development opportunities. Lisa was candid on this point:

> I love the concept. I think we have been so busy as a company. I'm not sure we
> have the capacity to take something like that on, because in the last two years, the
> work load of the whole company has been just a real strain.

Lisa described the difficulty in making sure that existing leadership positions in the AWN

were filled. She identified an ongoing dilemma, "So, I don't know if we are ready for that and

someday hopefully we are. It's just you can only bite off so much when you're all volunteers."

I then asked Lisa if she thought there was ever the potential to have someone in a role

dedicated to leading some of the AWN initiatives. Her response was a flat out "no." Lisa

explained that the company CEO was afraid that having someone in a dedicated role would take away a lot of the passion of the dedicated group of volunteers. I was perplexed and somewhat taken aback by this reasoning. I asked Lisa if this made sense to her and if she thought it would be a good idea to have a certain amount of her "official" time allotted to work on AWN activities. Her response, not surprisingly, was a resounding "yes."

Organizational Leader/Executive #4: Kevin

Kevin is a senior executive in the HR division. He has been with the company for several years. Like Stephanie and Sue, he is a member of the AWN Advisory Board. Kevin displayed genuine interest in the topic and sincere curiosity about this research project.

When I asked Kevin how he was involved with the AWN, he modestly downplayed his role, "My role is primarily through the governance body." He further explained, "I suppose beyond that I am an unpaid consultant providing counseling in some areas where I may have some knowledge." We both laughed as I added that I could appreciate what it is like to be in an unpaid consulting role; certainly those involved in the AWN could as well. Kevin smiled and jokingly looked over to his desk as he prepared to respond to my question about the purpose of the AWN. Kevein explained, "I think the mission is to help the advancement of women in the organization and ensure we have a culture that allows everybody, in this case women, to come [in] and do their best work."

Although Kevin mentioned advancement when explaining the purpose, much of our conversation about the role of the AWN was tied to organizational culture. Kevin believed women would be more inclined to stay with the organization, because they felt supported, so the AWN served as "a vehicle for improving the organization's culture." He believed the AWN "contributed significantly to attracting and retaining talent."

Kevin: Members' Career Advancement

Kevin provided multiple examples of how the AWN may potentially support women's career advancement, including helping the organization recruit successful women; networking opportunities; professional development, including mentoring; and the ability to influence organizational policies and practices. He also viewed the AWN as capable of effectively influencing Avero executives to enhance development opportunities for women and/or to eliminate obstacles (of whatever type) that may exist. Specifically, the AWN could help leaders in the organization understand what they could do to support women's career success.

I asked Kevin if he believed there were specific ways the AWN could support women's career advancement. He referenced the mentoring opportunities available to members and noted some concerns about the quality of mentoring available, "I don't think they [network leaders] fully leveraged mentoring. There is an accountability piece of mentoring which is often ignored. Sometimes, it's too much mutual support and people need to be held accountable for what they say they are going to do," Kevin explained.

Since the issue of sponsorship had come up in so many previous conversations, I was excited to ask Kevin about his perspective on the role of sponsorship in facilitating women's career advancement. Kevin believed members of the AWN had gained more from mentoring than sponsorship, and he did not have a clear vision of how sponsorship would take place through the AWN. "With respect to sponsorship, it can get a little political. You don't want people jockeying to get so and so as their sponsor. It would be a little counterproductive," he explained.

Each conversation with the study participants generated new questions or opportunities for clarifications. With Kevin, I took the opportunity to share a troubling discrepancy that had arisen in the interviews: AWN leaders appeared to believe there was a more direct connection between involvement and advancement than the executives I had interviewed. Kevin listened

carefully and responded, "I think the AWN's influence is influence. It's more indirect." I could

see Kevin carefully processing the conversation. He continued, "It could have a more direct and

impactful role. I don't want to sell it short."

Kevin: Organizational Success

Kevin's feedback affirmed my belief that there are important connections between

general organizational success and women's career advancement. Before this conversation, I

would have not considered recruiting women as a strategy of the women's network for advancing

women, but it was becoming clearer. Kevin was intensely focused as he responded to my

question about how the AWN could impact organizational success on a macro level. Kevin

explained how much the company relied on people to be successful. He stressed the importance

of attracting and retaining high quality leaders in the organization. "We just had business reviews

and every single business leader said first and foremost talent is either the enabler or the key

resistence point." He stressed the need to continue to make progress on moving the company in a

direction that would enable it to be successful developing and advancing a diverse talent pool.

He explained, "We've gotta get going."

Kevin appeared genuinely interested in supporting the overall success of the AWN.

However, it was also evident that, like everyone else I had talked with, he was not mandated with

leveraging the AWN to increase the representation of women in leadership roles within the

organization.

Kevin had some additional thoughts on how the AWN could become more strategically

important. One of his primary concerns was that the AWN could become too focused on

community involvement activities. He recognized the enthusiasm behind community

involvement and the potential for members to develop some key leadership skills through these

volunteer efforts. However, he cautioned, "I don't want the AWN to be viewed as an organization that is focused on charitable activity. He believed that if it were viewed that way, it would fail.

I was curious about Kevin's position on the concept of engaging in action learning projects like those being piloted in other areas of the company to further members' advancement and organizational success—a question that I received very different answers to during the interview process. Kevin shared his personal insights regarding the question and the existing initiative, "We are going to incorporate action learning into some of our key leadership programs and we are being very attentive to make sure there is diverse representation of gender and ethnicity." Kevin explained his view that projects like this tend to be more valuable for individual than the organization, as a whole. He continued, "I've worked on these types of programs in the past and what I've learned is that it's very hard for projects like that, it's unusual that a project like that would take off, that somehow it would be implemented." He reiterated that projects like this can enable individuals to gain exposure to people in different functions, different sectors, and different geographies.

Kevin was not sure how these types of projects would potentially work within the AWN and its framework. He explained, "I'm not sure how we would do it. I'm not sure [about] giving a project to the AWN like that, because it's such a big organization." I shared more of my knowledge about the value of leveraging women's networks and Kevin seemed to appreciate what he had learned. He mentioned that the topics we discussed would be something he would share at an executive meeting the following week. At this point in our conversation, Kevin took the opportunity to share with me what he had learned about the value of leadership development initiatives in general:

The research I've read says that all of that is only going to influence 10-25% of development and that most development occurs on the job. But, it's not just doing the job; it's the reflection and experience. It's what you gain from understanding and learning about what I did that worked well and what I didn't do so well. So, I think the AWN can be instrumental in helping to identify opportunities and be that kind of a network. As well as helping people get the most out of those experiences.

Eventually, Kevin shifted back to his holistic perspective. Based on his many years as an HR leader, Kevin believed there was really only one way to impact women's representation within the organization. Kevin explained, "In my mind, any progress from a representation standpoint [the number of women in senior roles, in this case] is going to come down measuring it and holding people accountable." He described the type of accountability he was ideally looking for:

> Every business leader and every function leader are accountable and saying where they are and what they are going to do to get [to] where they want to be. Then, identifying or isolating the actors and evaluating what helped or hindered progress and at least tie part of someone's pay to progress in that area.

Kevin seemed skeptical, though, about whether the organization was working toward this level of accountability. Kevin explained, "Others in the organization would say that's a quota system and you are going to make bad selection decisions, because you are going to be paying people to make the wrong decisions." Kevin did not believe that was true. In fact, he attributed a part of his past company's success to the willingness of leaders in the organization to embrace such metrics.

Organizational Leader/Executive #5: Scott

My final leadership conversation was with Scott, an executive vice president and avid supporter of the largest AWN chapter outside of the headquarters (R2). Scott has been with the organization for the majority of his professional career and recently moved into a new role as the leader of one of company's largest divisions (which had been part of a recent acquisition). When I asked Scott about how he had become involved with the AWN, he explained that he had participated in an offsite meeting (four or five years ago) with other senior leaders to have an open dialogue about current organizational culture. He described how this meeting had deeply impacted him:

> Frankly speaking, there were a number of things that I would say, at the very least, you know, pretty concerning and especially as it related to women in our organization . . . you sit through one of these sessions and you maybe had some level of ignorance before and of course, you know, after you don't. And once you know, I think for most people, you have to do something about it.

One of the things Scott decided to do was join the AWN. Part of his willingness to participate was driven by others in the organization asking him to support the AWN. He also discussed the relationships he had developed with others during the above-mentioned offsite meeting. Due to his concerns about the organization's culture, he became motivated (along with others) to try to drive corporate change. I asked if his concerns were related to the representation of women in the organization. Scott responded by explaining that there was a profound representation problem. His business line comprised approximately 96% men, yet, the customer base was 95% women. He recalled one situation that involved a very large account:

> The customer came to us and said, "Just out of curiosity, do you have any corporate account people you can put on this account that are not white males?" Something we need to deal with right! We need to have women in the right kind of positions, because that's what our customers look like.

Scott went on to explain certain accounts of inappropriate behavior:

> So for one example, this young woman was called "the token." It was to the point where you say, okay, this is really unacceptable. So we had to take action and we have.

He concluded that story by informing me that a woman now leads that entire business sector. Scott was a strong believer that developing a large pool of women was essential to promoting women into leadership roles like this and was proud to say that he believed he had made a significant impact in that division.

Scott: Members' Career Advancement

Scott believed the AWN could indirectly impact women's career advancement. He offered a couple of examples. First, he believed that the professional development day was of value to all women, because it encouraged women to start thinking about their careers in different ways. He emphasized the significance of senior women sharing their career experiences at the event. "I think, at the very least, that gives insight for the broader audience into okay, here's how I should be thinking about my career, my experiences," he explained. Scott also mentioned the opportunities for members to interact with Avero executives. He described his experience as the most senior leader who had attended the event:

> I met a bunch of women at that event that I did not know, even in my own business, including some women who are engineers from very good engineering schools. . . I'm like holy cow, I've got to keep my eye on them. These are very bright individuals who I had not met before. So can I help their careers? Absolutely.

Scott also talked about opportunities for those in the AWN to take on leadership roles. He believed these roles provided women with additional ways to develop their leadership skills and interact with senior leaders in the company. Scott observed what he believed to be an increased level of engagement from women who served in such roles.

I asked Scott if he would be willing to share his perspective about the role of mentoring and sponsorship through the AWN. Scott explained that senior leaders were actively discussing

the varied concepts of mentoring and sponsorship. "One of the things that really came up at the executive level . . . was this idea of moving from mentoring to sort of more sponsorship. And actually, I think there's a place probably for both . . . but, I do like this idea of moving to sponsorship," Scott explained. He described what sponsorship might look like if he personally identified a really talented person. "I'm going to keep them in my little talent pool, as I'm moving people around and/or sponsoring people for other jobs in other businesses."

Scott was excited to leverage the value of the AWN in his region. He confirmed his support for the new AWN pilot mentoring program targeted at a small group of emerging women leaders in his region. Similar to the model at the HQ office, the R2 chapter was planning to match participants with senior leaders in the organization who could help facilitate the members' career development and advancement.

Scott: Organizational Success

Scott conveyed his perspective about how the AWN could contribute to organizational success by focusing on the company's need to recruit and retain women. He shared his knowledge about the growing percentage of highly educated women in the workplace. He observed that the percentage of women in the company was not reflective of the workforce as a whole. Scott summed up why it was so important for organizations to develop strategies to attract, retain, and advance women:

> So, if we just use the math, for no other reason, if we just strictly looked at the math, how are we going to be competitive moving forward and maintain the talent levels we need if we are carving down the pool immediately? Okay, let's say some women are still going to be in the pool. But, if we have a pretty tough environment, it's clearly going to decrease the pool right? So then you just chuck it down . . . all of a sudden you're sitting there with a significantly reduced talent pool in a much more competitive market right?

In other words, Scott suggested that the AWN could improve the company's ability maintain a talent pool of women by fostering a culture that supports women's career success. Scott

proceeded to explain his belief that there were many other reasons why the organization should

support the success of women within the company. For him, it was also a highly personal issue.

He continued on:

> So okay, I have two daughters, and now, I'll make it personal . . . during one of these
> off-sites one of the questions asked was basically, would you want your own
> daughter in this business working for [company name]? And you take a step back
> and go, wow, not so sure. And so, that's not a good thing. And then, we had many
> other comments like that. But, the point is, we've made tremendous progress. You
> know there's everything from the micro personal reason all the way up to the macro
> math.

Scott reiterated his belief that the AWN was important to organizational success, because

of its ability to engage the workforce and act as a voice for the organization as a whole. I recalled

hearing Kevin referencing the AWN in a similar way as well. Scott believed that the work he had

done to support the AWN in his region had "fired up" the team. He continued:

So if we want people to give that extra effort, I think we've got a group of highly

engaged people that are now willing to give an extra effort. And so, if that's the

difference between two companies, and often times it is, that's a big deal!

Scott elaborated on what he had meant when he described the AWN as the voice of the

company. He believed the issues raised by the AWN were the same issues that other employees

believed the organization needed to work on. From Scott's perspective, "It's not just [the AWN],

really in a way, it's not just about women."

My final question for Scott related to the action learning projects taking place throughout

the organization. He was curious about this program. He believed these types of projects would

be of value to the AWN, but he emphasized the need for more to be done across the company's

business and line functions. Scott explained, "With the explosion of our growth, and the talent

we're going to need, we won't get there unless we jump on it [incorporating action learning]

across our businesses and our functions." He believed the AWN was having an impact, but he

recognized there was more to be done. Scott explained, "I'm glad we are looking at it. It's been good. But, how do we take it to the next level? I have a lot of work to do to have the right representation."

Summary of Findings: Organizational Leaders

The Avero executives who participated in this study offered mixed perspectives regarding the AWN's effects on members' career advancement and organizational success. While the AWN is highly valued, the predominant thinking of Avero executives is that it does not, in its current state, directly impact members' advancement. The AWN is especially appreciated for its positive influence on organizational culture and employee engagement, both of which were perceived to be important factors in supporting women's career success and organizational success. As Avero's most senior HR leader explained, the company would have a very difficult time attracting and retaining women without the AWN because of the company's historically male-dominated culture. Recognizing that the network was not focused enough on advancement did not take away from the executives' view point that the AWN served a critical role in the company. Key themes related to the leaders' perspectives on how the network affected members' career advancement included: targeted development (particularly in leadership roles), robust mentoring (focused on more active sponsorship), and increased levels of measurement and accountability to evaluate success.

The company executives also believed the AWN impacted organizational success by influencing organizational policies, recruiting practices, and customer engagement. When asked whether or not the AWN was viewed as strategically important, the executives reiterated what they had previously said about how the AWN contributes to organizational success, yet questioned the extent to which the AWN was advancing women at the time. However, they did express a desire to develop a better understanding of how the network could more directly

influence members' career advancement.   Leaders viewed this research as a valuable step in determining the direction of the AWN moving forward.

Organizational Leaders' Perspectives on Members' Career Advancement

Four out of the five Avero executives viewed the connections between involvement in the AWN and women's career advancement to be somewhat indirect. The AWN was primarily viewed as an organizational resource designed to increase employee engagement and provide opportunities for networking rather than to offer a path for women to obtain a promotion. The one executive who believed the path to advancement was more direct shared her experience of developing a relationship with someone through the network that helped her secure a promotion.

All five of the executives viewed the AWN as valuable for members' professional development. They were open to the possibility of the AWN having a more direct and impactful role on women's career advancement, but no one appeared to be taking ownership of it. Leaders offered a variety of perspectives about how the organization may leverage the AWN to more significantly influence members' career advancement. The lack of infrastructure and the accountability required to facilitate advancement were identified as challenges at this time.

From the five executives' perspectives, the AWN is a vehicle for delivering targeted professional development programs to women. The types of development opportunities ranged from broad-based events, like the annual development day, to specific opportunities for women to excel in leadership roles. They emphasized the importance of the annual event because it focused on career development strategies exclusively for women. Leaders also viewed this event as a way to demonstrate the organization's commitment to women within the company. Four of the five executives stressed the benefits to members of taking on leadership roles within the AWN. These positions strengthened members' leadership skills and increased their visibility with senior leaders.

Though leaders acknowledged that members were benefiting from the development experiences, there was also a general sense that the organization could do more to provide women with leadership development opportunities. One strategy put forth was to be more purposeful about how members were placed into leadership roles versus the "take what you can get" approach that had been in practice. The two male leaders stressed that it is not enough to provide targeted development opportunities solely within the AWN; development opportunities need to take place on the job as well. There was no clear understanding of how strategic projects would be integrated or that the network would have the capacity to manage such an undertaking.

Three of the five executives underscored the importance of mentoring women through the AWN to facilitate advancement, but they questioned the value of the AWN's mentoring program. The AWN is now shifting to a new mentoring strategy intended to offer more targeted development to emerging women leaders. This change in strategy was intended to strengthen the AWN's ability to leverage mentoring to advance women within the organization. All of the conversations with Avero executives included the topic of mentorship versus sponsorship; they agreed that company leaders would benefit from education about how they could serve in more of a sponsorship role. The challenge ahead would be to shift from a focus on trying to get senior leaders "to just show up" to enabling leaders to become effective advocates.

All five executives agreed that developing effective strategies to advance more women was an important issue for the company to address. Four of the five executives acknowledged the necessity for more accountability in order to make this happen. The female executives appeared to be more focused on the company's progress specifically related to advancing women, whereas the male executives focused on creating an organizational culture that would lead to a larger talent pool of women to draw from. In other words, the female executives appeared to be leading corporate efforts to make advancing women a business priority.

Though the organization had been challenged by board members, senior leaders, and customers to place a greater emphasis on developing and advancing women, no one seemed to be accountable or responsible for leading this effort. Senior leaders conveyed their commitment to the AWN, but the infrastructure required to make the network more impactful was not in place. Executives expressed the need to develop an organizational infrastructure that made it easier for women to advance as well as the need to hold leaders accountable for delivering specified results. The extent to which the AWN should play a role in the company's efforts to become more focused on advancing women or actually facilitating women's career advancement remained unclear in the executives' eyes. A summary of the findings is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

From the Perspectives of Organizational Leaders: How does the AWN Affect Members' Career Advancement?

Org. leader	Impact on Members' Advancement	How Does the AWN Affect Members' Advancement?
1 – Stephanie	Yes. Indirect impact.	Development (resume builders, development day, Leadership roles), Mentoring: no active sponsorship/executive presence, Accountability: no tracking movement.
2 – Sue	No. Should have.	Development (development day, leadership roles), Visibility (willingness to step up) Mentoring: No active sponsorship, Accountability: Track movement and ID types of development skills that are related to advancement, Need more senior women and men involved.
3 – Lisa	Yes. Direct impact.	Skill development can be form of advancement. Involvement can lead to promotion. Development (speaking, facilitation skills, development day), Visibility (connections with leaders), Mentoring: Need education about sponsorship.
4 – Kevin	Yes. Indirect impact.	Development, Leadership Roles, Recruiting (positive culture), Networking, Mentoring (Sponsorship?), Accountability (mentoring and representation of women).
5 – Scott	Yes. Indirect impact.	Development, Connections, Visibility, Leadership Roles, Mentoring (Sponsorship?), Accountability (culture, representation of women).

Organizational Leaders' Perspectives on Organizational Success

All of the company's executives agreed that the AWN positively impacted organizational success. How the AWN contributed to organizational success was primarily focused on the success of its members. These Avero executives commented on the AWN's influence in creating a corporate culture widely recognized for supporting women in the workplace. Leaders acknowledged the AWN's role in positively impacting employee engagement, retention, company policies and practices, recruiting efforts, and customer engagement. The strategic importance from a business development/customer engagement standpoint was primarily theoretical at the time of our conversations.

Three of the five executives discussed the AWN's positive influence on the organization's culture, policies, and practices in a tangible manner. As the largest and most active affinity group in the organization, executives considered the AWN to be well-positioned to influence the company's most senior leaders. In this way, the AWN helped leaders understand what they could do to support women's career success and to identify obstacles or barriers that held them back. The two male executives stated that the AWN's influence on the organization's culture and practices extends beyond advocating for women; it often has a positive effect on the success of the company as a whole. All of the Avero executives agreed that one of the most positive affects the AWN could have on the organization overall would be to generate higher levels of employee engagement. They stressed the importance of engagement in all organizations and the connections between engagement and corporate performance.

