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Human Resources: The Complexity of the Gender Imbalance

Benjamin Banks
St. John Fisher College

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Human Resources: The Complexity of the Gender Imbalance

Abstract
This original research investigated and revealed some of the reasons, perceptions, and impact related to the high percentage of women in HR, and the comparatively low percentage of women at the executive and boardroom levels. This study has been conducted to articulate the complexity of the topic by introducing the opinions and experiences of several professionals and students of HR. This research study offers recommendations, and has been designed to motivate healthy dialogue. Timely and relevant literature research from published professionals is included in this study. This study also included both qualitative and quantitative data from convenience interviews with six HR professionals. In addition, a Likert Survey was conducted with twenty-eight members of Cohort 12 and Cohort 13 from the Organizational Learning & Human Resource Development Masters Program at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York.

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Human Resources: The Complexity of the Gender Imbalance

By

Benjamin Banks

May 2010, St. John Fisher College

A final project submitted to
The Faculty of
The Graduate School of Organizational Learning & Human Resource Development
Of St. John Fisher College in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family in Tennessee, Virginia, Alabama, and New York. Thanks to their encouragement and the blessings from Jehovah; change and achievement are possible.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the many people whose insight, mentorship, and dedication served enormously in the completion of this thesis. I give a special thank you to Dr. Seth Silver and Bob Whipple for their guidance and direction. Bob, I thank you for helping to morph an idea into a full-blown thesis. Seth, I thank you for your succinct and pragmatic input which helped to structure and format this thesis, while inspiring creativity. I would also like to thank all of the participants for both the survey and interview which served as the foundation for this project. You are all knowledgeable and passionate folks. I especially would like to thank Cohort 12 for their input, honestly, and above all, their humor. I would like to give a special thanks to Claude Balthazard for his enormous help with this thesis; thank you Claude for dedicating your time and providing such great information. Also special thanks to Ed Ciaschi, Suzanne A. Choma, and Mary Willoughby. Finally, thanks to my family and friends who were so supportive, sometimes without even knowing
Master Signature Page

Dr Seth Silver, Advisor   Signature:_____________________________

Dr. Ann Leonard   Signature:_____________________________

Dr. Mike Wischnowski   Signature:_____________________________
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Abstract

This original research investigated and revealed some of the reasons, perceptions, and impact related to the high percentage of women in HR, and the comparatively low percentage of women at the executive and boardroom levels. This study has been conducted to articulate the complexity of the topic by introducing the opinions and experiences of several professionals and students of HR. This research study offers recommendations, and has been designed to motivate healthy dialogue. Timely and relevant literature research from published professionals is included in this study. This study also included both qualitative and quantitative data from convenience interviews with six HR professionals. In addition, a Likert Survey was conducted with twenty-eight members of Cohort 12 and Cohort 13 from the Organizational Learning & Human Resource Development Masters Program at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York.
Chapter One

Introduction

The low percentage of men in the HR profession has certainly not gone unnoticed. Nor has the disconnect between the high percentage of men in HR senior level positions compared to a lower percentage of women (Klie, 2008). The reasons for the disparity and the gender imbalances remain open for debate, as does the impact created by the imbalances. For some, it is a taboo subject that stretches the limits of political correctness and therefore is only marginally discussed. For others, the imbalance is profoundly important and demands further discussion and research. The significance of such dialogue is the opportunity to dissect a complex weave of opinions and attitudes that may profoundly impact the credibility of the profession.

Willock (2007) states that “75% entry of women into HR is too high, and you get the sense that something is wrong here” (pg.26). Other comments from HR executives interviewed for Willock’s (2007) article ranged between moderate concerns with the high percentages, to an alarming concern that this should be a burning issue that needs to be addressed (2007).

As this research will show, there are varying opinions as to whether or not the high numbers even matter. Some believe that the imbalance may hurt the profession in ways that cannot be clearly validated, and might be speculative at best. Are women, for example, hiring their own into the profession because of a certain comfort level within the majority? Or is it simply because men see the profession as a matriarchal stronghold designed to nurture and administrate, while offering little in the way of power and advancement?
Problem Statement

There is a gender imbalance in HR. This has led to major issues to consider: 1) The relatively high percentage of women in the HR profession and its potentially negative impact on the credibility and influence of the profession; and 2) The related-though different -issue of too few women at the HR executive level compared to men. Therefore, there is a need for a study which examines the reasons and perceptions about this imbalance and the consequences, in order to make recommendations for the field.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to reveal some of the perceptions about the high percentage of women in HR, and the comparatively low percentage of women at the executive and board room levels. This research addresses the measurable impact and relevance of this imbalance on individuals, organizational decisions, and the profession as a whole. This research obtains both qualitative and quantitative data from students of HR and HR professionals, in order to explore the reasons and significance of the gender imbalance. The research will also help to break-down some of the complexity of the topic in order to engage future dialogue and perhaps positively impact future changes. This research explores the implications of the gender imbalance and makes recommendations for the field as a whole.
Significance

This study benefits organizations by providing new research data that may help make them more effective. Organizations that are aware of the imbalance and the related impact are in a better position to address current and future issues. Practitioners may benefit from the findings provided by this research as it may help them define their own opinions, and recognize opportunities within their own organization. Finally, both organizations and HR practitioners may benefit from this study by developing a better understanding of the dynamics of the gender imbalance, and being encouraged to engage in healthy dialogue.

Research Questions:

1. What does the data show regarding gender representation in the field of HR?
2. What are the reasons and effects of the imbalance?
3. What are some recommendations to address the gender imbalance and enhance credibility in the profession?