Closely tied to their perspectives on culture and engagement, three of the five executives indicated that the AWN functioned as an integral part of the organization's strategy to encourage women to stay with the company. Executives declared that the AWN contributed significantly to attracting and retaining talent by ensuring that the company maintains a culture that enables employees to contribute to the best of their abilities. The inability to attract and retain the right talent was described as a key "choke point" in the organization's ability to grow.

In addition to supporting women's career success, four of the five executives said that investing in professional development opportunities for women would help to build a more successful organization. Leaders were exploring the possibility of adding development opportunities for women to engage in action learning projects as a potential way strengthen their leadership skills and areas of expertise.

Three of the organizational leaders discussed the value of leveraging the AWN as part of a comprehensive corporate effort to recruit women (particularly at the senior level). Executives

focused significant attention on how the AWN's fundamental purpose was to make the

organization a more attractive place for women to pursue their careers. Stephanie envisioned the

AWN as a more "explicit recruiting engine." The positive public image resulting from the

AWN's initiatives, such as community involvement activities, were also thought to be of value in

the company's efforts to recruit women.

Three of the five executives were interested in leveraging the AWN to engage customers.

Scott was outspoken about his belief that the AWN could positively impact the company's

relationships with its customers. Sue suggested that the company invite customers to partner with

the AWN to explore strategies to advance women across organizations. Stephanie agreed that

building a strategy directly with customers is a space the AWN should explore. The findings

from research question number four are provided in Table 4.

Table 4

From the Perspective of Organizational Leaders, How Does the AWN Affect Organizational Success?

Org. leader	Impact on Organizational Success	How Does the AWN Affect Organizational Success?
1 – Stephanie	Positive	Engagement (building community, increased productivity), Retention, Reputation (positive branding)
		Strategic: Could be more strategic in terms of developing/advancing women, recruiting women, and engaging customers, potential for strategic projects (action learning), not there yet—no infrastructure.
2 – Sue	Positive	Engagement, Strategic: Not strategic in terms of developing and advancing women, more focus on customer engagement, need for a stronger influence on policies and practices and overall business strategy. Should incorporate strategic projects—not there yet—no infrastructure/accountability.
3 – Lisa	Positive	Engagement, Influence Policies and Practices
		Strategic: Important for culture and talent management, did not view from external/business focus—not there yet —not sure it's a fit—too stretched.
4 – Kevin	Positive	Engagement (talent management), Influence Policies and Practices, Recruit, Retain, Develop/Advance. Strategic: Important for culture and talent management, external focus on recruiting, could incorporate strategic projects—not there yet—no infrastructure/accountability.
5 – Scott	Positive	Engagement, Recruit, Retain, Policies and Practices (talent management/culture), Customer Engagement, Develop/Advance. Strategic: Important for culture and talent management, to recruit and engage employees, and customer engagement, should incorporate strategic projects in the AWN and across the company.

AWN Leaders

The following three women who were interviewed for the study have served in one or more roles as part of the network's leadership team. The types of roles the women served in ranged from chapter leader to national co-chair. One of the three AWN leaders was based at the company headquarters; the other two were located in chapters outside of the Midwest. The

leaders' occupations were diverse, and their professional experience covered a variety of work responsibilities and areas of expertise within the organization.

AWN Leader #1: Jackie

Jackie was based in an AWN chapter outside of the organization's headquarters. She started her career with the company several years ago as an administrative assistant; having obtained two promotions since then, she now works in a management role. Jackie has served in a variety of AWN leadership roles over the years. She was in the process of transitioning into a new volunteer leadership role outside of the women's network that focused on the organization's community relations activities.

Jackie became a member of the AWN because she wanted to develop new skills and find a mentor. "I was excited, because I thought that it was a way for me to grow outside of my current position," she explained. Jackie believed the purpose of the AWN was to provide women (and men who support the mission) with an opportunity to connect with one another and to develop skills to enhance their performance in their current or future positions.

Jackie: Members' Career Advancement

Jackie maintained that involvement in the AWN could positively impact members' advancement. She discussed how her involvement in the AWN had directly affected her advancement, "A lot of the skills I obtained and some of the leadership skills I obtained did help in those promotions." When asked about the types of skills that were particularly helpful in getting those promotions, Jackie immediately described her involvement in a national organization dedicated to helping members develop public speaking and leadership skills. Jackie participated in a pilot program through the AWN that offered employees access to the public speaking group and worked to expand the opportunity for others within the organization. She

described her experience developing leadership skills and gaining visibility through her increased

involvement in the AWN:

> I got my name out there and it gave me some focus from management and it also allowed me to gain skills in public speaking. I moved to a chapter chair role and after that I begin to speak in front of the AWN groups, as well as management. Also, working as the chapter chair, you have to work with budgets and different managers so I was able to interact with them, that also helped give me some new leadership experiences.

She also emphasized that it is the members' responsibility to take advantage of the

opportunities available through the AWN, as well as to display what they have learned. When

asked if she was familiar with any specific instances when AWN members had advanced as a

result of their involvement in the AWN, she described a unique communication piece. This piece

was a newsletter that had been distributed by the AWN multiple times per year to highlight

women being promoted within the organization. She believed the AWN had a positive impact on

the promotions announced in the newsletter, but this publication was not intended to make

connections between membership and promotions. Jackie recalled one specific example of a

member who had advanced by leveraging the connections she had made through the network with

managers in the marketing department. Jackie clarified, "After expressing an interest in a new

role in marketing, she was encouraged to apply for an open position. She was promoted into that

position." Jackie further emphasized that the AWN helped her and others to be viewed as

leaders.

Jackie: Organizational Success

Jackie believed there were connections between the network's activities and

organizational success. Jackie focused on the strategic importance of efforts to reach out into the

community. "I was able to mentor young single moms through the YWCA with resume writing

skills and interview skills," she enthusiastically shared. Jackie was very excited about the

network's community involvement component. This work provided her with a sense of greater purpose. She believed that participating in community involvement activities like this enhanced members' commitment to the organization, which therefore had a positive impact on the company's ability to retain employees.

Jackie believed that the AWN contributed to the company's success because of its ability to help women develop skills that are needed by the organization. To be more strategic, she suggested that the AWN could focus on helping women build skills that would prepare them for specific career paths. This would contribute to the organization's success by helping employees develop the specific skills that are required for them to excel in new roles. She provided a concrete example:

> For someone that is not currently in marketing, but is interested in a marketing position, they could look at the skill sets or job requirements for a marketing position. If it requires further education, for example, what are the avenues that would fit that particular marketing position?

Jackie expressed a high level of support for the AWN within the company. She conveyed, "I do see that starting at the top with our CEO, as well as [with] our senior management. They are very supportive, and a lot of middle management is supportive." Jackie stressed that her own managers had been very encouraging over the years. Indeed, she incorporated her leadership roles in the AWN into her overall professional development goals, but she viewed her role in the AWN to be above and beyond her day-to-day role. As she explained, "It was as long as my job was getting done, I was free to work as I saw fit."

AWN Leader #2: Danielle

Danielle had a long history of advocating for women within the organization. She has been with the company for over 30 years and currently served as a senior manager. When asked how she had been involved in the AWN, she went back to a time before the AWN existed:

> I was one of the first women in 2004 that designed what we were going to do to help women at the company. I was a chair of one of the first groups. Later, I moved to the headquarters and become a member of the chapter.

Danielle had been serving in chapter and national leadership roles in the AWN since 2008. She believed that the purpose of the AWN is to give women opportunities to develop and grow: providing opportunities that they wouldn't get in their regular job. She also highlighted the value of connecting with other women in the organization. Danielle viewed involvement as a great opportunity to meet people that she doesn't have the opportunity to work with directly through her current job.

Danielle was clearly enthusiastic about the opportunity to talk about the AWN and her involvement over the years. She described her level of involvement in this way, "Heavy involvement. I really get a lot of energy from it. I find it a nice supplement to my paid job." It became clear at this point that Danielle viewed her involvement in the network as above and beyond her work. When asked if she viewed it as volunteer work, she replied, "Oh yes!" Danielle went on to clarify how her role in the network fit in with her day-to-day work. She described her role as a manager in the organization and how her AWN work was not one of her job-related duties. She continued, "The organization does not ask me to do this. I volunteered to do this. Everything I do, I do because I care and I'm willing to work on it." Some of Danielle's work pertaining to the AWN was accomplished during the day, but she also spent quite a bit of time on it during the evenings and weekends. Danielle communicated that her role was not considered as part of her regular performance evaluations, but she did discuss it as part of ongoing professional development conversations with her boss. Each employee was expected to have a professional development plan in place.

Danielle: Members' Career Advancement

When asked if the AWN could have an impact on members' career advancement, Danielle focused on her own career. She discussed the connections she had made through the network. Danielle described how valuable the network had been in determining who she should reach out to when she needed help with a work-related issue. Danielle clarified:

> I can reach out to someone I know through the AWN. So, they're not the one who knows the answer to the problem, but they can give you the connection that will give you the answer to the problem. And that's happened many, many times for me.

At this point, it became important to ask Danielle how involvement in the AWN may affect other members' career advancement. She responded, "Absolutely! Well, certainly our advisory board knows who the AWN leaders are at the national level . . . we have an executive awareness." She described the opportunity the AWN gave her and other members to develop skills in public speaking and presenting to executives. Danielle declared:

> I didn't get to do that in my old roles. In my current role, I'm happy to say the CEO and COO—they call me by name when I see them in the elevator. They wouldn't know me by [company division]. So it [the AWN] gave me that opportunity.

When asked to share specific stories about other member experiences within the AWN, Danielle immediately thought of Jackie's move from an administrative assistant position to an individual contributor position. She attributed Jackie's promotion to the increased exposure with management in her AWN leadership role. As she explained, "That's very rare in this organization. To make that jump . . . she was getting huge exposure. I've got to believe the AWN was part of it." I asked if she could think of other examples of how the AWN may influence advancement, and she identified the mentoring program. Danielle, however, described the challenges of running a mentoring program through an all-volunteer organization:

> We do offer mentoring. We spend a lot of time doing matching and executing a program every year. We did that for many years and our volunteers got burned out . . . we got to a point where we needed help, so we bought some software . . . we never

really leveraged it. All along this journey of mentoring we were hoping to hand it off to HR, but every year it's been cut from the budget.

Danielle was excited about a new mentoring program that was being piloted within the company. This program was designed to provide mentoring opportunities for AWN members in a more targeted way. She described the criteria for being accepted as, "High potential, I suppose." The network was partnering with an outside consulting firm to lead the program, which included 21 women divided into three teams. It would take place over an eight-month timeframe. Danielle had asked the COO of the company to directly distribute the announcement so that other Avero executives would be encouraged to nominate women on their teams for the program. Danielle quickly referred to a list when asked about the criteria for acceptance into the program. Qualifications on the list, included: professional experience, demonstrated leadership, and a desire to give back and mentor others. When describing the topics the program would cover, Danielle went directly to advancement. "Advancement is one of our objectives here. We are working with a firm who has done this [before]. It's about strengthening leadership skills, increasing confidence, and improving collaboration." Beyond development, she emphasized the value of building connections across the organization. "If you are serious about advancing your career through networking, we've got the venue for it," Danielle insisted.

Danielle wisely recognized that the AWN couldn't impact women's advancement without the individual member's self-initiative and an organizational infrastructure that provided avenues for women who wanted to advance to do so. I asked Danielle for her insights regarding how the AWN could be more strategic about advancing women, particularly related to member sponsorship. Danielle believed that leaders in the organization were unclear about how sponsorship differed from mentoring, but they had a desire to learn more. She added that Avero executives would be matched with participants in the new pilot mentoring program, and this

could be an opportunity to educate leaders about the importance of sponsorship. When asked

whether or not it was a good idea for the AWN to engage in business-related projects, like the

action learning pilots happening elsewhere in the organization, she responded, "I think it's a great

idea!"

Danielle: Organizational Success

Employee engagement and recruiting senior women were Danielle's first ideas when she

was asked to consider how the AWN impacted organizational success. Danielle discussed a new

program established to include AWN members in the interview processes for executive women

candidates. Women who were invited back for a second round of interviews would have the

opportunity to meet with a member of the AWN to learn about the company and the experiences

of women who worked there. The HR team in charge created a selection and training process for

AWN members who wanted to participate to ensure that the program was ultimately a success.

Danielle also recognized connections between retention and employee engagement, and

that was the business case behind developing the AWN. "More engaged people do their best

work and they stay. If we are enjoying what we are doing, the people around us are going to

enjoy it more too," Danielle declared.

Danielle's passion was contagious. Though the research objective focused on how career

advancement played a role in understanding the value of women's networks in organizations, it

was clear that if increasing employee engagement was the intended goal of AWN, then Danielle

and others I talked with suggested it was fulfilling its role. Danielle also described the

commitment of senior leaders to support the AWN:

> They told us that they look to the AWN as the voice as to what to do for the company
> as a whole. Not what we should do for women, what we should do for the company.
> That was so empowering and validating for us. The fact that they make time for us…
> that's huge.

I asked Danielle to help me understand her interpretation of what it meant for the AWN to be viewed as the voice of the company. Danielle was very clear, "We've brought things forward that need to happen." She described the positive response the AWN received after requesting that the CEO hire a diversity officer. "He thought about it and decided not to do a diversity person, but a diversity department; the Culture and Inclusion Department. It was three people. We asked for one, and we got three." Danielle believed the CEO's actions were the result of the AWN's request. Danielle also recalled the AWN's role in implementing a flexible work policy that had initially been sponsored by the AWN. She easily recalled a variety of other ways the AWN added value to the organization, including a new initiative to have members meet with senior women who were coming back for second round interviews.

Support from senior leadership was evident, but Danielle noted that she was unfortunately familiar of situations where middle managers had been less supportive. The AWN was in the process of holding a focus group with middle managers to determine what the underlying issues were. She also believed members needed to proactively engage their managers in discussions about the value of participating in the AWN, rather than simply assuming that their managers were not supportive.

As our interview came to a close, I asked Danielle whether or not she believed the AWN should become more focused on advancement, or if it should stay focused on engagement and connection. Her response was clear, "We want to get to the advancement. We really want to get there. And we want to get there where it really matters—in recruiting. So . . . baby steps."

AWN Leader #3: Jody

Jody had a long history of supporting women's initiatives through AWN involvement, as well as via strong external partnerships with a powerful industry network for women across a variety of businesses within their industry (the same network that was the inspiration for the AWN in 2005). She emphasized the level of responsibility she maintained as one of the network leaders. It was clear that she took her role seriously. Jody talked about the difficulties of being based in a region far from the organization's headquarters. She felt that she did not have the same exposure as those working in the HQ office, and she viewed her role in the network as an opportunity to gain some additional visibility. I asked Jody about her history with the company and how long she had been involved in the AWN. She responded, "I have been involved in the AWN since its humble beginnings." Jody shared a this story when asked why she had gotten involved in the AWN:

> When I first started there were only two females, myself and one other in the field. Where we were actually had a territory and would install [type of products] and everything. After just four months being with us, she [the other employee] was sent on a [project description], all by herself, without support, and she cried, called her husband [and] was picked up and quit that day. So, needless to say I was the only female for quite some time, and in the twelve year span, there's been four and today, there's zero. I'm the only one left. So for me, the AWN really means a lot.

Jody believed one of the reasons she thought she was able to succeed in her territory was because she did not have children. It was a very large territory and required being away from home for extended periods of time. Jody loved her job and the people she worked with. She was happy to proclaim how proficient she has become in her very technical, laborious work. She also believed women could be very successful in her field, because of the extra care (and attention to detail) they put into working with their customers. Jody's story was deeply touching. For having faced such intense challenges, it was surprising that Jody was able to remain so positive and

upbeat. She expounded upon the impact her involvement in the AWN had on her willingness to stay with the company:

> I love the camaraderie with all of my male counterparts, but being able to connect with another female in similar situations was just very helpful, and I think that's why I have [had] such a long tenure with the company. Part of it was because of the AWN.

Jody maintained that there were women in other divisions and that the company has been changing. "It's come a long way since I first started, with the culture being more welcoming," Jody explained. One of the reasons the culture was changing, according to Jody, was that management was finally beginning to recognize that not all of the company's customers are men. She maintained, "A lot of our customers are female owners, female executives. It's nice for them to know we have that diversity." She believed having women in the organization was important both for keeping business and for acquiring new customers. One of the things Jody was particularly proud of was her chapter's focus on engaging the organization's customers. She believed her chapter was the only chapter that actively did this. "I do lunch and learns, and that's where we have the largest percentages of people show up. I actually have customers come and do presentations," she explained.

Jody described the story of one customer who shared her life story at one of the AWN events. The woman had lost a child to cancer, was abandoned by her husband, and had to work her way back to financial stability, starting with a position as a dishwasher. She was the only female in this position. Over time, she was recognized for her work ethic. After several years of proving herself, she was able to run part of the business. Jody shared how important it was for the women in the audience to hear how she had overcome these challenges. She observed that everyone could relate to her struggles: "Her positive attitude, tenacity, and unwillingness to give up was so inspirational to all of us. They [network members] still talk about it."

Jody: Members' Career Advancement

I asked Jody to think about how the AWN may impact women's advancement and she took a moment to think before she responded. Jody viewed involvement in the AWN as a way for women to demonstrate their willingness to go above and beyond. It also helped women develop new leadership skills that may be transferable to their jobs. Jody laughed when I asked her if she thought her role in the AWN would help her advance. She went on to explain her career advancement challenges:

> You know, I guess part of it is if I did work closer to the headquarters that would help a lot more in terms of my career path. I think for me. I think it's really going to help me, because I do want to be a VP and my current supervisor is supportive of this work.

Jody explained that the timing was right for her leadership involvement in the AWN, because her previous bosses had not supported her work with the network, which led her to feel pigeonholed in her career. Jody also enjoyed how relationship building through the AWN led to developing connections with employees in different areas of the organization. This provided many opportunities to share best practices around effectively serving their customers' needs. Jody explained that it was difficult to develop connections and gain exposure for women in the field.

I asked Jody if she could think of examples of how those cross-organization connections positively impacted business. Jody responded, "Definitely! I actually helped the career path of one of the men in another division." Jody couldn't think of other examples of career advancement, but she did talk about how the AWN positively impacted women through the camaraderie of the network, "You know just to pick up the phone and say I've had a bad day and I need someone to listen to me. To have another female relate to what I'm going through." I could sense a bit of despair in Jody's voice at this point. Jody was the only woman in her area of

the company. I was inspired by Jody's unique ability to stay positive and overcome the many

obstacles that she had faced. Jody did mention her sincere desire to have more support from

senior women within the organization, but it seemed that there were too few to reach out to. She

relayed, "Each chapter has to have an executive sponsor and we are having a hard time finding

women executive sponsors. Unfortunately, when we look up, there's no one there."

Jody: Organizational Success

When asked about how the AWN contributed to organizational success, Jody shared a

story about a last-minute customer call she had the previous week. It was a very serious situation

where a large account was testing three companies against the firm to determine future business.

As a territory sales manager, Jody was naturally distressed about the possibility of losing one of

her largest accounts. It was fascinating to learn that her work with the AWN had been

instrumental in navigating through the difficult conversation with the client, who happened to be

another woman. Jody shared:

> You know my tie-in with the AWN has been so helpful, because she is a female and
> she has been working several years in the [type of business]. She had kind of similar
> challenges, you know, being the only female on the team. She actually just sent me
> an article today about women's leadership in our industry. So that's a huge win. She
> actually said to me that our conversation about the business would have been
> different if I were with my two male account managers.

One of Jody's primary objectives was to leverage the AWN to connect with customers.

She moved on to discuss the success and strategic value of providing women with opportunities

to network, particularly with outside customers:

> I think what makes it of value to the organization is to see how we are impacting not
> just our organization, but we're able to, for instance impact [customer name] . . .
> we're positive, we're energized, we truly care, not only about our customers, but
> about our team members as well. So I think that camaraderie is contagious. It's
> contagious and everybody benefits.

Jody did see some issues with regard to management support. While both top-level and low-level management appeared supportive, she indicated that there were challenges related to middle managers being "set in their ways." I asked Jody if she thought management concerns were related to a lack of understanding of the AWN or were actual disapproval of the network. This comment resonated with her, "You know that's the thing I notice the most, the lack of knowledge or education." Jody offered an interesting example, "Whenever they have hiring fairs, they never invite women." In contrast, middle managers who attended Jody's events were able to recognize that the organization had female customers and that the organization would benefit from more female employees. When middle management did make that connection, they started inviting women to join them at hiring fairs to help recruit more women. I asked Jody if she thought that engaging women in the recruiting process had helped. She responded, "It helped a lot. We have a quite a few more women working in the field."

My final question for Jody had to do with her perspective on what could be done to increase the value of the AWN. Jody emphasized the importance of technology; this was especially of value for women in the field to help them stay connected. Jody believed there were a lot of women within the organization that did not know about AWN, especially globally. Jody also expressed the need for women to do a better job of supporting one another. She recalled a number of occasions when she had tried to reach out to some of the more senior women in the company (through email and voice messages), without ever even hearing a response. This was frustrating, but she also empathized with the demands placed upon them in their leadership roles. She understood how difficult it could be to take on another role outside of an already "impossible" workload. As our conversation closed, Jody remained optimistic about the future and she wanted other women to know that they could be successful in the company.

Summary of Findings: AWN Leaders

Compared with Avero executives, the three national leaders of the AWN were more likely to believe that the AWN can directly impact members' career advancement and organizational success. Career advancement had not been the direct focus of the AWN, yet the leaders unanimously agreed that women were indeed advancing as a result of their involvement in the network. Again compared with organizational leaders, AWN leaders were less concerned with specific measures or goals around women's advancement. The network leaders did discuss the responsibility of members to take advantage of provided opportunities and to display what they had learned through job performance and interactions with management. The AWN leaders have volunteered their time to make the network a success and many beneficial outcomes resulted from their hard work.

Though support from senior leaders appeared solid, AWN leaders expressed the need for more executives (especially senior women) to engage in AWN activities. A need to address concerns about parts of the organization that were unsuccessful in recruiting and developing women to succeed in the organization also surfaced; the field offices had an especially poor track record of recruiting and retaining women. Leaders worried that the absence of genuine support from supervising managers may discourage some women from participating in AWN activities. They further described the challenges of operating an all-volunteer organization; the amount of time required to go above and beyond their daily work responsibilities was considerable.

AWN Leaders' Perspectives on Members' Career Advancement

AWN leaders understood advancement to mean a promotion or the ability to move into a new position with greater responsibilities in the organization. Through their own experiences and witnessing others' careers, the consensus among network leaders was that involvement did have

an arguably direct impact on members' career advancement. The leaders focused primarily on their own experience with development and advancement.

AWN leaders directed their energy to fueling their passions and the network enabled them to do so. From their perspectives, the AWN offered tremendous opportunities for those who were willing to take the initiative and to commit to self-development. The network leaders wisely qualified their beliefs about the direct connection between involvement and advancement, insisting that no one factor could solely be responsible for a woman's advancement. Job performance, self-motivation, and the ability to successfully apply what they had learned from their experiences were all key contributors to advancement. Serving in leadership roles, mentoring, networking connections, and overall support were identified as benefits of the AWN that may have a positive impact on members' career advancement. The leaders argued that members not in leadership roles also benefitted from their involvement.

According to the three network leaders, serving in a leadership role can be a highly effective way for members to positively impact their career trajectories. Network leaders shared their personal experiences of developing valuable skills while serving in a variety of leadership roles. In particular, these opportunities enabled them to strengthen their communication skills and significantly increased their exposure to the most senior corporate leaders, including the company's president and CEO. All three agreed that the increased exposure and the opportunity to practice their leadership skills outside of their day-to-day work positively impacted their ability to advance within the organization. Danielle insisted that all 30 members of the AWN leadership team, across the country, benefitted from enhanced visibility. She noted, "They know who we are . . . we have an executive awareness." Leaders also shared stories of others who were able to move into new roles as a result of opportunities that had unfolded through the AWN.

The network leaders were focused on improving the value of the mentoring provided through the AWN. In the past, the network leaders and committee members spent a considerable amount of time matching and executing a program every year, and it became too overwhelming. Currently, two new mentoring programs were being created for smaller groups of AWN members who were viewed as emerging leaders. Though they had not identified any specific metrics regarding how they would measure success, one of the goals of the new targeted mentoring programs was to increase opportunities for women to advance.

The value of expanding their professional networks through their leadership roles within the AWN was identified by all three leaders. Jackie discussed her positive experience meeting others via the AWN leadership team, development activities, and meetings with corporate senior leaders. Danielle enthusiastically communicated the value of the connections she made through the AWN and how they improved her job performance. Jody provided an example of how the connections a male colleague made through the AWN led to a new leadership opportunity for him. Support for women in this organization appeared to be especially important for women working in the field offices. Table 5 summarizes the findings for research question one.

Table 5

From the Perspective of AWN Leaders, How Does the AWN Affect Members' Career Advancement?

AWN leader	Impact on Members' Advancement	How Does the AWN Affect Members' Advancement?
1 – Jackie	Yes. Direct impact. Individual performance is essential. Examples: yes.	Development/Leadership Roles (skills), Visibility (with senior leaders), Connections (especially AWN leaders across the country).
2 – Danielle	Yes. Direct impact. Personal motivation is essential. Examples: yes.	Development/Leadership Roles, Visibility, Mentoring, Connections, Support (from senior leaders), Engagement. Need more support from middle managers.
3 – Jody	Yes. Direct impact. Examples: yes.	Leadership Roles, Visibility, Connections, Support (retention). Need more support from senior women.

AWN Leaders' Perspectives on Organizational Success

The AWN leaders fervently agreed that the AWN contributes to organizational success. Tactics contributing to organizational success included developing women, employee engagement, recruiting, retention, engaging customers, community involvement, and influencing the organization's culture and practices. Employee engagement, recruiting, and customer engagement were emphasized as strategically important to the organization's success. Reminiscent of what Avero executives shared, connections were made between what factors the AWN leaders viewed as facilitating members' career advancement and those that they credited to enhancing organizational success. All three network leaders believed that developing and engaging women were key factors contributing to women's career advancement and organizational success. They believed the network provided women with opportunities to learn and grow in ways that would enable them to contribute to the best of their capabilities. The network leaders directly engaged in activities to foster their own development, as well as the development of other members. Jackie talked about the importance of members' going back to their managers to display the new skills they had learned. Jody contended that the AWN was especially important because of the opportunities it provided for members to interact with management.

All three AWN leaders believed the network cultivated positive employee engagement. Danielle contended that the business case for starting the AWN was based on evidence that higher levels of engagement would lead to increased productivity and retention. She argued that women would do their best work and be committed to remain with the company if the AWN were in place. Jody's goal was to find ways to engage the women working in the field offices who were (in her opinion) more likely to experience a male-dominated culture and a sense of isolation.

The AWN leaders were also in agreement about the AWN's positive impact on the organization's culture and practices that support women's career success and organizational success. Danielle was especially passionate about leveraging her position to impact corporate policies. Jody talked about the critical need for women in the field to participate in the AWN in order to feel connected, valued, and supported within the corporate culture. The AWN leaders agreed the network could contribute to the organization's success by supporting recruiting efforts. Danielle was most excited about an upcoming opportunity to partner with HR on recruiting initiatives. She revealed a new program established by HR to include AWN members in the interview processes for executive women candidates. Jody talked about her experience encouraging hiring managers to invite women employees to join them at the hiring fairs they attended. She believed this change positively impacted the number of women successfully recruited to work in the field offices. Jackie focused more on the concept of internal recruiting. She would like to see more women within the company move into new positions or new business lines and she believed the AWN could play a role in educating women about various available career paths.

Jody powerfully presented the business case for why the AWN should focus on customer engagement. She noted that customers appreciated knowing that the organization values diversity. Jody attributed the progress of advancing women in some parts of the organization to external influence from the organization's customers, who are increasingly female owners and executives. Jody was particularly proud of her chapter's focus on engaging customers.

Community outreach had an important place in the AWN. Passionate, highly engaged AWN leaders and members expressed their commitment to community outreach. Jackie and Jody felt that the organization supported their engagement in community outreach. Jody enthusiastically described the experience of strengthening relationships with managers in the company who partnered with the AWN to contribute to the greater community good. AWN

leaders had not previously thought about the concept of incorporating strategic projects (such as those related to the company's business development) into the AWN. Table 6 summarizes the findings.

Table 6

From the Perspective of AWN Leaders, How Does the AWN Affect Organizational Success?

AWN leader	Impact on Organizational Success	How Does the AWN Affect Organizational Success?
1 – Jackie	Positive	Employee Engagement/retention, Development, Recruiting (internal), Community Involvement (org is supportive of it), Policies and Practices.
		Strategic: Developing women and preparing them for career paths in the company.
2 – Danielle	Positive	Employee Engagement, Development, Recruiting (senior women), Policies and Practices (diversity initiatives and flexibility).
		Strategic: Engaging and mentoring women, external recruiting of senior women.
3 – Jody	Positive	Employee Engagement, Community Involvement, Customer Engagement, Retention, Recruiting (field), Culture that Supports Women.
		Strategic: Customer engagement.

AWN Members

All of the network members who submitted a survey response were invited to voluntarily participate in an interview conversation. The invitation stated that a random number of members would be selected from those who volunteered. To protect their anonymity in the survey, participants did not receive the invitation to participate in an interview until after their survey results had been submitted.

Twenty-five of the AWN members who completed the survey (approximately 10%) expressed an interest in participating in an interview. From the list of 25, 12 individuals were randomly selected. These 12 individuals were contacted via email by the company project

manager and eight confirmed their willingness to participate. Five of the AWN members from office headquarters and three from regional offices were interviewed.

HQ Member #1: Chris

Chris has been a senior woman in the company's law department for over 20 years. She became a member of the AWN when the network was initially forming, because of her desire to support women's career development and advancement within the organization. She has been a guest speaker at various AWN events. She also participated as a mentor in the AWN's previous mentoring program. Chris communicated her motivation, "It's no secret that women are underrepresented here, especially in the management ranks. It's a 'pay it forward' thing for me. I'd like to make the path easier for other women." She described herself as "a big cheerleader for the company" and believed the company could be even better, if it focused more on advancing women and providing opportunities for women to succeed.

Chris: Members' Career Advancement

Chris believed the AWN could have an impact on members' career advancement by offering women professional development opportunities. From her perspective, the organization lacks formalistic career development opportunities and women, in particular, are disadvantaged, because they may have fewer development opportunities. She explained, "Women may naturally receive less [development] than men do, because men maybe relate more to other men and are more comfortable with other men and provided sort of those mentoring opportunities or coaching career development."

Chris viewed the AWN as a system put in place to help women succeed. She believed getting involved, either as a member or through a leadership role, provided opportunities for women to expand their professional networks and access professional development. As a senior woman in the organization, she viewed it as her role to encourage women to work on their

leadership skills and gain exposure to senior management. The mentoring provided to members was also viewed as valuable in helping women advance. Chris recalled a conversation with one member who confided in her that the AWN had a real impact on her ability to be promoted in the company. She believed employees' efforts to advance their own career resulted in positively advancing the company.

Chris firmly believed one of the reasons for the AWN's success was top leadership support. "The CEO, the President (who's been the executive sponsor as well), and a number of the very senior leaders are very supportive" she recounted. As a senior leader, Chris believed network members would benefit from more involvement from the executive women in the company. As the organizational role models, she felt women at her level should be more visible and act as stronger advocates for members' career progress. She viewed it as their responsibility to strengthen the voice of the AWN.

My conversation with Chris was reminiscent of my discussion with Sue. As a senior woman leader who had been with the company for a long time, she was also growing impatient with Avero's lack of progress advancing women. "If you just talk it at the top it turns into nothing, and so put your money where your mouth is," Chris asserted. Chris also expressed her concern that senior managers needed to do more to encourage middle management to actively engage (with the AWN). She suggested that middle managers should go out of their way to affirm members' involvement and encourage them to make the most of it.

Chris: Organizational Success

Chris believed the AWN influenced organizational success by fostering a culture that supports and engages women. She also believed the network strengthened the company's ability to recruit and retain talented women. Chris provided an example of how the R2 professional development day helped women feel supported by the organization. "When I went to the regional

development day, several women told me that the AWN was what's been keeping them energized over the last few months," she shared. The company had been going through a lot of change and the AWN was helping members stay positive and engaged. Chris talked about the satisfaction she gained from connecting with AWN members made her feel more engaged. "I come away just energized and it makes me more excited to be part of the company," she explained. Chris believed events like this were strategically important because they brought women together and fostered a culture where women felt valued and engaged. Chris also discussed the connections between engagement, retention, and productivity.

Another way the AWN influenced corporate success was through supporting recruiting efforts. She discussed the company's challenges with recruiting women, "I'm told our reputation around town is that we can be a tough place for women to work at. So knowing that there's a very active women's network, I think is helpful to recruiting." I asked Chris why she believed the organization had a reputation as a difficult place for women to work. She responded by referring to female representation:

> I think it's based on numbers . . . it takes a while until you really feel like you're part of the gang, I guess. And then, because we are so heavy on the male side, it's harder for women to feel part of the group, perhaps.

Chris also viewed the network's efforts to recruit women as strategically important. She was especially concerned about retaining women in the field offices. "Over the years when I hear that somebody's left, a woman in the field, it really hurts because we just don't have that many to begin with and we need to cultivate the ones that we have."

HQ Member #2: Jill

Jill has been working at the corporate headquarters for the past five years. She currently serves as an HR director in one of the business sectors. Jill had more than ten years of sales experience outside of the organization before moving into an HR role within Avero. Jill has been

very involved with employee engagement surveys, performance planning, and professional development activities within the organization. Like Chris, Jill was a member of the AWN to help "pay it forward," for other women in the organization who want to further their careers. Jill volunteered to be interviewed for this study, because she believed the AWN could be "even more successful than they are today." Jill found the AWN to be a good way to network and get involved in various activities, like book clubs and the annual development day. She believed the purpose of the AWN was "to empower women to develop and grow and to help them to be able to advance within the organization." Jill has served in a variety of AWN committee roles in the past.

Jill: Members' Career Advancement

Jill believed the AWN was very helpful for women to think about their career goals, but she did not see a direct connection between AWN involvement and career advancement. As far as advancement is concerned, Jill was not sure how the AWN helped women advance. She did not have personal examples to share of women advancing, but she did believe the AWN served a role in providing women with the opportunity to have conversations with their manager about their career development goals:

> It's interesting. I've had a couple of conversations with managers and I think, like I said, I think the AWN does a very good job of helping to empower women . . . people are having those types of conversations with their managers and putting the check-ins on their manager's calendar to say here's where I want to go, here's what I want to do—now how do I get there?

Jill believed assertive behavior could be risky for women, because it was not always well-received in the organization. She disclosed, "It [assertiveness] can come across as, for lack of a better word, sometimes because I've heard men executives call us this, but of being bitchy."

Jill talked about several things the AWN could do to help women in the organization, including increasing the number of senior level leaders advocating for women and providing

women with ways to gain experience. She reflected, "I think what I hear a lot, and myself included, is we own our destiny, as far as putting our career goals in place and we have to know what we want to do. But, then, you've got to be willing to give people those experiences." Jill emphasized the need for advocates to encourage members and to help them recognize when they did have the "[necessary] skills and abilities to take on that new role." She believed senior women needed to take more responsibility for this, because of their influence level within the organization. Jill observed that more women seemed to be advancing in the company than in the past, but she did not see a connection between her observation and involvement in the AWN. She based her observation on a publication disseminated by the AWN, which provides quarterly updates about women being promoted in the company. She described her perspective on the publication, "So you're seeing people be promoted . . . but I think a lot of people are being promoted at kind of that manager or below manager level. I think there's less females in the executive roles being promoted."

Jill believed the company was making progress, but that they still had a long way to go to have a significant female presence in executive roles. She offered examples of two female executives who had left the organization a year ago because they did not feel valued by the company. I asked Jill if she thought they did not feel they were valued because of their gender, and she said, "Yes. That group went from having at least two women on the leadership team to having zero."

Jill affirmed the strong sense of senior leadership support, but also suggested there were parts of the organization where middle managers were less supportive. "I think there are better managers than others," she reported. Jill believed there were still certain divisions of the company where women may be questions for taking time away from their day to day work. She

suggested that the company can do a better job of educating managers about the value of the AWN; women should be encouraged to get involved and recognized for their contributions.

Jill: Organizational Success

Jill's basic belief was that the network brings women together and that the resulting sense of connection and community increases the likelihood that they (female employees) will want to stay at the company. However, she expressed concern that there was a lack of organizational understanding of what the AWN's value truly is and that it may be unclear how it impacts organizational success. She believed the AWN was strategically important because it brings women in the organization together. The AWN was also vital because the network helped the company recruit and retain women. Jill believed that the AWN could be doing more to influence organizational success, "I think that we're at a point now where we need to put a little more skin in the game . . . and figure out how we utilize it to help retain and promote more of the females that we have."

HQ Member #3: Amy

Amy was a planning manager in one of the business sectors. She has been with the company for nine years and became a member of the AWN about six years ago. She joined the AWN because she wanted the opportunity to get to know women across the company. Amy has served in numerous AWN committee roles over the previous five years and she was going into her second year as the national lead of the communications committee. Prior to that, she was the leader of the communications committee for the HQ chapter. She viewed the AWN's purpose as to provide women within the organization with opportunities to network and access mentors.

Amy: Members' Career Advancement

Amy believed that the AWN directly impacted her own career advancement:

> I would say networking is the only reason I'm in the position that I am, and that's largely due to the AWN. I have had at least two positions that I've applied and received offers for where I wouldn't have known that the position was available, and I know at least in the position I'm in currently, another AWN associate actually made a phone call on my behalf to recommend me for the job to the hiring manager.

It was exciting to hear Amy's story of how connections made through the AWN directly led to advancement opportunities within the company. Amy's story and the experiences of others led me to believe that women who served in AWN leadership roles may benefit more from their involvement (than women who are merely members). Exposure to those at higher corporate levels also played a role. Amy confirmed that the connections she made with others who supported her advancement were more senior members. Amy shared her experience leading the mentoring committee:

> It allowed me to interact with at least two or three different AWN women who were two or three or four rungs [further] up the ladder than I was, one of which recommended me to apply for a position I did apply for. Unfortunately, I didn't get it, but it wouldn't have been something I was aware of if she hadn't pointed it out, and that was a good experience for me. And they both really helped me find direction and figure out really what I wanted to do with my career within the company and pushing me when I needed to be pushed.

The example provided by Amy was sponsorship in action. After sharing her own positive experience, Amy offered the stories of several friends who had developed connections through the AWN that facilitated their movement into new corporate roles.

Amy expressed her belief that senior leaders in the organization were very supportive of the AWN. Amy also identified what she described as "a gap" due to the lack of middle management support, "I haven't had it personally, but I've heard from other folks that their mid-level managers don't quite understand what the benefit is."

Amy: Organizational Success

Amy believed the AWN impacted organizational success primarily by helping the company recruit, engage, and retain women. Amy shared her feelings about the impact of the

AWN since she had first started, "The feel of the company was very much male dominated, and there's some of that still, but I think by the development and bringing in of [the AWN] we started to find more balance." She believed the network brought to the forefront the need to have a good mix of both female and male employees in order to be an effective company. Amy also discussed the value of the AWN's role in recruiting women:

> And so if you're looking from the outside in and you see a company and you're like oh, gosh, it's all guys, why would I apply there—as a woman. But if you see it's a company that has something like AWN and its acknowledging and working towards a better mix of employees from the gender position, you're more willing to apply to it, be involved and stay engaged and stay with that company.

Amy expressed the desire to see more movement of women into the executive level. I asked Amy if she believed the AWN should be engaging in strategic projects, like the action learning pilots happening in other areas of the organization. She initially questioned whether or not the AWN was an appropriate fit for a project like that. Giving it more thought, she affirmed, "I don't think it would be a bad idea, because we're all from different areas and different divisions. Actually, I think it would help." Amy also touched upon the value of the AWN in engaging in community involvement. "We get our name out there, which is huge."

HQ Member #4: Tina

Tina was a manager in one of the business sectors. She came to Avero eight years ago after working at another large multinational organization that had a thriving women's network. She enjoyed being involved in her previous employer's women's network and was excited to join the AWN when it was launched, the same year that she joined the company. She clarified:

> I thought, wow, maybe we'll be able to do something like that as well. So I went to the kick off meeting and I've heard of some, I want to say executive women, who were at that meeting as well. What I pretty much told them is, yes, I signed up to be on that team because they are on it. They're very successful women.

Tina has also served in a variety of leadership roles in the AWN during her tenure with the company. She believed the primary purpose of the AWN was to develop women and to enable them to build and expand upon their professional network. She shared her own experience in starting off in a highly technical role within the company. Feeling a sense of isolation, she had a desire to meet others outside of her division.

Tina: Members' Career Advancement

Tina believed the AWN could potentially impact members' career advancement, but she did not believe it had a direct impact. She described it in this way, "Potentially yes, it really depends on the pockets. It's not like I know somebody through the AWN and they end up hiring me or influencing [the] hiring me. I've not had that experience." She did say that the AWN offered opportunities for members to think about career paths and connect with women in other areas of the company. I asked Tina if she was aware of others who may have advanced as a result of their involvement and she responded, "I don't know. There probably are some. I'm not sure." Tina found the real value of the AWN to be in the annual development day and community involvement activities. As an example, Tina talked about her own development experience as a manager attending the annual AWN development event:

> Our CEO kicked it off with a really good message around the trends around business as a whole globally and then what it means in terms of talent, development and retaining. What I really enjoyed was the leadership qualities and how you influence people to work for you.

Tina enjoyed the message because he was speaking to the managers in the audience and his advice resonated with her. She described how she appreciated the focus on strategies to use her power as a manager to influence her employees rather than "just telling them what to do." Tina's example offered a compelling case in point of how even a brief interaction with a senior leader

could result in women learning new skills that may help them become more effective leaders in the organization.

Tina also discussed how impressed she was with one of the senior female leaders who spoke at the event. The presenter talked about her career path and the concept of the corporate ladder. Tina explained:

> And then, we have [speaker] talking about her perspective in terms of her career path . . . we always talk about the corporate ladder and people wanting to be on the ladder, but sometimes there are a lot of lateral moves or ladders that you have to climb, so to speak, to get all the necessary skills. You need to be outside of your division. You have to be outside of your comfort zone to be able to navigate your career better, because you have a different perspective.

Tina mentioned several other presentations that were impactful, including "talks about networking, how you widen your network and the importance of having mentors, advocates and sponsors on your behalf. So those are really great topics that hopefully we're reaching more people [with]."

Tina: Organizational Success

When I asked Tina if she believed the AWN contributed to organizational success, she responded, "I would think so. I mean success for the organization ultimately is diversifying the talent pool to be more inclusive." She expressed the need for the company to do more to hire both women and more minorities. Tina discussed her current leadership role in another employee network and the partnership that they had created with HR to increase the recruitment and retention of African-American employees. She described "a meet and greet program" for interns so they would have some contacts in the company if they did end up receiving a job offer.

Tina hesitated a little when I asked about the AWN incorporating strategic projects like the action learning projects discussed previously. Tina did not feel the AWN was ready to engage in projects such as resolving business problems or growing customer business. Tina

expressed her concern that the AWN does not currently do a good job of measuring their effectiveness. She explained, "Right now, I believe the AWN is still a little bit loose on that, in terms of yes, there are initiatives, but we are trying to figure out the metrics." Tina believed the AWN needed to establish some baselines and measure goals more effectively. She offered another example, "Say you want to improve executive level women by 10 percent. How do we get there? Promote from within or you're going to hire from outside? What's the process?" Tina was excited about the possibility of incorporating goals around these issues within the employee network she was currently leading.

Like others, Tina observed strong support from top management. "We have total support from the CEO and COO. Our chief operating officer is our executive sponsor for the national AWN, so we have leaders' support," she explained. Tina did express a desire to see more executives present at the annual development day. She commented, "You probably can count, using your fingers, the number of VP level mangers there." When questioned about the level of support from middle managers, Tina identified the need to do a better job of engaging managers at that level.

HQ Member #5: Lee

Lee was a project manager in one of the business sectors. She has been a member of the AWN for more than five years and has served in a variety of leadership roles, including having a role on the mentoring committee. She became a member of the AWN because she wanted to meet others outside of her division and learn more about the company as a whole. Lee described the purpose of the AWN in this way, "To grow individuals. And I know it's mainly focused towards women, but it is across the board. But to grow individuals not only as a person, but within their jobs."

Lee: Members' Career Advancement

Lee believed involvement in the AWN could affect members' career advancement. In her personal experience, the AWN gave her an opportunity to lead outside of her current job. As the leader of the AWN mentoring program, Lee enjoyed being able to add value by helping others with their personal growth and development. She explained, "That's something I really have enjoyed doing and the AWN gives [me] that opportunity." Lee also talked about opportunities to meet others in different departments and the increased visibility that came with it. I asked Lee if she was aware of other women who had advanced as a result of their involvement in the AWN and she hesitantly responded, "You know, I believe so. I'm trying to think. I know [name] moved into another area and this was something she kind of attributed [to] some of her involvement in the AWN."

Having heard mixed impressions about its success, I was curious about Lee's experience with leading the mentoring initiative. Lee talked about her role as a mentor, and the impact she saw other mentors have on their mentees. "It's interesting, because I don't think people realize the impact they have on others," Lee expressed. She believed the support of women above her added tremendous value to her career success. I was interested in gaining Lee's perspective on the role of a mentor versus that of an advocate or sponsor. I asked her, "Is one of the responsibilities of the mentor to be an advocate for an individual's career? To kind of go out of their way to coach them and help them advance? Or is that really not a part of it?" Lee explained that it was not a part of it initially, but over the last year, the AWN had developed a campaign to help senior leaders and members understand the difference between a mentor and an advocate (or sponsor). Lee and I agreed on the differences, that sponsorship implies a willingness of a more senior leader to actively support the advancement of the mentee; for example, a sponsor may

endorse a candidate for a promotional opportunity rather than just providing suggestions to interview effectively.

I was surprised to hear there was some education taking place about the value of sponsorship within the AWN, because two of the AWN leaders and most of the Avero executives I had talked with gave me the impression that leaders and employees alike did not have a good understanding of what advocacy (or sponsorship) was really about. Lee also felt strongly that the AWN had the support of senior leaders, but like many others, she was aware of ongoing issues with lower layers of leadership. Lee's previous manager had been very involved in the AWN, and her current manager was very supportive of the program.

Lee: Organizational Success

Lee believed the AWN affected organizational success in many ways. She discussed the importance of calling attention to the need to develop, promote, and create equal opportunities for women, as well as for everyone else in the company. Lee believed the AWN was one of many tools the organization needed to attract and retain a multicultural workforce. She highlighted the strategic importance of a diverse workforce:

> You got to get past that old white guy phase and kind of get into the new age and get that benefit, because it is financial. There is a bottom line to it when you have people that think different ways and you get all those people in a room and they really boil [it] down to a best idea, that if you leave two or three people out of the room that idea may not have even happened at all.

I was energized and impressed by Lee's insight. When I asked Lee if she felt the AWN was strategically important, she reiterated her previous points about how the AWN could potentially help with the retention and development of women. Lee believed the AWN could more effectively achieve its goals by partnering with HR to ensure that the culture did not support practices that might hinder women. She explained, "We need to formally say that those practices are not okay and we need to go out of our way to make sure they're not still happening." I asked

Lee if she thought the AWN could be more strategic by engaging members in projects related to the organization's bottom line. Lee did not see this type of activity happening within the AWN, and she wasn't sure if it was a good fit. She became more open-minded about the idea though as she thought more about it. Lee responded, "It could be. I think that would be interesting. You know, we certainly have people from every department there, so it would make sense to say hey, let's work on this and let's [get] together to do it." She stressed the need to make it inclusive for those outside of the AWN as well.

Regional AWN Member #1: Nancy

Nancy is sales assistant in one of the company's regional operations centers in the Midwest. She chose to become a member of the AWN because she felt those outside of headquarters did not have many opportunities to network within the organization. She was hoping to meet other employees, and learn about different aspects of the company. She also was interested in the AWN's mentoring program. When I asked Nancy about the purpose of the AWN, she was rather outspoken:

> I've read it, but I've yet to experience it. But I think it's for networking and, you know, managers being able to talk with non-management levels, but we've never had any kind of seminars or meetings or whatever that have to do with anything like that. If that's not what it's about, then I have no idea.

Nancy was very candid about her reason for volunteering to participate in this study. She wanted to vent her disappointment and frustration with the AWN. Nancy was frustrated by the AWN's lack of follow through and outright exclusion of certain members. She mentioned numerous occasions when she heard about an event after the fact. She shared one of her most upsetting experiences:

> One of my big, big problems with it is the Race for the Cure that we have here. The only people invited to those [events] are upper management and a lot of time those people aren't even members of the AWN. I don't understand why I'm a member and I don't get invited!

I could hear her voice crack as she whispered, "I've had cancer survivors, as well as

people who didn't survive cancer in my family, and I totally wanted to do that. But, we aren't

included in that. We are only shown the pictures afterwards." I empathized with Nancy and

attempted to understand where the breakdown in communication had happened. Nancy explained

that she was never copied on emails announcing events like Race for the Cure. Nancy believed

the distribution list only included AWN leaders and company managers.

Nancy: Members' Career Advancement

When I asked Nancy to share her perspective on how AWN involvement may influence

members' advancement, she shared another frustrating personal experience, "We had a mentoring

program. We got partnered with someone in higher management. He contacted me one time;

never heard from him again . . . nothing ever came of it." She felt that the program had been

started and then quickly ground to a halt. She expressed her sense of hopelessness, "It's hard to

try to have growth in the company in an administrative position and then, you know, like doing

this for hopes of networking and stuff and then it doesn't follow through." I asked Nancy if she

thought the person she was paired with had been the problem or if it was the whole program. She

explained that the program was supposed to include events and various updates, but she never

received any future communication about the mentoring program.

Based on her observations, the AWN was not positively impacting women's career

advancement. Nancy questioned the AWN's ability to help women at all. She offered her

perspective, "I think depending on who that person's boss is depends on whether or not they're

going to have any kind of advancement whatsoever in the company." Nancy's comment led me

to question how the AWN, or any organizational efforts to support women's career advancement,

could have an impact if women lacked managerial support.

Nancy: Organizational Success

Nancy did believe there was the potential to make the AWN more valuable for members and the organization, but she did not know how to make this happen. She had wrestled with the idea of trying to get elected to a board role, because it seemed they (board members) were able to participate in more activities and become more connected with the management team. Overall, she was unclear about the purpose of the AWN board and how the AWN influenced organizational success. I was curious about Nancy's perception of the level of support from organizational leaders. Nancy believed the main chapter at headquarters was more supported than those in the field, but she still felt the AWN was supported. She explained, "Absolutely [leaders support AWN]. They're the ones that are going out and doing these things with the AWN board members." Nancy expressed frustration that she did not benefit from opportunities the network leaders in her chapter had to interact with the Avero executives.

From Nancy's perspective, the AWN chapter in her region operated sort of like an 'old boys' network; only a select few were included in the social networking opportunities that took place. Nancy couldn't comment on whether or not her manager was supportive of her involvement, "We haven't been included in the things, so I haven't asked him, 'Say I'd like to participate in it, can I?', because we haven't been included in it." I felt quite helpless during my conversation with Nancy. I explained to her how much I appreciated her reaching out to me to share her story and asked her if she thought there was anything the AWN could do to make it more valuable to her and the organization. She vocally responded:

> Yes, to ask us. I think it would make a great difference if, I don't know if it would be a AWN senior leader in [headquarters] came down here and had a meeting with us and let us know like this is what this is . . . and this is what we should be doing as members and as board members and stuff like that. I think that that would help a lot.

I told Nancy that I thought that was a great idea and that she should consider running for a board position or starting a new board. We laughed as she responded, "I'm not a creative person. I don't know what I would call it, the Jilted Member Board?" I said, "The We're Gonna Invite Everyone to Everything Board." She laughed again, "That's right, everyone gets invited. It's like being in school and you're required to invite everyone from the classroom to a birthday party!" I was happy to end our conversation on a high note. I thanked Nancy again and wished her the best of luck in crafting her new leadership role. As I ended our conversation, I wondered how many other Nancys there were within the organization who were longing for opportunities to develop themselves and connect with other women.

Regional AWN Member #2: Jane

Jane worked as an executive assistant in one of the regional offices. She joined the AWN primarily for the opportunity to network across the organization. She was specifically interested in understanding how to access resources and information across the company that may help both her and her boss become more effective in their roles. When I asked Jane about the purpose of the AWN, she responded, "That I couldn't tell you." The chapter that Jane was a part of covered multiple states and she was not actively participating in any AWN events. She explained the difficulty of being a member of her field chapter. "It was huge and it was impossible to do networking events with that big of an area. A lot of the territory managers and the admin, they can't travel for that type of thing, so I think they split it." Jane was not sure of the name of the AWN chapter or the current regional boundaries of the chapter.

Jane: Members' Career Advancement

Jane considered the initial purpose of the AWN to be to help women advance their careers, but she highlighted that this seemed to be an unrealistic goal for those working in the field offices. As Jane described the different roles in the field offices, she maintained that the

only career path for those wanting to move out of an administrative role was to become a territory sales person. For a variety of reasons, she and her peers were reluctant to consider this path. According to Jane:

> Advancement is difficult in this area. Whereas at the headquarters, if you want to go into marketing or any of those different types of things, it's easier. And I think that's what made everything kind of stall, because a lot of the girls here became kind of disillusioned with it.

Jane believed there were opportunities for advancement, but they required the risk of pursuing a new career path and she did not feel that her peers were willing to pursue these new opportunities. "I've seen everybody stay pretty stagnant in their position. Whether they're comfortable there and don't want to advance that's one thing, but yes, I would say no, it [AWN] hasn't helped." Jane believed if women really wanted to advance, they needed to "step outside of that box and take a chance on it." For Jane, the thought of going into sales was frightening. "I've never sold anything in my life," Jane reasoned. She suggested that women could become more comfortable with taking risks if they were provided with some education about the potential opportunities. She described some types of education that may help women step out of their comfort zone, "You know, just on people skills and skills that are needed in sales. I think, just because I'm not quite sure that they, and even myself, I don't really understand what's involved."

Jane thought it would be easier for women to envision making the move if they knew the risks and benefits involved. I encouraged Jane to pass on her great ideas to leaders in the AWN. Like Nancy, Jane believed the HQ chapter had more leadership support, but she still felt that the chapter in her region was viewed positively by corporate leaders. Jane's boss was very supportive of her interest in becoming involved in the AWN. "I've never had any push back at all," she explained.

When I asked Jane about whether or not the AWN was able to facilitate women's career advancement, she offered a surprising response. In her mind, women were being pushed into positions that they may not have been ready for. I asked if she could think of a specific example where this happened. Jane continued, "There's been a couple of jumps to corporate account manager . . . then, it didn't really work out. [The woman promoted] wasn't ready. But there was a push to get her there." Jane expressed concern that placing too much emphasis on promoting women through the AWN or otherwise may hurt the associate and the organization's customers if the women were not adequately prepared for the new role. I was intrigued by Jane's insight. Her example illustrated the need to ensure that women have the skills they need to succeed in future roles. I was reminded of the interview with Jackie, who stressed the strategic importance of the AWN and its role in providing women with the opportunities to develop skills required to succeed in future roles.

Jane: Organizational Success

Jane's perspective regarding how the AWN could impact organizational success was focused on opportunities for employees to become more educated about the company's businesses and career opportunities. She discussed the value of an experience she had through one AWN sponsored event. Jane enthusiastically described the outing, "The visit was absolutely invaluabe. We got to network with some of the associates that work there, and we got a fabulous education on how our manufacturing and logistics work." Jane believed educating and connecting workers like this was an ideal way for the AWN to add value in her region. She continued, "That was perfect, I mean, I came back very enthusiastic from that particular venue."

R2 Regional AWN Member #3: Faye

Faye, a senior research and development specialist in one of the large regional offices (Q2), was excited to join the AWN, because the company she used to be a part of did not have

any type of employee networks. Faye had been working in a business that was recently acquired

by the organization for the past 13 years. It was very interesting to see the contrast in Faye's

perspective relative to other members from outside of headquarters. Faye worked in the R2

region where Scott (organizational leader #5) was the executive sponsor. Based on my

conversations with both Avero executives and AWN leaders, members in Scott's regional

territory were highly energized about the AWN. With Scott's public support, events were well

attended by both men and women at all levels in the organization. Faye viewed her involvement

in the AWN as a way to effectively network and access development training. Faye believed the

AWN's purpose is to provide women with opportunities to connect with one another;

opportunities for community outreach; and if interested, career change and development

opportunities.

Faye: Members' Career Advancement

Faye believed the AWN could directly and positively impact her career advancement and

was excited about the possibilities of advancing her own career through involvement. She

continued:

> Actually, one thing already has come about. Even though it's voluntary, I am
> chairman of the community relations board. That came as a result of being involved
> in the AWN networking group and getting the bit of confidence of the outgoing chair.
> She happened to be involved in the AWN, and it gave me an opportunity to have
> interaction with her, which then facilitated her request that I take over the
> chairmanship from her.

I was eager to hear if Faye had heard of any other instances where members had been

able to advance their careers as a result of AWN involvement. Faye quickly responded,

"Actually yes, one or two people." Both made connections through their involvement in the

AWN that led to new leadership opportunities. Faye referenced the person who she was

replacing on the community relations board. "I can see where the connections she made and

along with her job performance, also helped her in being able to get her new promotion," Faye explained. She felt strongly that an important reason for having a group like the AWN is to allow women to help each other advance through the organization. Faye also emphasized the need for members to take responsibility for their careers, as well as the importance of women having advocates. Managers or executives could advocate by recognizing talented women and "maybe helping them along a little bit." As I listened, I realized that Faye was describing the importance of executive sponsorship without labeling it as such.

Faye affirmed her belief that her chapter had strong support from senior leadership. She described the cross-section of both men and women at events and the level of involvement from those at the executive level. She continued, "I see the president present at events or included in communications, the amount of funding that I know they've gotten. You can tell there's a lot of buy in and support."

Faye also offered her insights about the degree of middle management support. She described the culture prior to the acquisition. Some of the managers from the company that had been acquired (including her own manager) were struggling with the AWN. She explained, "And I know even with me, even though I'm being allowed to do certain things, I can tell that my manager doesn't always like it." I recalled Scott's comment to me about the challenges he faced in integrating these two distinct organizational cultures and increasing women's representation in leadership roles. He had said, "I have a lot of work to do."

Faye: Organizational Success

Faye believed the AWN contributes to organizational success by supporting individual development and increasing positive engagement. She reflected on how many of the AWN's activities were interconnected:

> Well, anytime you develop your people and you give them opportunities to network, do community service, to learn, to grow . . . that can only bolster your organization, because you're going to have people that are more enthused, you're going to have people that are more engaged, you're going to have people that feel you support them in their career goals.

Faye viewed the AWN as strategically important because of its focus on shaping individuals to contribute at the highest levels. She explained, "Whether it be from the smallest goal or something that's specific to a department [or] to the overall health of the organization." I asked Faye if she believed the AWN could do other things to support women's advancement or be more strategically important. Her response echoed Jane's comment about encouraging women to explore other career paths within the organization. Faye offered an example, "Say someone is interested in what a specific business is doing, it may be so that people are like hmm, I'm interested in that, maybe I want to see what opportunities there are." It was exciting to listen to Faye provide another recommendation that the AWN should focus on introducing members to different career paths and providing specific skill set training to prepare them for these new opportunities. I also asked Faye her thoughts about offering projects to AWN members that would be focus on specific business issues or business development. She was also excited about this idea.

Summary of Findings: AWN Members

The group of AWN members included five members from the AWN at chapter headquarters (HQ) and three members from regional chapters (one from the R2 chapter). Participants included senior leaders in the organization who are current and past leaders in the AWN, as well as members in administrative roles who have little to no involvement with the AWN. After talking with AWN members from across the country, it was clear that they had all experienced the network quite differently. Proximity to highly supportive leaders, the extent to which they had experienced serving in a leadership role, the types of opportunities available

through the AWN, and their sense of the career opportunities ultimately available within the company influenced their perspectives on the value of the AWN.

AWN members mentioned many of the same factors identified by Avero executives and AWN leaders that could potentially affect members' advancement; among these were participating in leadership roles, professional development and mentoring, and networking connections. Members also identified barriers that limited the AWN's effectiveness. These included a need for an increased focus on developing and advancing women, greater advocacy from senior leaders, and support from middle management. Similar to AWN leaders, members recognized the importance of self-initiative and a willingness to invest in their own development in order to advance within the company.

Members connected the organization's efforts to support the success of women with the ultimate goal of building a successful organization. Factors most often cited as contributing to long-term organizational success included the networks' role in engaging and retaining women. Members made the case that the AWN is strategic because of its role in supporting the success of women within the organization.

Members' Perspectives on Members' Career Advancement

Participants were divided on their perspectives of the AWN's influence on members' career advancement. Half of the members affirmed the AWN's direct impact, 25% suggested the impact is indirect, and 25% said that involvement in the network is unlikely to have a positive effect on women's career advancement. Those who had previously served in leadership roles or were located in the company headquarters' chapter (HQ) were more likely to agree that the network could play an important role in advancing members' careers. Factors that were most likely to affect members' advancement included participating in leadership roles, developing networking connections, and having access to professional development opportunities.

The four members who believed the AWN could have a direct impact on women's career advancement discussed the importance of serving in leadership roles. The members discussed the value of developing their own leadership skills as well as helping to develop other members. Chris, a senior executive, insisted that serving in a leadership role was highly valuable in building leadership skills and gaining executive exposure. She believed more women should take advantage of these great opportunities. Faye credited her involvement in the AWN with developing increased visibility that led to a new committee leadership opportunity. Members' experiences in the regional chapters (outside of R2) were less positive. One member expressed feeling excluded. Another talked about the lack of development opportunities and activity in general of the chapter in her location.

Seven of the eight members identified professional development as a primary way the AWN could affect members' career advancement. All of the five members in the HQ office provided positive feedback about the development opportunities available through the AWN. They especially appreciated the opportunity to attend the annual development day. Jane mentioned the value of a visit to an off-site facility that helped her develop a better understanding of the business. She stressed the need to educate women about advancement opportunities, especially for those who were reluctant to explore opportunities to transition into a new role. Members appeared to be interested in accessing development opportunities that would be more specific to the types of skills members would need to achieve their career goals. Nancy and Jane underscored the challenges of developing women to advance when there were so few career paths to pursue in the field offices. The value of mentoring through the AWN appeared to be inconsistent. Three of the five members in the HQ offices believed mentoring could have a positive impact on advancement. Nancy, a member of one of the field offices, described the lack of follow-through she experienced within her mentoring relationship. Six of the eight members

highlighted the value of the connections that they developed through the network. They offered

various examples of how networking through the AWN led to new connections, a sense of

belonging, and a better understanding of the organization. Amy declared that she would not be in

her current job if not for the relationships she developed through the AWN. Chris expressed how

she made it a priority to attend AWN events because she felt senior women should serve as role

models for the rest of the organization. Tina expressed her belief that there needed to be an

increased focus on targeting leaders at that level to become engaged. Faye's positive experience

with exposure to senior leaders in her region was different from members' experiences in the less

active regional chapters. Members in these regions sincerely wanted to expand their professional

networks but did not view the AWN as a vehicle to do so. Table 7 provides a summary of the

findings related to research question number one.

Table 7

From the Perspective of AWN Members, How does the AWN Affect Members' Advancement?

AWN member headquarters	Impact on Members' Advancement	How Does the AWN Affect Members' Advancement?
HQ members		
1 – Chris	Yes	Leadership Roles, Development, Mentoring and Role Models. More visibility from senior women and more middle management support. Members need self-initiative.
2 – Jill	Not directly	Development. Agreed women were advancing but did not see the connection with the AWN. Women need to be valued, have advocates, opportunities to gain experience, more senior women involved, more middle management support. Need accountability. Women need self-initiative.
3 – Amy	Yes	Leadership Roles, Connections/Visibility, Development, Mentoring/Sponsorship, Need for Advocacy. More middle management support needed.
4 – Tina	Potentially, not direct	Professional Development (development day), Connections. Need more executives present at the development day and more middle managers to be engaged. No accountability.
5 – Lee	Yes	Leadership Skills/Roles, Development (professional development plans), Mentoring/Sponsorship, Connections (across functions), Visibility. May

		need more support from middle management.
Field members		
1 – Nancy	No	Does not. No opportunity to be included. No follow through on activities. Not sure what value AWN adds. Wanted to access networking, mentoring, and professional development opportunities.
2 – Jane	Not likely	There are limited opportunities for advancement in the company. The AWN could educate women to explore different career paths and specific skills to advance in the company. She cautioned too much of a push to advance women in the company.
3 – Faye	Yes	Leadership Skills/Roles, Development, Connections/Visibility (led to new volunteer leadership opportunities). Women need to help each other, have advocates, self-initiative. Need more support from middle management.

Members' Perspectives on Organizational Success

Having a positive impact on women's success in the company was mentioned by members as a way that the AWN could impact organizational success. Women felt the organization's sponsorship of the AWN was an example of the company's ongoing commitment to their success. Some members believed that the AWN had fostered a culture where members felt valued and supported, whereas others expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of inclusion. One member shared an example of how the AWN could support women in challenging times, such as during organizational restructuring. Other members believed the AWN had the potential to positively impact the culture, but Avero and the network needed to do a better job of valuing women. Perceptions of organizational and managerial support influenced members' perceptions of the value of the AWN. Lack of genuine support from middle managers was pointed out by six of the members. Members in two of the regional chapters had experienced a lack of support from the AWN itself. Four of the eight hoped to see more senior leaders engaged as well.

Members also believed the AWN could positively impact the organization's success in recruiting and retaining female employees. Half of the members identified the importance of recruiting and retaining a diverse talent pool as a way the AWN could tangibly contribute to organizational success. Tina acknowledged that the company was "nowhere near" where they

should be, but she believed that the AWN could add value to the company's efforts to hire more women and minorities. She suggested the AWN become more involved in various corporate recruiting initiatives. Chris also discussed the AWN's value in supporting recruiting efforts. She expressed her concern that the company did not have a positive reputation of being a great place for women to work because it was viewed as male dominated.

Members had mixed feelings about the value of the AWN engaging in community involvement activities. Two of the eight members viewed it as a potential way to strengthen the company's reputation. Faye viewed community engagement activities as a way for members to connect their work with something personally meaningful and fulfilling. Still others, like Chris, expressed reservations that there were numerous alternative outlets for employees to contribute to community activities and that the AWN should really be focused on addressing the issue of developing and advancing women instead. Members were supportive of the concept of engaging the AWN in projects specifically related to the company's business objectives, but they were not familiar with the concept or aware of any instances where this was currently happening. Table 8 summarizes the findings from members' perspectives on the networks effects on organizational success.

This chapter concludes with an overall summary of the interview findings. Table 9 reviews the participants' perspectives on the effects of the network on members' career advancement. Table 10 reviews participants' recommendations to enhance the network's effectiveness. Lastly, Table 11 provides a summary of the participants' perspectives regarding how the AWN affects organizational success.

Table 8

From the Perspective of AWN Members, How Does the AWN Affect Organizational Success?

Member	Impact on Organizational Succcess	How Does the AWN Affect Organizational Success?
HQ members		
1 – Chris	Positive impact	Engagement, retention, recruiting, help with the advancement of women, support through times of change. Strategically important for engagement and recruiting.
2 – Jill	Not sure	Connections, Recruiting, Retention. Should focus more on attracting, retaining, and promoting women. Strategically important because it brings women together and helps with recruiting and retention.
3 – Amy	Positive impact	Engagement, retention, recruiting, and community involvement. Strategic projects in the AWN would be helpful.
4 – Tina	Not sure: "I would think so."	Retention, Recruiting (diversify talent pool), metrics needed. Potential to be strategic mainly by having more diversity in the company.
5 – Lee	Positive	Culture, engagement, new/diverse ways of thinking, develops and promotes women. Strategically important to retain and develop women.
Field members		
1 – Nancy	Not sure: "Has the potential to."	Not sure. Could have an impact if it were inclusive and had direction.
2 – Jane	Not sure: "Has the potential to."	Few opportunities to advance in this region. Could educate women about opportunities within the organization and encourage risk-taking. Could help with the company's image (recognized for having the AWN to support women). Strategically important to advance women who are qualified for higher roles.
3 – Faye	Positive	Professional development, employee engagement, community service, encourages new thinking, educates women about career paths within the company. Strategically important to develop women to contribute at their highest level.

Table 9
How Does the AWN Affect Members' Career Advancement?

	Direct Affect	Indirect Affect	Unlikely to Affect	Positive Culture	Professional Development	Mentoring	Visibility/ Connections	Leadership Roles
Org. leaders (%)	20	60	20	40	100	60	60	80
Stephanie		X			X			X
Sue		X	X		X		X	X
Lisa	X				X	X	X	
Kevin		X		X	X	X		X
Scott		X		X	X	X	X	X
AWN leaders (%)	100			33	66	33	100	100
Jackie	X				X		X	X
Danielle	X				X	X	X	X
Jody	X			X			X	X
AWN members (%)	50	25	25		88	38	75	50
Chris	X				X	X	X	X
Jill		X			X			
Amy	X				X	X	X	X
Tina		X			X		X	
Lee	X				X	X	X	X
Nancy			X					
Jane			X		X		X	
Faye	X				X		X	X

Table 10

Recommendations to Enhance the AWN's Effectiveness

	Develop Skill-Based Competencies / Targeted Development	Accountability Executive Leadership / Metrics	Advocacy / Sponsorship	Middle-Management Support / Recognition for involvement	Participation of Executives as Role Models (Especially Women)	Resources / Recognition for Members' Involvement
Org. leaders (%)	100	80	100		40	60
Stephanie	X	X	X	—	X	X
Sue	X	X	X	—	Xa	X
Lisa	X		X	—		X
Kevin	X	X	X	—		
Scott	X	X	X			
AWN leaders (%)	66	0	66	66	33	66
Jackie	X					
Danielle	X		X	X		X
Jody			X	X	X	X
AWN members (%)	38	38	75	75	50	25
Chris		X	X	X	X	X
Jill	X	X	X	X	X	X
Amy			X	X		
Tina		X		X	X	
Lee			X	X		
Nancy	X		X		X	
Jane	X					
Faye			X	X		

Note. aAnd men.

Table 11

How Does the AWN Affect Organizational Success?

	Positive	Not sure	Culture Policies	Engagement	Retention	Recruiting	Comm. Involve	Develop / Advance	Customers	Strategic Projects
Org. leaders	100		60	100	60	60	20	60	20	
Stephanie	X		P	X*	X	X	X	X	P	P
Sue	X		P	X				P	P	P
Lisa	X		X*	X						P
Kevin	X		X*	X*	X	X*		X		P
Scott	X		X*	X*	X*	X*		X	X*	P
AWN leaders	100		100	100	33	100	66	100	33	
Jackie	X		X	X		X	X	X*		P
Danielle	X		X	X*		X*		X		P
Jody	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X*	—
AWN members	50	50	38	38	50	50	25	25		
Chris	X		X*	X*	X	X*				P
Jill		X			X*	X*				—
Amy	X			X	X	X	X			P
Tina		X	P		P	P				No
Lee	X		X		X*	X		X*		P
Nancy		X	P							—
Jane		X					P	P*		—
Faye	X		X	X			X	X*		P

Note. * = strategic; P = potential; — = Did not discuss.

Chapter 5: Survey Findings

This chapter reports the findings from the survey of the AWN members. The chapter is organized by first, an overview of the survey and participants; second, a discussion of the network's purpose; third, the network's effects on members' career advancement (and other benefits of involvement); fourth, the effects of the network on organizational success; fifth, considerations regarding the level of network support within the organization; and lastly, factors that may limit the network's effectiveness.

Survey Participants

An online survey was distributed via an anonymous link to all registered members of the AWN. The invitation came from the AWN National Co-Chair based in the company's main office (HQ office). The network's distribution list included the email addresses of approximately 1,300 employees across the U.S. A total of 261 employees completed the survey, a response rate of approximately 20%. Participants who received the email, but did not consider themselves members, were invited to take the survey as a non-member. Approximately 10% of the participants described themselves as non-members.

Participants were not required to respond to every question on the survey; this resulted in subtle variations (less than 5%) in the number (N) of participants who responded to each question. The survey was available for 10 days; two email reminders were sent to employees during this time frame. Question types included a combination of quantitative and open-ended discussion questions (Appendix E). Demographic questions about the participants' backgrounds and AWN involvement were also incorporated (Appendix E). References to the level of agreement reported in this findings chapter are based on the sum of the participants who indicated an "agree" or "strongly agree" response to the question of interest (unless otherwise indicated).

To develop a distinct understanding of the perspectives of the organizational leaders/executives, participants who identified themselves as such were filtered out of the data set before the remaining population was divided into the remaining roles: network leader, committee member, network member, and non-member. The 39 executives who completed the survey identified themselves across a variety of network roles: network leaders (10%), network members (52%), committee members (18%), and non-members (18%). Selection role choices should be reconsidered in future research to include adding an option for "Executive Sponsor" or "Executive Supporter" to accurately reflect the status of some of these more senior executives. Comparing mean responses using ANOVA, the only significant difference in participants' perspectives across occupations was related to perceptions of individual career advancement rates ($p < .001$). Executives were more likely to believe they were advancing at a faster rate (29%) compared with middle managers (20%) and non-managers (6%).

The majority of participants were female (92%), Caucasian (87%), had an undergraduate degree (48%) or higher (32%), and 36 years old or older (62%). Sixty percent of the participants had been with the company for seven years or longer, 24% for 16 or more years. Seventy-four percent (29) of the 39 executives who participated were women, and only 10% were women of color (Table 12). This latter statistic highlights the need to determine what unique barriers women of color face in their efforts to advance to senior leadership roles. Executives and network leaders tended to be older, more seasoned members. There were no significant differences in the mean ages or the number of years participants had worked at Avero across the various network roles. Network leaders were most active, with 82% describing themselves as "active" or "very active." Committee members were the next most active (76%), followed by executives (28%) and AWN members (13%). Fifty percent of AWN leaders and 30% of AWN

committee members reported spending time on issues or activities related to the AWN at least once per week or more.

There were significant differences in the mean levels of the members' education and tenure with the company across chapter locations. Participants located in chapters outside of the HQ and R2 (largest regional chapter office) were less educated and more likely to indicate that they had been with the company for seven or more years (Table 13). The tenure reported may have included time spent working at a company that was acquired by Avero. Members from the HQ and R2 (largest regional chapter) chapters represented the majority of survey participants: 50% (131) were located in the HQ office while 23% (62) were located in the R2 office. Response rates from the remaining seven chapters (27%) ranged from 2% to 7%. To ensure participant anonymity (that could be compromised as a result of low response rates) the responses from the 72 participants from the seven remaining chapters were combined into an "other" category. The tables that report responses across chapters do so by comparing these three groups.

Members of chapters outside of the HQ and R2 chapters were significantly less active in comparison to HQ and R2 members. As the newest chapter, the majority of R2 members had been a part of the AWN for less than two years. R2 chapter engagement is evident in the high levels of activity. Forty-five percent of these members described themselves as "active" or "very active," compared with 26% of the HQ members and 20% of other chapter members. The R2 chapter also had a larger number of committee members (28%) compared with the HQ office (11%) and other chapters (10%). Participant profiles are explored by role in Table 12 and by chapter in Table 13.

Table 12

Survey Participant Profiles by Network Role (Excludes Non-Members)

	Org leader / exec	AWN leader	AWN committee	AWN member
N	39	28	29	140
HQ (%)	57%	52%	47%	57%
R2 (%)	27%	12%	37%	23%
Members for 3+ years (%)	66%	75%	33%	50%
Active or very active (%)	28%	82%	76%	13%
Female (%)	74%	100%	96%	96%
Ages 36-55	83%	75%	60%	53%
Mean age	3.66	3.00	3.03	3.26
Std. dev. age	1.04	.92	1.07	1.22
Caucasian (%)	92%	89%	73%	90%
Undergrad or higher (%)	97%	86%	86%	77%
7+ years at Avero (%)	75%	54%	60%	44%
Mean years at Avero	4.38	3.82	4.07	3.86
Std. dev. years	1.70	1.42	1.53	1.59

Table 13

Survey Participant Profiles by Chapter Location

	HQ	R2	Other
N	131	62	72
Members for 3+ years (%)	70%	8%	56%
Active or very active (%)	27%	45%	21%
Female (%)	98%	87%	86%
Ages 36-55	62%	65%	75%
Mean age	3.66	3.00	3.03
Std. dev. age	1.04	.92	1.07
Caucasian (%)	92%	84%	81%
Undergrad or higher (%)	88%	82%	63%
7+ years at Avero (%)	52%	69%	66%
Mean years at Avero	3.72	4.31	4.15
Std. dev. years	1.62	1.46	1.49

Primary Purpose of the AWN

Nearly 100% of participants (81% for non-members) agreed that the primary purpose of the AWN was to create an opportunity for members to network with one another (Table 14). AWN leaders (90%) and committee members (87%) were most likely to agree that community involvement is also a primary purpose, whereas executives (72%) were least likely to agree with this purpose. ANOVA results showed significant differences in the participants' perspectives regarding the network's purpose. Network leaders responded more positively to all of the questions in Table 14 ($p < .05$ significance). Committee members followed, except for the question related to focused skill-set training on which they reported the lowest level of agreement (43%). The types of skills committee members gain from involvement is of interest in this study because further analysis showed that committee members were less likely to report having advanced. Chi-square tests indicated that the differences between those in other network roles who responded to the question on skill-set training were not statistically significant (e.g., executives 62%, network leaders 58%, members 57%). The regional chapters outside of the HQ office were more likely to agree that community involvement and networking were the primary purposes of the AWN (Table 15). Eight percent of male participants were significantly less likely than women to believe that the purpose of the AWN was for community involvement ($p < .045$); 20% of the men disagreed with this statement compared to only 5% of the women.

Career advancement as a primary purpose. The majority of participants across network roles reported that facilitating members' career advancement was a primary purpose of the AWN (Table 14). Network members reported the highest levels of agreement (74%) and committee members reported the lowest (62%). Participants were also asked whether or not they believed the network is effective in facilitating members' advancement. The results from these two questions are highlighted in Table 14. Findings indicated that participants were significantly

more likely to report that advancing women was a primary purpose of the network, in comparison to their perceptions that the network was effective in its efforts to advance women.

ANOVA results showed that there were significant differences in the perceptions of the network's effectiveness in advancing women across network roles ($p < .026$). Network leaders were most likely to believe that the network was effective in its efforts to facilitate members' career advancement (60%), followed by executives (42%), network members (35%), committee members (32%), and non-members (26%). The gap between purpose and effectiveness in the participants' responses was narrowest among the AWN leaders (11%) and widest among AWN members (39%), meaning network members were most likely to think the AWN should be about advancing women but least likely to believe it is effective in doing so (Table 14). Setting a goal to increase members' perceptions that the AWN is effective in its efforts to advance women could be one of the goals of the AWN moving forward. When comparing the various chapters' responses about network effectiveness to facilitate advancement, a gap was also evident across all three groups (Table 15). The gap was narrower among the R2 chapter responses (70% purpose vs. 47% effectiveness).

Table 14

Primary Purpose of the AWN by Network Role

A Primary Purpose of the AWN Is:	Org. leaders (%) (*N* = 39)	AWN leaders (%) (*N* = 28)	AWN committee (%) (*N* = 29)	AWN members (%) (*N* = 140)
To Facilitate Members' Career Advancement	72	71	62	74
The Awn Is Effective in Its Efforts to Facilitate Members' Career Advancement	42	60	32	35
To Provide Members with Opportunities to Network with One Another	97	100	100	99
To Provide Members with Opportunities for Community Involvement	72	90	87	77
To Provide Members with Individual Mentoring	51	71	50	64
To Provide Members with Focused Skill-Set Training	62	58	43	57

Note. Response = Strongly Agree + Agree.

Table 15

Primary Purpose of the AWN Across Chapters

A Primary Purpose of the AWN Is:	HQ chapter (%) (*N* = 128)	R2 chapter (%) (*N* = 63)	Other chapters (%) (*N* = 64)
To Facilitate Members' Career Advancement	75	70	66
AWN Is Effective in Its Efforts to Facilitate Members' Career Advancement	38	47	29

Note. Response = Strongly Agree + Agree.

Benefits of AWN Involvement

Consistent with participants' perceptions of the primary purpose of the AWN,

participants across network roles and chapters were most likely to agree that they had developed

connections across sectors in comparison to other benefits of involvement (Tables 17-18).

ANOVA testing showed significant differences in mean responses within groups based on

activity level and network role (excluding executives). The means were lowest for those who described themselves as "not active" or a "non-member" and highest for those who described themselves as "very active" or a "network leader." Table 16 shows that the ranking order between the benefits reported by the network leaders and those who were most active were quite similar. This is not surprising because half of those who described themselves as "very active" were network leaders.

Table 16

Benefits of Involvement for the Most Active and Network Leaders

	Very Active[a] (N = 30)	Network Leader (N = 28)
1	Developed connections across sectors (4.63)	Developed connections across sectors (4.47)
2	Developed friendships (4.17)	Developed friendships (4.16)
3	Exposure to female role models (4.07)	Exposure to female role models (4.06)
4	Greater desire to advance (4.07)	Confidence in leadership capabilities (4.03)
5	Confidence in leadership capabilities (4.03)	Greater desire to advance (4.03)
6	Confidence in ability to advance (3.90)	Confidence in ability to advance (3.96)
7	Exposure to male role models (3.62)	Exposure to male role models (3.59)

Note. [a]Very Active group (self-identified) comprised 16 leaders, 8 committee members, and 6 individual members.

The greatest benefit of involvement reported across network roles was the connections members developed across the organization, and the least reported benefit was exposure to male role models (Table 17). As expected, ANOVA results showed that there were significant differences in benefit levels reported across network roles and network leaders benefitted most; network leaders reported the highest mean scores, followed by committee members, network members, and non-members (differences were significant at the $p < .05$ level). In comparison with network members, network leaders were more than twice as likely as AWN members (82%

vs. 35%) to agree that they had developed meaningful friendships; greater confidence in their leadership capabilities (79% vs. 38%); increased exposure to executive male role models (46% vs. 22%); and increased workplace satisfaction (64% vs. 30%) (Table 17).

Exposure to Executive Role Models

Chi-square analysis showed that all participants were significantly more likely to increase their exposure to executive female role models vs. executive male role models ($p < .001$). Less than 50% of participants across the groups agreed that they had increased their exposure to male role models. ANOVA showed that there were significant differences ($p < .05$) in participant responses across roles. Network leaders were most likely to report having increased their exposure to male (46%) and female (71%) role models, followed by executives (m=45%, f=68%), committee members (25%, 59%), and members (22%, 45%) (Table 17). Chapter members outside of the main office were significantly more likely ($p < .014$) to say they had increased their exposure to executive male role models (HQ-32%, R2-56%, Other-50%) (Table 18). A possible reason for this is the lack of female role models available in these offices, as interview findings suggest. However, there were no significant differences in reported rates of exposure to female role models across chapters. R2 chapter participants were significantly more likely ($p < .026$) to agree that they had developed relationships with others across business sectors, compared with the HQ office (84%) and other offices (71%). This could be attributed to the high levels of activity in the R2 chapter (Table 18).

The effects that exposure to male or female role models may have on members' career advancement were of particular interest in this study. Previous research on women's networks suggests that executive role models, especially women, play an important role in determining the value of a women's network to members. Linear regression was used to determine if the presence of male or female role models did impact the likelihood that participants would report an increased desire or ability to advance. Findings indicated that exposure to female role models predicted a participant's likelihood to report greater confidence in the ability to advance ($p < .018$) (Appendix F-3). The regression model also included exposure to male role models

(p<.611), greater confidence in leadership capabilities (p < .001), increased work satisfaction (p < .002), and increased desire to advance (p < .001). When the regression model included only two predictor variables (exposure to male and female role models), exposure to males also became significant (p<.05). Exposure to male or female role models did not have a statistically significant effect on participants' responses related to their desire to advance (Appendix F-4). However, confidence in leadership capabilities (p < .002), work satisfaction (p < .001), and confidence in the ability to advance (p < .001) were meaningful predictors of a participant's reported desire to advance.

Table 17

Benefits of AWN Involvement by Network Role

Based specifically on your involvement in AWN:	Org leaders (%) (N = 39)	AWN leaders (%) (N = 28)	AWN committee (%) (N = 29)	AWN members (%) (N = 140)
I have developed meaningful friendships	66	82	70	35
I have developed connections with individuals across business sectors	74	89	87	60
I have increased my exposure to executive men I view as role models	45	46	25	22
I have increased my exposure to executive women I view as role models	68	71	59	45
I have increased my level of satisfaction at work	49	64	44	30
I have greater confidence in my leadership capabilities	53	79	59	38
I have a greater desire to advance	61	75	70	48
I have greater confidence in my ability to advance	51	79	47	43

Note. Response = Strongly Agree + Agree.

Benefits by Chapter

The R2 members reported greater benefits on all questions in Table 18. It was notable that members of chapters outside the HQ office were significantly more likely to report exposure to male leaders. One potential reason for this is that there were more senior women to connect with at the main office in comparison to in the field. However, there were no significant differences across chapters in members' perceptions of their exposure to senior women role models.

Table 18

Benefits of Involvement by Chapter

Based specifically on your involvement in the AWN:	HQ chapter (%) (N = 128)	R2 chapter (%) (N = 63)	Other chapters (%) (N = 64)
I have developed meaningful friendships	49	54	44
I have developed connections with individuals across business sectors	69	76	55
I have increased my exposure to executive men I view as role models	22	39	36
I have increased my exposure to executive women I view as role models	53	55	48
I have increased my workplace satisfaction	35	42	36
I have greater confidence in my leadership capabilities	46	46	44
I have a greater desire to advance	50	64	46
I have greater confidence in my ability to advance	48	52	41

Note. Response = Strongly Agree + Agree.

Effects on Advancement

Thirty (10%) of the survey participants reported that they had advanced as a result of their network involvement (Table 21). Twenty-four of these participants responded to an open-

ended question asking them to explain how the network helped with their advancement. Eleven

(46%) reported that they developed valuable connections and increased visibility, six (25%)

identified skills they developed (leadership/communication skills), five (21%) discussed their

mentoring experiences, and four (17%) specifically mentioned their network leadership roles.

In exploring how network role affected advancement, AWN leaders benefitted most, with

25% indicating they had advanced; this was more than double the rate of committee members

(7%) and members (11%) (Table 20). Certain projects and activities the members participated in

also influenced the probability of advancement. Chi-square analysis indicated that 90% of those

who responded "yes," indicating that they had advanced as a result of network involvement, also

indicated that they had participated in projects or activities through the network that were helpful

in advancing their career.

Participants were also invited to share what types of projects or activities were helpful in

advancing their career by responding to an open-ended question that followed. Twenty-one of

the 30 participants who reported advancing responded to this question. Nine participants (43%)

described the professional development they gained through the AWN's events (such as

developing leadership skills and effective interviewing skills), seven (33%) discussed their

responsibilities as network leaders (such as managing meetings and presenting at events), five

(24%) identified their experiences as a mentee through the AWN's mentoring program, and two

(10%) shared their experiences of having acted as a mentor for a more junior employee. These

findings suggest that women and their organizations should evaluate whether or not women have

access to the types of development opportunities that they deem helpful in advancing their careers

within, as well as outside of, their regular work.

Whether or not the participant had developed a relationship with a sponsor (see

definitions describing the "sponsorship question") was also critical for advancement. Sixty

percent of participants who reported that they had advanced also answered "yes" to the

sponsorship question. Survey participants were also invited to share how a sponsor helped to

advocate for their advancement. Eighteen of the 30 participants who reported sponsors advanced;

10 of these participants responded to the open-ended question about how the relationship with a

sponsor was helpful. Three of the 10 (30%) shared stories about how an individual had pointed

out a new role in the company and encouraged or helped them pursue the position, four (40%)

discussed how an individual had recommended them for a new role, two (20%) described the

career coaching they received, and one (10%) shared how an individual had opened up an

opportunity to work on a high visibility project in one of the business sectors. The two most

relevant examples of sponsorship, as described in prevailing literature, were the actions of

recommending an individual for a new role and opening up an opportunity for an individual to

work on a new project.

In an effort to understand how sponsorship and participating in advancement projects or

activities were related to advancement, binary logistic regression was conducted. The goal of the

analysis was to determine if these two variables (advancement projects and sponsorship) were

predictors of a participant's reported advancement. Results revealed that sponsorship ($p < .001$)

and advancement projects ($p < .001$) were significant predictors (Appendix F-1). Further analysis

showed that these two activities accounted for 40% or more of the variance in the advancement

outcome (Appendix F-1). Table 19 shows that having a sponsor in itself was not as important as

participating in an advancement project; in fact, none of the participants who reported "yes" to

sponsorship, but "no" to participating in an advancement project, actually advanced. These

findings emphasize the magnitude of women taking the initiative to engage in projects or

activities that may be helpful for advancement. It also suggests that sponsors are most likely to

be impactful when women have the opportunity to display their talents and motivation.

Table 19

Advancement Projects Are Critical for Advancement

Relationship with a Sponsor	Project or Activity Helpful for Advancement	Participants Who Advanced (count)	Participants Who Did Not Advance (count)
No	No	3	128
Yes	No	0	11
No	Yes	10	92
Yes	Yes	18	18

Network leaders were most likely to agree that they had participated in an advancement project (82%) or had developed a relationship with a mentor (61%) or sponsor (36%) (Table 20). Committee members were least likely to report that they had someone at a higher level facilitating their advancement (10%) and least likely to report that they had advanced (7%). This is a surprising finding given they are more involved than members by serving in a leadership role (Table 20). Thirty-two percent of participants overall reported that they had formed a relationship with a mentor and 17% indicated that they had developed a relationship with a sponsor (Table 20).

Table 20

Advancement by Network Role

Based specifically on your involvement in AWN:	Org leaders (%) (N = 39)	AWN leaders (%) (N = 28)	AWN committee (%) (N = 29)	AWN members (%) (N = 140)
I have developed relationships with one or more colleagues <u>at a higher level </u>who have gone out of their way to support my career advancement	23	36	10	12
I have developed relationships with one or more colleagues that I consider to be mentors.	26	61	37	30
I have participated in projects/activities that I consider to be of value in advancing my career.	41	82	67	49
I have advanced as a result of projects, activities, or connections made through my involvement in AWN.	8	25	7	11

Note. Response = Yes.

Table 21

Advancement by All Survey Participants

Through my involvement in the AWN:	All (%) (N = 261)	With a mentor (%) (N = 94)	With a sponsor (%) (N = 49)
Greater Confidence in Leadership Cap[a]	45	64	72
Greater Desire to Advance[a]	53	65	72
Greater Confidence to Advance[a]	47	67	78
Participated in Projects of Value to Advance[b]	49	67	77
I Have Advanced[b]	10	21	38

Note. [a]Response = Strongly Agree + Agree.
[b]Response = Yes.

Understanding what types of activities may increase the likelihood of sponsorship

happening through the AWN was also of interest in this study. Three variables were identified as

significant predictors of the likelihood that a participant would report that they had developed a

relationship with a sponsor: having developed a relationship with a mentor ($p < .001$), having

participated in advancement projects (p < .022), and having been exposed to executive male role

models (p < .024). Exposure to executive female role models was not a predictor of sponsorship

(p<.302) (Appendix F-2). This finding supports research on social networking that suggests

individuals benefit more when they have the opportunity to develop relationships with those in

positions of power. As is the case in most organizations, men held the majority of executive

positions at Avero. These findings also highlight the importance of encouraging male executives

to become involved in women's networks.

Findings exploring advancement across chapters indicated that the sponsor (13%),

mentor (23%), and advancement levels (5%) were lowest for the R2 chapter (Table 22). As

mentioned previously, the R2 chapter is the newest chapter. It is possible that the network has

not been in place long enough for members to benefit in these ways.

Table 22

Advancement by Chapter

Based specifically on your involvement in AWN…	HQ chapter (%) ($N = 128$)	R2 chapter (%) ($N = 63$)	Other chapters (%) ($N = 64$)
I have developed relationships with one or more colleagues <u>at a higher level</u> who have gone out of their way to support my career advancement.	18	13	21
I have developed relationships with one or more colleagues that I consider to be mentors.	36	23	35
I have participated in projects/activities that I consider to be of value in advancing my career.	60	54	33
I have advanced as a result of projects, activities, or connections made through my involvement.	14	5	12

Note. Response = Yes.

Effects on Organizational Success

Two questions were explored to develop an understanding of how the AWN contributed to organizational success. The first question pertained to the participants' beliefs about the greatest benefit to the organization for establishing and supporting the AWN. The second question related to members' perceptions of the network's strategic importance.

Regardless of network role, participants were most likely to respond that the greatest benefit to the organization (of sponsoring the AWN) was to provide members with professional development opportunities (Table 23). Nearly half of the network leaders, followed by executives (36%), committee members (29%), and members (15%), identified developing women as the greatest benefit in this open-ended question. The annual professional development day was frequently mentioned as an important development opportunity. There were differences in the second most common themes across groups: executives mentioned the benefit of creating a positive culture (30%) (this was consistent with what male executives focused on during the interviews); network leaders identified the ability for the network to support members' advancement (16%); committee members commented on the network's role in supporting women employees (23%); and members identified the network's value in connecting women within the organization (12%).

Table 23

Open-Ended Question: Greatest Benefit to the Organization

Network Role	N	Develop Women (%)	Support Women (%)	Connect Women (%)	Advance Women (%)
Executives	39	36	23	11	3
Network leaders	28	48	13	5	16
Committee	30	29	23	11	3
Members	127	15	10	12	10

Strategic Importance

Perceptions of executive support for the network and an individual's network role influenced the extent to which the network was viewed as strategically important. ANOVA results showed that there were significant differences in perspectives across network roles ($p <$ .04). Network leaders were most likely to agree that the network was strategically important (71%), followed by committee members (55%), non-members (48%), executives (47%), and members (43%). There were no differences in perceptions of strategic importance across occupations ($p < .884$) or chapter location ($p < .163$). Linear regression analysis was used to determine if there were factors that may predict the likelihood a participant would view the network as strategically important. Findings showed that broad support from executive men ($p <$ .001) and executive women ($p < .001$), whether or not the participant's contributions were recognized and valued by the organization ($p < .001$), significantly increased the likelihood that a participant would report that the network was viewed as strategically important (Appendix F-5). These findings suggest that the network is viewed as more valuable when executives are supportive and involved.

Level of Organizational Support for the AWN

Eighty percent of participants agreed that the network was perceived positively within the organization (only 3% disagreed and 0% strongly disagreed) (Table 24). Executives (90%) and network leaders (89%) and "very active" members (90%) were most likely to believe that the network was perceived positively. These findings are consistent with feedback from interview participants that the network has strong support from senior leaders. In comparing responses across network roles, there was a consistent gap between perceptions of the level of support from executive men and women, with executive women being perceived as more supportive. Network leaders were most likely to report that the network had the broad support of executive women. Chi-square analysis showed that males (the majority of executives in the study) were significantly more likely than females ($p < .05$) to perceive that the network had the support of male and female executives.

Network leaders (74%) and committee members (52%) were most likely to report that their time and contributions to the network were recognized by their managers (58%) and the organization (55%) (Table 24). Based on previous research and interview findings, a lack of time to participate is a concern for women. Findings from this study show that perceptions that the network is viewed positively may also influence an employee's willingness to participate. Non-members (55%) were significantly less likely than executives (90%), network leaders (89%), committee members (79%), and members (82%) to believe the network is perceived positively in the organization; this finding indicates that time may not be the only reason non-members are choosing not to be involved in the network.

Network leaders were significantly more likely than all other groups to agree that their time and contributions were recognized by the organization. There were no significant differences in the perceptions of organizational support versus the support of supervising

managers across chapters (Table 25). This finding is inconsistent with the concerns raised during

the interview conversations about the lack of mid-level management support for the network.

Table 24

Organizational Support Level for the Network by Network Role

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following:	Org. leaders (%) (N = 39)	AWN leaders (%) (N = 28)	AWN committee (%) (N = 29)	AWN members (%) (N = 140)	Non-members (%) (N = 32)
AWN is perceived positively within the organization.	90	89	79	82	55
AWN has broad support from executive women.	75	89	79	73	67
AWN has broad support from executive men.	53	58	65	49	58
AWN is viewed as strategically important within the organization.	47	71	55	43	48
My time and contributions are recognized by the organization.	40	74	52	35	17
My time and contributions are recognized by my manager.	36	58	55	39	16

Note. Top Box = Strongly Agree + Agree.

Table 25

Organizational Support Level by Chapter

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following:	HQ chapter (%) (N = 128)	R2 chapter (%) (N = 63)	Other chapters (%) (N = 64)
AWN is perceived positively within the organization.	87	85	68
AWN has broad support from executive women.	75	83	71
AWN has broad support from executive men.	48	66	53
AWN is viewed as strategically important within the organization.	47	57	48
My time and contributions are recognized by the organization.	39	48	41
My time and contributions are recognized by my manager.	43	41	42

Note. Top Box = Strongly Agree + Agree.

Limits to the AWN's Effectiveness

Participants were also asked to identify factors that may limit the AWN's ability to effectively serve members' needs.   The most common theme identified when analyzing the responses to this open-ended question related to the lack of sufficient support from managers and senior leaders (Table 26). Executives were the most likely to state that there needed to be greater support from corporate leaders (40%) followed by network leaders (25%). Members were the most likely to report that they did not have enough time to participate in network activities (35%). Network members also mentioned that chapters outside of the HQ office may not have the ability to participate in AWN activities at the same rate as those in the HQ office (16%).

Table 26

Open-Ended Question: What Limits the AWN's Effectiveness?

Network Role	N	Lack of leadership support (%)	Lack of time to commit (%)	Field chapters do not have the same opportunities (%)
Executives	39	40	12	—
Network leaders	32	25	19	—
Committee members	37	20	16	—
Members	132	10	35	16

Summary of Survey Findings

Participants reported a variety of benefits of involvement in the AWN. The primary

purpose and greatest benefit of the AWN was to provide members with opportunities to develop

networking connections across business sectors in the organization. Network leaders were

significantly more likely to report having benefitted from their involvement in the women's

network across all measures. Surprisingly, members serving in committee roles did not

consistently report more positive outcomes in comparison to members. Understanding the types

of activities that are most valuable for women choosing to serve in network leadership roles

would be of value in future research.

The survey also explored the extent to which there were differences in the perceptions of

members across network chapters. Chapters outside of the HQ office were more likely to agree

that the primary purpose of the AWN was community involvement. The R2 chapter participants

reported higher levels of engagement and greater benefits of involvement. The strong leadership

support in the R2 region revealed in the interview findings may be related to the level of

enthusiasm in that region. Interestingly, the R2 chapter participants reported lower levels of

sponsorship and advancement. As the newest AWN chapter, this suggests that it may take time

for women to benefit from involvement in these ways. Concerns raised about the value of the

AWN during the interview conversations from regional members outside of the R2 chapter were difficult to reinforce or contradict from the survey findings due to low response rates in the regions. Members did comment on one open-ended question that those located outside of the HQ office did not have the same opportunities to participate in AWN activities.

This study revealed a notable gap between perceptions of the network's purpose and effectiveness in advancing women. Addressing this disconnection is one way for organizations to evaluate the extent to which advancing women is an organizational goal and if it should be executed through the sponsorship of a women's network. Reducing the gap could be one benchmark established if advancement is a priority. Organizations should also consider how advancing women aligns with other network objectives. For example, executives in the interview portion of the study suggested that the AWN's focus on community involvement may have distracted from the network's ability to focus on advancing women, yet survey participants were more likely to identify community involvement as a primary purpose of the network in comparison to career advancement.

Only 10% of survey participants reported that they had advanced. However, that percentage more than doubled for network leaders (25%). The most significant predictor of advancement was whether or not a member had participated in a project or activity that they viewed as important for their career advancement. Having a sponsor to advocate for a member's advancement was also found to be a predictor of advancement. These findings suggest that individual efforts to demonstrate capabilities and secure sponsors to recognize performance can have a meaningful impact on advancement potential. Executives who participated in a study by O'Neil et al. (2011) reinforced these findings; they emphasized the significance of women's network members demonstrating their visible accomplishments as a strategy for advancement.

The study also investigated how exposure to male and female role models influenced members' desire and ability to advance. Previous qualitative studies on women's networks concluded that exposure to male and female role models is important for women's career advancement (Hersby et al., 2009). The need to engage more male and female executives was also underscored in the interview conversations and on the survey. Female role models were found to be especially important for women to develop confidence in their ability to advance, but exposure to male or female role models did not affect participants' desire to advance. Exposure to male role models increased the probability that a participant would report having developed a relationship with a sponsor.

The vast majority of participants agreed that the network was perceived positively within the organization. Organizational leaders and network leaders were most likely to believe so. These findings are consistent with feedback from interview participants. When asked about the challenges that limited the AWN's effectiveness, participants identified the desire for more support from mid-level and senior leaders. This was a recurring theme throughout the interview and survey findings.

Network leaders and committee members were most likely to report that their time and contributions to the network were recognized by their managers and the organization as a whole. There were no significant gaps between the perceptions of organizational support versus the perceptions of supervising managers' support. This finding does not reinforce concerns related to a lack of middle management support during some of the interview conversations with network members. Female executives were significantly less likely than male executives to perceive that the network had executive level support; this is consistent with remarks by executive women (during the interviews) that the network may be symbolically supported by senior leaders, but there needed to be more executive engagement to consider its strategic importance in advancing

women. Survey findings did reinforce concerns expressed during the interview conversations

that members had limited time available to engage in network activities.

The organizational leaders and network leaders were eager to gain some perspective

about the AWN's effectiveness relative to similar company-sponsored women's networks. Due

to a lack of existing research like the current study, I was unable to offer any relevant

comparisons. Rather, I encouraged the organizational and network leaders to consider the extent

to which the findings were aligned with their expectations and if they were satisfied with the

current situation. I reaffirmed my belief that the data provided them with an opportunity to think

differently about the role and value of the AWN to advance women in the company.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

This study was initiated to explore the theoretical and practical implications of how women's networks may affect women's career advancement and the success of their sponsoring organization. The study is grounded upon feminist case study methodology, theories of women's career development, and the limited existing research on women's networks. This final chapter is organized into two primary sections with implications for future research and theory interwoven within. The first section is dedicated to women who may be contemplating involvement in a company-sponsored women's network. It discusses strategies to leverage involvement in a network to best align with their career objectives. The second section is presented to organizational leaders who are interested in structuring women's networks so they can have a positive impact on women's career advancement and organizational success.

Leveraging Women's Networks from the Member's Standpoint

Results from this study confirm that participating in a women's network can positively impact a member's career success. Some of the many benefits of involvement include developing a professional network, accessing professional development opportunities, engaging in community involvement, and positioning oneself for advancement. Two primary benefits stood out in both the survey and interview findings: the opportunity to develop connections with others within their organization and the ability to access a variety of professional development opportunities.

Women who are interested in advancement should recognize that advancement as a result of involvement in the women's network was not extensive, but it did happen. Network leaders and members were more likely than organizational leaders to believe the network could directly impact member's advancement. Three of the 16 interview participants and approximately 10% of the survey participants reported that they had advanced as a result of their involvement. The

likelihood of advancement increased for those who pursued opportunities to demonstrate leadership capabilities and develop relationships with executives.

The findings also revealed that not all participants benefitted equally. Because women's networks may address women's career development needs through multiple avenues, women must individually explore what it is they hope to gain from dedicating the necessary time and energy to become involved. Members' experiences participating in the AWN varied from highly rewarding to thoroughly disappointing. Several factors contributed to the likelihood that members had a positive experience: how active they were, the roles they served in, the types of activities they chose to become involved in, their geographic location, and the support they received from the organization and its leaders. The following conclusions and recommendations are intended to provide women with the opportunity to evaluate how various types of involvement in a women's network (if any) may best align with their career development needs.

Developing a Professional Network

Women who are interested in developing and expanding their professional network can accomplish this by becoming involved in a women's network. Nearly 100% of study participants agreed that one of the primary purposes of the network was to help members develop connections within their company. The majority of survey and interview participants identified developing connections across business sectors as one of the greatest benefits of involvement. In addition to developing relationships with others, participants commented that networking was valuable for them to learn about career opportunities within their organization and to increase their level of visibility with corporate managers.

In order to maximize the value of attending networking events, women are advised to evaluate their professional networking goals. For women interested in connecting with female peers, women's networks can provide an increased sense of community and an opportunity to act

as both a giver and receiver of knowledge and support. As Higgins and Kram (2001) explained, developmental networks can provide members with peer mentoring support via friendship, counseling, and affirmation. Women who work in male-dominated organizations with few opportunities to connect with other women may find that these connections are very rewarding because they reduce the sense of isolation women may experience in these environments.

For women who are interested in developing and expanding their professional networks for advancement purposes, this study upheld previous research that questioned whether or not women's networks are the proper venue. Evaluating the extent to which there are opportunities to network with those in positions of power and influence is one way that women can assess the value of a women's network for this purpose. Research on social networking confirms that developing relationships with executives through social networking can increase promotion likelihood (Seibert et al., 2001). Conversely, research on women's networks cautions that women may have limited opportunities to interact with senior leaders, particularly men, who often occupy the majority of senior leadership positions (Perriton, 2006). That was the case at Avero. Participants were much more likely to report that they had increased their exposure to female role models in comparison to males, but males were more likely to hold executive-level positions. Participants who served in a network leadership role were much more likely to report developing connections with managers that they viewed as valuable for advancement purposes.

The importance of exposure to senior women role models has been discussed in earlier research (Hersby et al., 2009), and the results of this study affirm that women benefit from this exposure. Women gain from these interactions because they can learn from their predecessors about the unique challenges that women face as they move up the corporate ladder. Exposure to female role models significantly impacted the probability that participants would report increased confidence in their ability to advance.

Exposure to executive male role models is also critical for women's career advancement. Exposure to males was found to have a significant impact on the probability participants would report developing a relationship with a sponsor. Developing a relationship with a sponsor to advocate for advancement has been found to be an effective strategy for women (Foust-Cummings et al., 2011). Based on these findings, women who are interested in advancing should consider ways to develop professional networks that include executive women and men.

Exploring a Range of Professional Development Opportunities

Results from the survey reinforced the interview findings that one of the most effective ways the network could positively impact members' advancement was to offer professional development opportunities that support women's career needs. Professional development was also identified in the survey findings as one of the greatest benefits of involvement and a key contributor to organizational success. Women should be advised to evaluate the types of professional development activities available within or outside of women's networks to determine how they might align with individual career goals. Findings from this study suggest that women who are interested in advancement should seek out opportunities to develop leadership skills, participate in projects that may be helpful for advancement, or serve in a network leadership role.

Participants reported that even one development opportunity could prove to be of value. The annual development day, monthly book clubs, and lunch and learn sessions were targeted to all women in the company, and many women confirmed that they benefitted from involvement. The full-day professional development seminar offered annually by the AWN was often cited as one of the AWN's most valuable contributions to women and the organization. Attendees especially appreciated hearing from outside speakers, senior leaders, and the CEO of the company. The event also provided women with a specified time set aside for them to learn new skills and contemplate career goals.

Avero was exploring ways to offer more targeted development opportunities for women such as a new mentoring program intended for women with high advancement potential. Seeking out projects or activities like these may help women develop skills that are relevant for advancement. Survey findings showed that 90% of those who advanced participated in projects or activities that were helpful for their advancement. The combination of participating in an advancement project and developing a relationship with a sponsor had an even greater impact on the advancement outcome. These findings suggest that women who are interested in advancing their careers should seek out projects that enable them to demonstrate their advancement potential and foster relationships with executives who are willing to advocate for their advancement. Women should explore engaging in projects and developing relationships like these within women's networks as well as through other avenues.

Women should also recognize that serving in a network leadership role may significantly impact a member's advancement potential. All of the network leaders and half of the network members who were interviewed believed that serving in a network leadership role could positively affect women's career advancement. The survey and interview findings consistently emphasized the career benefits of serving in leadership roles. Increased visibility with senior leaders, effective leadership skills, strengthened communication skills, and financial management skills were some of the many benefits identified by participants. Network leaders were more than twice as likely as network members to report that they had greater confidence in their leadership capabilities. They were also significantly more likely to report that they had participated in projects helpful for their advancement and that they had a relationship with a sponsor.

Women are encouraged to carefully consider the types of network leadership roles and developmental experiences associated with them. Due to their greater level of involvement and potential for leadership development, it was expected that committee members would be more

likely than network members to report sponsorship or advancement; however, this was not the case. Although no specific reasons for why committee members did not benefit more were explored, interview conversations with executives suggested there was a need to be more purposeful about the types of developmental experiences women gained from serving in a network leadership role. It is important to note that feedback from the interview participants who had served in committee roles did not reinforce the survey findings; they found their committee roles to be highly rewarding and helpful for advancement.

Influence on Policies and Practices

For women who are seeking change within their organization's policies and practices to better support their career success, women's networks may provide a viable venue. Previous studies on women's networks show that they can offer members an opportunity to build collective influence within their organization that can then be leveraged to shape organizational policies and practices (Hersby et al., 2009; Singh et al., 2006). Hersby et al. (2009) affirmed that a sense of shared identity developed through a women's network was most valued when women perceived significant barriers to advancement as well as when women believed that they could collectively work together to improve the status of women.

Survey results validated the interview findings that the network was perceived positively within the organization. As the largest and most active employee network in the company, the AWN was valued for its ability to shape organizational practices that benefitted all employees. In fact, the network had affected the organizational structure of the company by persuading the CEO to create a diversity and inclusion department. Similarly, the network convinced organizational leaders to implement a formal corporate policy on flexible work arrangements.

Community Involvement

Women's networks can provide an outlet for women who are interested in opportunities to gain personal satisfaction and fulfillment through community involvement activities. Research on women's career development reinforces that women's career goals are deeply connected to their relationships with others, and the notion of career fulfillment has unique meaning (Lalande et al., 2000). Survey and interview findings indicated that network members and leaders appreciated the organization's support of their efforts, and an increased sense of commitment to the company resulted. Community involvement may also provide women with an opportunity to expand their professional networks. Inviting managers to participate in community involvement is one way women may gain increased visibility within the company. However, executives in this organization questioned how much of the network's emphasis should be placed on community involvement. To ensure there is clear communication between members and their managers, it is recommended that women engage their supervisors in conversations about the value of a network, particularly the extent to which community involvement activities are viewed positively.

Time Constraints and Desired Outcomes

Several studies on women's networks addressed concerns that women are time constrained and have limited resources to dedicate to women's networks (Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Perriton, 2006; Singh et al., 2006; Wang, 2009). Consistent with previous research, participants in this study emphasized the significant amount of time and energy they dedicated to network activities. With this in mind, women should be intentional about the types of opportunities and the time commitment they are willing and able to invest in participating. Though strong support from senior leadership was consistent across survey and interview

findings, conversations with network members revealed that mid-level managers may be less likely to value network involvement.

Given these findings, women who choose to invest time in network activities should develop a rationale for doing so and request that their managers recognize their network responsibilities as part of the performance goals they are measured by. Women are encouraged to propose specific strategies and measures of accountability to organizational leaders to accelerate this process. For example, study results may be used as benchmarks for evaluating progress toward increasing advancement rates, the level of participation in important projects, and the level of access to role models, mentors, and sponsors. Just as women in organizations were often behind grassroots efforts to form women's networks, women should now initiate steps to move networks in the direction of becoming more focused on women's career advancement and organizational success.

Leveraging Women's Networks from the Organization's Standpoint

This study suggests that organizational efforts to positively impact women's career advancement and organizational success are often complimentary. Participants indicated that supporting the success of women in the company was one of the most effective ways for the network to contribute to the organization's success. Survey and interview findings revealed several ways that women's networks could do so. These included fostering a culture that engages women, providing women with professional development opportunities, and encouraging organizational leaders to serve as role models, mentors, and sponsors. Networks may also contribute to organizational success by supporting company efforts to develop and strengthen relationships with external stakeholders. Prioritizing goals and establishing measures of effectiveness are essential regardless of which strategies organizations choose to pursue.

Fostering a Culture that Engages Women

All executives and network leaders who were interviewed for this study emphasized the network's ability to generate higher levels of employee engagement and foster a culture that supported women's career success. Increasing employee engagement was cited as the business case for establishing the network because leaders agreed that higher levels of employee engagement often lead to higher corporate performance levels. Executives in this study were more likely to express that the AWN was important for organizational success because without it the organization would have a much more difficult time attracting and retaining a pool of talented women. The network's ability to support women's career success was evidenced by its influence on organizational policies.

Consistent with previous research suggesting that support from organizational leaders is important for networks to operate successfully (Catalyst, 1999a; Donnelon & Langowitz, 2009; Hersby et al., 2009), the commitment of organizational leaders to advocate for the AWN was clearly valued. Survey and interview findings also indicated that members wanted more opportunities for exposure and support from male and female executives. Perceptions of support from mid-level leaders were inconsistent in the survey and interview findings, thus organizational leaders are advised to investigate how management support may vary across their organization. Organizations operating in multiple geographies are especially urged to educate and motivate leaders to become advocates in their regions. Findings from this study affirm that strong leaders can have a positive impact on members' willingness to become involved and report positive experiences.

Providing Women with Opportunities for Targeted Professional Development

Organizations can use the study findings to determine the types of development opportunities appropriate for their workforce. Organizational leaders should balance the desire to

make programming accessible to all women with the need to offer targeted development strategies to facilitate advancement. Once programs are in place, senior leaders should encourage managers at all levels to promote the development opportunities available. Serving in network leadership roles and selective mentoring programs are two good examples of the types of activities that may have a positive impact on women's career success and advancement. Incorporating projects related to the company's core businesses should also be explored. Projects like these can increase members' prospects for advancement and at the same time enhance the organization's ability to achieve its strategic business objectives. The capacity for network members to take on such projects, as well as the extent to which a women's network is the best channel for engaging employees, were questions raised in this study. Based on current and past research, these questions are worthy of discussion in any organization with a women's network.

Engaging Senior Leaders as Role Models, Mentors, and Sponsors

All sources of data showed that members benefitted from and appreciated the support and advocacy of senior leaders. The desire for opportunities to connect with and learn from executives was a resonating theme. Specific results from this study reveal that securing organizational leaders as role models and sponsors can significantly impact women's advancement prospects. Exposure to women role models was especially important for increasing participants' confidence in their ability to advance. In addition, increased confidence in their ability to advance had a positive influence on members' desire to advance. These are significant findings for organizations to consider as ways of evaluating the effectiveness of their women's networks. Understanding the factors that influence women's motivation to move into senior roles is a necessary step to increasing the number of women in these roles. As Barsh and Yee (2011) concluded, women may question their desire to advance into senior roles, wondering if it is "worth the cost."

This study exemplifies why senior leadership is so critical to the success of women's networks, but the organizational leaders who participated in this study had more questions than answers about how to effectively advocate for women's career advancement. Those who were reaching out to other senior leaders to encourage them to become engaged found that it was a frustrating process. Several suggestions for how senior leaders can become involved and support women's career success and advancement were proposed in this study including speaking at networking events, serving on a leadership advisory board, or acting as a mentor or sponsor for an individual member.

Leveraging the Network Externally

Women's networks can be leveraged to develop and strengthen relationships with external audiences in a number of ways. The strategies employed by this network included involving network members in the company's recruiting initiatives, community engagement activities, and customer engagement activities. The majority of interview participants believed the network should be leveraged as part of a comprehensive corporate effort to recruit women, especially at the senior level. One executive envisioned the network as a more "explicit recruiting engine." Network leaders offered several examples of how the network was supporting recruiting efforts including partnering with HR on recruiting initiatives to attract women leaders, involving women in recruiting activities at hiring fairs and focusing on internal recruiting efforts that educate current employees about career opportunities in other areas of the company. Conclusions from this study are consistent with previous research that discussed how women's networks can positively influence recruiting and retaining women (Singh et al., 2006).

As previously discussed, the positive image resulting from network initiatives, such as community involvement, were thought to be of value in the company's efforts to engage current employees. Members benefitted from developing connections with others (including managers)

and also gained personal satisfaction and fulfillment from knowing that they positively impacted

others. Community involvement was also viewed as having the potential to boost the company's

reputation as a good corporate citizen, a message that organizational leaders believed would also

be helpful with recruiting women.

Existing research indicates that organizations can succeed by leveraging women's

networks to develop customer relationships (Singh et al., 2006). Examples of how the AWN was

customer-focused were not widespread; however, some of the organizational leaders and network

leaders expressed an interest in making customer engagement a future priority. One executive

shared his belief that the company's workforce should reflect the company's customer base,

which was predominately female in some business divisions. An incoming network leader

discussed the successful events she organized to appeal to the organization's female customers.

These findings suggest that women's networks have great potential to support organizational

efforts to develop and enhance relationships with customers. Companies with women's networks

should explore opportunities to invite customers to participate in network events, partner with

other organizations to address women's lack of representation in corporate leadership roles, and

incorporate strategic projects related to the company's products and/or services (like the action

learning projects taking place in the company's business sectors).

Evaluating Effectiveness

Women's networks are frequently established with the goal of being inclusive of women

at all levels and in all areas of an organization. Determining how to serve the needs of such a

diverse audience while developing strategies to advance women requires ingenuity, particularly

when there is a lack of organizational leadership and accountability in place. Given these

challenges, it is not too surprising that few organizations with women's networks have attempted

to measure their effectiveness. Indeed, finding an organization willing to explore these issues

was a challenge. Results from this study are intended to provide stakeholders with an understanding of how various women's network activities may fit within an overall strategy to advance women. It is my hope that women and the leaders in their organizations will partner together to determine how women's networks can support organizational efforts to advance women and foster organizational success.

Several strategies to increase the likelihood of advancement through women's networks are discussed throughout this study. Based on these strategies, the following recommendations are directed toward organizational leaders that are interested in leveraging women's networks to have a positive impact on women's career advancement and organizational success. First, organizations should make advancing women through women's networks a strategic business priority; executives who will be accountable for future results should be identified. Systematically tracking the progress of women into management roles levels should be integrated into HR practices. Recognizing divisions that increase the representation of women in these roles may accelerate progress. Second, organizational leaders and women's network leaders should partner together to agree upon and clearly communicate (to women and leaders at all levels) the types of development opportunities that are most likely to facilitate advancement. Third, organizational leaders and women's network leaders should identify specific benchmarks for measuring the network's effectiveness, such as those recommended in the current study. Fourth, senior leaders should be held accountable for serving as role models, mentors, and sponsors for women's network members. Fifth, the extent to which networks (across chapters/geographies) are provided with the resources and support necessary to operate effectively should be evaluated. On this note, organizations should be advised to consider appointing dedicated personnel to lead the organization's efforts to advance women. Finally, organizations should recognize that leveraging women's networks to advance women can also contribute to the success of the

organization in a number of ways; examples of the types of projects that may be helpful for advancing women's careers and simultaneously contribute to organizational success, such as action learning projects, are explored in this study.

Theoretical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Feminist case study research is undertaken to attempt to enact positive change (Daly, 2007; Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992). This study contributed to existing feminist career development theory by seeking multiple perspectives to better understand women's workplace experiences and to stimulate individual and organizational efforts to foster change. The study did so by inviting the diverse perspectives of network members and organizational leaders to explore the role and value of one women's network.

Another aspect of feminist research is to attempt to be of use to participants. This research was undertaken to have a positive impact on organizational and network practices. The study timeline was designed so that the findings could be presented to organizational leaders and network leaders during the AWN's national strategic planning session. Network leaders from across the country attended this annual event at the HQ office so that they could have a voice in setting the network's strategic priorities for the upcoming year. After presenting the findings, I facilitated a two-hour collaborative planning session to discuss the study implications and to consider the AWN's goals for the upcoming year. The attendees were highly engaged in this discussion, and several strategies for increasing the AWN's value to members and the organization resulted from it.

Leaders in this organization recognized that networks like the AWN can help them address the contemporary challenges that many companies face. One especially relevant challenge for the organization was having the diverse talent pool of employees necessary to maintain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Studies like this affirm that feminist theory

and traditional HRD theories focused on organizational performance can be complementary; strategies to advance women were proposed from the feminist perspective of exploring organizational inequalities, but the findings also revealed that developing and advancing women can contribute to organizational success.

Feminist theory and critical HRD focus on exploring questions related to how power is utilized within organizations and why so few women occupy positions of power and influence (Bierema & Cseh, 2003; Oakley, 2000). This study affirmed that women continue to be underrepresented in executive roles, especially women of color, and that they continue to face challenges that are unique to their gender. One such challenge was the sense of isolation some women felt working in male dominated environments. The study also brought to light the frustration felt by female executives who wanted to have a greater impact on increasing female representation in leadership roles but believed the organization's structure did not easily allow them to do so. In addition, the study exemplified the feminist perspective that all women, and their positions and viewpoints, cannot be captured through one voice. In contrast to the challenges women faced, the organization's efforts to foster a culture where women would want to pursue careers and the success stories of women who had advanced their careers were also illuminated.

Implications for Future Research

Investigating women's experiences and helping them to increase both self-awareness and an understanding of their organizations will be the focus of my future research. The role and value of women's networks is a promising area of research with a variety of research directions. Executives in this study expressed their beliefs that research like this is necessary for organizations to understand how to become an attractive place for women to build their careers.

They viewed this study as way for them to understand how the network could have a greater impact on women's representation in leadership roles and organizational success.

The next step in the research process within this organization will be to identify specific benchmarks and then determine how to measure progress over the coming year. If Avero chooses to place more focus on advancing women through the AWN, it will be important to monitor the number of women who report sponsorship, projects helpful for advancement, and actual advancement. Connections between serving in a network role and the specific types of skill-development members attain from involvement should continue to be explored. In addition, what types of projects and activities may be most helpful for women's career advancement? For example, are women who have the opportunity to participate in action learning projects or formal mentoring programs (like those described in this study) more likely to advance? And how might having a sponsor recognize the outcomes of such projects impact a members' advancement potential? Lastly, how do action learning projects contribute to organizational success? These are other questions to investigate.

Future research is warranted to understand how the involvement of senior leaders as role models, mentors, and sponsors can affect women's career advancement potential. Future studies should explore the connections between the types of sponsorship behaviors identified by study participants and the likelihood that members will report advancement as a result of involvement. Behavior types included pointing out new roles, encouraging/helping with preparation for new roles, recommending individuals for a new role, and in some cases creating a new role for an individual. More research is also necessary to understand how the support of mid-level managers/direct supervisors may impact a member's choice to become involved and the types of benefits that will be gained.

The current recommendations for making women's networks more effective in advancing women should not overshadow all of the other benefits women and organizations may gain from establishing women's networks. Future research should explore these benefits, particularly how networks can effect employee engagement. Rath's (2006) research on employee engagement suggested that individuals who identify having close friendships at work are more engaged than those who do not. Exploring how women's networks can foster interpersonal relationships that lead to enhanced engagement would be another fruitful area of research.

Research focused on the value of externally leveraging women's networks should also be pursued. Significant attention in this study was focused on how the network's fundamental purpose was to make the organization a more attractive place for women and the potential for the network to be utilized as part of organizational recruiting efforts. One executive envisioned the network as having the potential to be a more "explicit recruiting engine." The positive image resulting from the networks initiatives, such as community involvement, were also thought to positively impact corporate reputation so evaluating how the AWN contributes to organizational success in this way could be beneficial as well.

Considering how women experience networks differently is also essential. Understanding how women of color experience involvement, and the extent to which they may be interested in becoming involved in employee networks that are established for those of similar ethnicities, is a critical area of investigation. Investigating gender differences in how male and female executives perceive the role and value of women's networks will also be important. Study findings suggest that female executives may be more focused on the value of the network to support members' career advancement in comparison to males. Furthermore, there were some differences in how male and female executives perceived executive support for the network, with female executives less likely than males to believe they had broad network support.

Understanding how gender consciousness plays a role in forming these beliefs would be valuable for future research.

Finally, studies could be initiated to gather feedback from women who choose not to participate in women's networks. Findings from this study indicated that non-members were less likely to agree that the network was positively perceived within the organization. Understanding why this may be the case, as well as if non-members are pursuing other strategies to develop and advance their career, is also of value.

Concluding Remarks

This study focused on understanding the value of women's networks to facilitate women's career advancement and organizational success. Results from this study suggest that participating in a women's network can positively impact women's career success, but advancement as a result of involvement may be limited. I believe, and some study results suggest, that women's networks have great potential to support organizational efforts to advance women. Yet, whether or not organizations choose to adopt the recommended strategies within women's networks or through other avenues is inconsequential. What is important is that organizations do take action because increasing the number of women in organizational leadership roles is "good for women, good for men . . . and good for business" (Catalyst, 2009, para. 2).

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

Study Number: 1305AWN4801

Principal Investigator: Sarah Rand

Title(s):
Formally Sponsored Women's Networks

This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota HRPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter.

This secure electronic notification between password protected authentications has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

Appendix B

Survey and Interview Consent

Interview Consent

Dear Colleague:

As a (leader in this organization or network member) who is familiar with the AWN, you are invited to participate in one 30 minute face-to-face or phone conversation to discuss your perspectives regarding how the AWN affects women's career advancement and the success of the company as a whole. Your help with this project is completely voluntary and you can end the interview at any point or refuse to answer any questions. Efforts will be made to ensure your contributions are kept confidential. Findings from this study will be shared with your organization in a manner that ensures your individual comments will not be identifiable to others unless specific permission is granted by you. The interviews will be recorded and interview transcripts will be stored securely.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sarah Rand

My interest in this research is based upon my current role as an Assistant Professor of Business Administration at St. Catherine University and doctoral student at the University of Minnesota. Findings from this research will be incorporated into my dissertation at the University of Minnesota in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy & Development. Participation or nonparticipation in this study will not impact your relationship with St. Catherine University or the University of Minnesota in any way. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. You can reach me at 651-690-6986. You may also contact the Research Subjects' Advocate line at the University of Minnesota at 612-624-1650 or St. Catherine University's Institutional Review Board contact, John Schmitt, IRB Chair at 651-690-7739.

Survey Introduction and Consent

Dear Colleague,

Organizational and WN leadership is pleased to extend you an invitation to participate in an important and engaging exploration of the value of employee networks at Avero. By participating in this study you will have an opportunity to share your perspective on how we're doing as a women's employee network and to help us learn from the findings. The results of this survey will provide all members and Avero leaders with a better understanding of the value of WN and help us to identify additional ways Avero women can benefit from involvement in WN.

This survey includes questions about your involvement as well as some demographic information. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete, perhaps longer if you choose to respond to the open-ended questions that follow the multiple choice questions. Please know that your participation is critical to the accuracy of the results and your opinions are valued regardless of your current level of involvement in WN.

Your help with this project is completely voluntary and you may stop at any point or leave any question unanswered. You can be assured of complete confidentiality/anonymity. No personal contact information (including your name and e-mail address) will be disclosed to anyone associated with this research. Results will be aggregated and it will not be possible to identify individual responses. Submission of the completed survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate and also that you are at least 18 years of age. Thank you very much for your consideration. We are excited about this research and look forward to sharing with you what we learn. Please feel free to contact _____ with any questions.

Invitation to participate in the member interviews (following the survey submission).

We are interested in learning more about how your involvement in the AWN may have influenced your career advancement. If you would like an opportunity to participate in a 30-minute interview to share your perspective, please provide your contact information below. Interview candidates will be chosen by random selection\. Any contact information you provide is entirely separate from the anonymous responses you submitted in the AWN survey. Your help with this project is completely voluntary and your feedback will be kept confidential.

About the survey: Sarah Rand, Assistant Professor and Co-Chair of the Department of Business Administration at St. Catherine University, will be working with us to develop the survey and analyze the findings. Professor Rand is currently working toward a Ph.D. in Human Resource Development at the University of Minnesota and this research will be part of her dissertation work. Sarah's professional expertise is focused on understanding the value of formally-sponsored women's networks in organizations, particularly their impact on women's career advancement and organizational performance. Sarah has partnered with a variety of organizations over the past several years to establish, expand, and evaluate the effectiveness of corporate women's networks. If you have additional questions regarding this research you may also contact Sarah Rand at 651-690-6986, the Research Subjects' Advocate line at the University of Minnesota at 612-624-1650 or St. Catherine University's Institutional Review Board at 651-690-7739.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol for Organizational Leaders

1.   From your perspective, what is the purpose of the AWN?

2.   What prompted your involvement in the AWN? How have you been involved?

3.   Do you believe the AWN can have an impact on members' career advancement?

4.   Are you aware of instances where women have advanced as a result of (or in part from) their involvement in the AWN?

5.   Do you believe the AWN contributes to the success of the organization?

6.   Would you say the AWN is of strategic importance to the organization?

7.   Do you believe the AWN has the support of organizational leaders?

8.   From your perspective, what could be done to increase the value of the AWN to members and the organization?

9.   How does AWN compliment other efforts by the organization to develop and advance women?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol for AWN Leaders and AWN Members

1. From your perspective, what is the purpose of the AWN?

2. Why are you a member? How have you been involved?

3. What do you see as the primary benefits of involvement in the AWN?

4. Do you believe the AWN can have an impact on members' career advancement?

5. Are you aware of instances where women have advanced as a result of (or in part from) their involvement in the AWN?

6. Do you believe the AWN contributes to the success of the organization?

7. Would you say the AWN is of strategic importance to the organization?

8. Do you believe the AWN has the support of organizational leaders?

9. From your perspective, what could be done to increase the value of the AWN to members and the organization?

Appendix E

Survey of AWN Members

5 Point Likert Scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the purpose of the AWN:
1. A primary purpose of AWN is to facilitate women's career advancement.
2. AWN is effective in its efforts to facilitate women's career advancement.
3. To provide members with opportunities to network with one another.
4. To provide members with opportunities for community involvement.
5. To provide members with individual mentoring.
6. To provide members with focused skill-set training.

Please answer the following questions based specifically on your involvement in the AWN:
1. I have increased my level of satisfaction at work.
2. I have developed meaningful friendships.
3. I have developed connections with individuals across business lines.
4. I have developed relationships with one or more colleagues at a higher level who have gone out of their way to support my career advancement (how)
5. I have increased my exposure to senior women role models.
6. I have increased my exposure to senior male role models.
7. I have secured a mentor.
8. I have greater confidence in my leadership capabilities.
9. I have participated in projects/activities that I consider to be of value in advancing my career. (ID the project or activity)
10. I have a greater desire to advance.
11. I have greater confidence in my ability to advance.
12. I have advanced. (how have you advanced?)
13. I am recognized by the organization for my time and contributions to AWN.
14. I am recognized by my manager for my time and contributions/ my time and contributions to AWN are valued by my manager.

Please answer the following questions base <u>on the AWN's role in the organization</u>.

7. The AWN positively influences organizational policies and practices that support women's career success (ID policies/practices).
8. The AWN has broad support from senior female executives in the organization.
9. The AWN has broad support from senior male executives in the organization.
10. The AWN is perceived positively within the organization.
11. The AWN is viewed as strategically important within the organization.
12. The AWN attracts a diverse membership base.

<u>Open-ended Survey Questions</u>
13. What is the greatest benefit to you for participating in AWN?
14. What is the greatest benefit to Avero for establishing and supporting AWN?
15. How do you think AWN compliments other strategies you are aware of to develop and advance women? (Recommended to split this question: 12: Are you aware of other strategies to develop and advance women at Avero? 13: Do you believe AWN compliments Avero's other strategies to develop and advance women?)
16. Do you feel there are any specific challenges that may limit AWN's ability to be of value to the organization and you as a member?
17. What is the one thing you would change about AWN to make it more effective?

Background Information:
1. Which chapter of AWN are you a member of?
2. How long have you been a member of AWN? (1) Less than one year (2) one to two years (3) two to four years (4) five to ten years (5) more than ten years (Please lengthen time periods)
3. Which of the following best describes your current role in AWN? (1) leader/chair (2) committee member (3) member
4. How active were you in AWN over <u>the past year</u> (1) very active (2) active (3) somewhat active (4) not active
5. Based on your best estimate, how often do you spend time on issues or activities related to AWN? (1) daily (2) weekly (3) monthly (4) quarterly (5) less than quarterly. (Follow-up – How is this contribution reflected as part of your planned goals or development objectives?)
6. Based on your best estimate, how often are you in communication with others who are part of AWN? (1) daily (2) weekly (3) monthly (4) quarterly (5) less than quarterly.
7. How many AWN-related events have you attended in the past 12 months? (1) 0-10 (2) more than 10.

Demographics:

1. Sex (1) female (2) male
2. Age (1) 18-25 (2) 26-35 (3) 36-45 (4) 46-55 (5) 55 and above , prefer not to answer
3. Race/Ethnicity (1) White or Caucasian (2) Black or African American (3) Asian or Pacific American (4) Hispanic or Latino American (5) Native American or Alaskan Native (6) Other
4. Highest Level of Education (1) secondary/high school (2) some college (3) associate/technical degree (2 year) (4) undergraduate degree (4 year) (5) some graduate level coursework (6) graduate or post-graduate degree

   Work History
5. Approximately how many hours per week do you work? ____
6. How many years have you been with Avero? (1) less than 1(2) 1-3 (3) 4-6 (4) 6-10 (5) 10-15 (6) 16+
7. What occupational category best describes your current position? (1) individual contributor (2) mid-level manager (3) executive (director level or above).
8. In comparing your rate of career advancement with your colleagues, has your advancement been faster, slower, or at an average rate? (1) faster (2) slower (3) at an average rate
9. How would you describe your long-term advancement goals?
10. Which one of the following best describes the sector you primarily work in

Appendix F1-F5

Statistical Analysis

Appendix F-1

Logistic Regression Block 2 Summary: I Have Advanced

Classification Table[a]

Predicted			
I_HAVE_ADVANCED		Percentage Correct	
Yes	No		
11	19		36.7
4	244		98.4
			91.7

a. The cut value is .500

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	Sponsor	1.859	.458	16.484	1	**.000**	6.414
	Adv Project	1.779	.658	7.317	1	**.007**	5.924
	Constant	-5.174	1.191	18.874	1	.000	.006
	Adv Proj	1.779	.658	7.317	1	.007	5.924

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Nagelkerke R Square
1	130.452[a]	**.390**

Appendix F-2

Logistic Regression: Sponsor

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Nagelkerke R Square
1	181.887[a]	.328

Classification Table[a]

	Observed		Predicted		
			DEV_COLLEAGUE_REL		Percentage
			Yes	No	Correct
Step 1	DEV_COLLEAGUE_REL	Yes	17	28	37.8
		No	11	202	94.8
	Overall Percentage				84.9

a. The cut value is .500

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	**Mentor**	**1.541**	**.388**	**15.777**	**1**	**.000**	4.671
	Adv Proj	**.996**	**.435**	**5.234**	**1**	**.022**	2.708
	Female	-.254	.247	1.064	1	.302	.775
	Male	**-.474**	**.210**	**5.081**	**1**	**.024**	.622
	Constant	.349	1.237	.080	1	.778	1.418

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Q9, Q14, Q5_3, Q5_4.

Appendix F-3

Linear Regression: Increased Confidence in Ability to Advance

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.866[a]	.750	.743	.529

a. Predictors: (Constant), INC_DESIRE_ADV, DEV_XSECTOR,

INC_EXMEN_RM, DEV_FRIEND, INC_EXFEM_RM, INC_WORKSAT,

INC_LEAD_CAP

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	210.883	7	30.126	107.601	.000[b]
	Residual	70.275	251	.280		
	Total	281.158	258			

a. Dependent Variable: INC_ABILITY_ADV

b. Predictors: (Constant), INC_DESIRE_ADV, DEV_XSECTOR, INC_EXMEN_RM, DEV_FRIEND,

INC_EXFEM_RM, INC_WORKSAT, INC_LEAD_CAP

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.063	.142		-.447	.655
	INC_EXMEN_RM	.021	.042	.023	.509	.611
	INC_EXFEM_RM	**.106**	**.044**	**.117**	**2.390**	**.018**
	INC_LEAD_CAP	**.335**	**.060**	**.317**	**5.544**	**.000**
	INC_WORKSAT	**.177**	**.056**	**.163**	**3.146**	**.002**
	DEV_XSECTOR	.036	.045	.036	.790	.430
	DEV_FRIEND	-.064	.046	-.064	-1.392	.165
	INC_DESIRE_ADV	**.398**	**.049**	**.399**	**8.085**	**.000**

a. Dependent Variable: INC_ABILITY_ADV

Appendix F-4

Linear Regression: Increased Desire to Advance

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.821[a]	.675	.666	.605

a. Predictors: (Constant), DEV_FRIEND, INC_EXMEN_RM,

INC_ABILITY_ADV, DEV_XSECTOR, INC_EXFEM_RM,

INC_WORKSAT, INC_LEAD_CAP

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	190.467	7	27.210	74.419	.000[b]
	Residual	91.772	251	.366		
	Total	282.239	258			

a. Dependent Variable: INC_DESIRE_ADV

b. Predictors: (Constant), DEV_FRIEND, INC_EXMEN_RM, INC_ABILITY_ADV, DEV_XSECTOR,

INC_EXFEM_RM, INC_WORKSAT, INC_LEAD_CAP

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.561	.158		3.544	.000
	INC_EXMEN_RM	-.040	.048	-.044	-.842	.401
	INC_EXFEM_RM	-.024	.051	-.026	-.458	.647
	INC_ABILITY_ADV	**.519**	**.064**	**.518**	**8.085**	**.000**
	INC_LEAD_CAP	**.229**	**.072**	**.216**	**3.189**	**.002**
	INC_WORKSAT	**.215**	**.064**	**.197**	**3.349**	**.001**
	DEV_XSECTOR	-.064	.052	-.064	-1.230	.220
	DEV_FRIEND	.059	.053	.059	1.119	.264

a. Dependent Variable: INC_DESIRE_ADV

Appendix F-5

Linear Regression: The AWN is viewed as strategically important within the organization.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.732[a]	.536	.527	.643

a. Predictors: (Constant), AWN_TIME_ORG, AWN_SUPPORT_EXFEM,

AWN_TIME_MGR, AWN_SUPPORT_EXMEN

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	102.050	4	25.512	61.686	.000[b]
1	Residual	88.507	214	.414		
	Total	190.557	218			

a. Dependent Variable: AWN_VIEWED_STRAT

b. Predictors: (Constant), AWN_TIME_ORG, AWN_SUPPORT_EXFEM, AWN_TIME_MGR,

AWN_SUPPORT_EXMEN

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	.348	.212		1.641	.102
	AWN_SUPPORT_EXFEM	.207	.062	.211	3.326	**.001**
1	AWN_SUPPORT_EXMEN	.285	.061	.308	4.700	**.000**
	AWN_TIME_MGR	-.013	.054	-.015	-.234	.815
	AWN_TIME_ORG	.406	.064	.407	6.382	**.000**

a. Dependent Variable: AWN_VIEWED_STRAT