Conceptual Framework

This study is modeled after work done by Klie (2008), Balthazard (2008), and Willock (2007). Klie conducted a qualitative and quantitative Pulse Survey designed by Balthazard (2008), which asked a series of questions relative to the significance of the high numbers of women in HR. The study focused on whether more men in HR would enhance the profession. The Pulse Survey reveals that 50% of those responding thought that the high proportion of women in HR is something of a concern for the profession. Over 70% of respondents believed the profession would benefit from a more even balance (Klie, 2008). Credibility was an ongoing theme in the qualitative data of Klie’s
research, noting that historically professions dominated by women in a patriarchal society loose credibility. Balthazard (2008) suggests that as HR becomes more strategic in nature and more dependent on business models that require quantification of facts and data, the profession will attract more men (Balthazard, 2008). Willock (2008) conducted a roundtable discussion with several HR professionals using a semi-structured interview process.

**Definition of Key Terms**

Some definitions cited have been adapted for the purposes of this research,

*Credibility*

- *The American Heritage Illustrated Encyclopedic Dictionary* (1987) defines credibility as being “worthy of confidence,” or “worthy of belief” (p.405). The word "credentials" is also appropriate as it applies to someone, or a group, “entitled to confidence, credit, or authority” (p. 405). Credibility is the “probability that official claims and pronouncements can be trusted” (p. 405). Since the term credibility may be a subjective term within the context of this research, there will be a variety of opinions as to what credibility means to those interviewed and the survey participants.

*C-Suite*

- “A widely-used slang term referring to a corporation's most important senior executive. C-suite gets its name because top senior executives' titles tend to start with the letter C for chief, as in chief executive officer, chief operating officer and chief

For this research analysis, C-suite is defined as a CEO position, and distinguished from the term “executive level”.

Diversity:

- The recognition, quality, and respect for variety and inclusion. Diversity includes demographic (gender, race, age), psychological (values, beliefs, attitudes), and all levels of organizational hierarchy (status, position, tenure, division) (Levi, 2007). For the purposes of this research, diversity is focused primarily on diversity of gender.

Executive Level

- Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary (1997) defines executive as a “supervisor or administrative authority in an organization” (p. 677). For the purposes of this research paper, executive level is defined as any HR managerial position reporting directly to the senior executive- typically referred to as the CEO or C-suite position. For example, VP of HR, board member, senior level, or senior management, falls under the category of executive level. The term is further defined as part of the gender imbalance in HR where men hold a higher percentage of executive positions. However, survey respondents and authors of research data cited, may refer to senior executive level as C-suite or CEO. In these
instances, the distinction will be clarified within the context of the citation

*Gender Based Discrimination*

- *Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary (1998)* defines discrimination as the power to make “distinction through treatment or consideration in favor of or against a group” (p. 564). Discrimination of any one gender male or female based on intentional or unintentional actions—such as stereotyping—eliminates, or limits that genders opportunity in the hiring process or advancement. Discrimination may be further defined as a system which places women in lower wage categories compared to men *(1998).*

*Gender-Role Play*

- A term used by this researcher to denote stereotypical roles assigned to men and women, and the acceptance of these roles as the norm.

*Glass Ceiling*

- “The glass ceiling is a barrier to advancement to the higher levels of the organization. This barrier may be due to stereotypes or company systems that adversely affect the development of women or minorities” *(Noe, 2010, p.419).*

*Human Resources*
The term “Human Resources” (HR) incorporates all aspects of The Human Resource Wheel as specified by the American Society for Training and Development (McLagan, 1989). Since those involved in the interviews and the survey instrument may have varying perspectives as to what “HR” entails, this approach seems appropriate to capture all vantage points.

**Imbalance**

*Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary (1998)* defines imbalance as “lacking proportion or distribution” (p. 955). This research refers to the imbalance as the high percentage of women in the overall HR profession as compared to men. It also refers to the high percentage of men in the HR profession who occupy executive level positions compared to women in the profession.

**Line Management**

*Line Managers* are responsible for: Managing individual performance, developing employees, coordinating interdependent groups, managing group performance, monitoring the business environment, and representing the business unit (Noe, 2010).

**Regression ($R^2$)**

*The technique of modeling and analyzing several variables, by focusing on the relationship between the dependant and independent variables. $R^2$ is an assessment measure which*
confirms the goodness of fit and statistical significance of the model, as a percent of variance (Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, and Younger, 2008).

*Standard Deviation (STDEV)*

- *Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1971)* defines Standard Deviation as “a measure of dispersion in a frequency distribution, equal to the square root of the mean of the squares of the deviations from the arithmetic mean of the distribution. The amount of variation from the mean or average” (p. 1385). A low standard deviation (STDEV) indicates the data or opinions of the participants are closer to the average or closer in agreement. A high standard deviation indicates the data or opinions of the respondents are spread out over a larger range indicating less agreement.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review briefly summarizes some of the literature obtained related to the gender imbalance in HR. The literature review will focus on the original research questions (Chapter One) by addressing the following specific points:

- What does the data show regarding gender representation in the field of HR?
- What are the reasons and the effects of the imbalance?
- What are some recommendations to address the imbalance?

Research Question 1:

What does the data show regarding gender representation in the field of HR?

Gender inequities in the workforce are not unique to the HR profession. Similar imbalances exist in other professions. For example, the percentage of male teachers in the public school system is extremely low compared to women and has dropped considerably in some areas of the US. Lynn Nielsen (Andino, 2008) states that “many factors play a role in the profession’s gender imbalance, including societal definitions of masculinity, and an underlying fear of men working with children, and pay” (2008).

What may be troubling for HR is that a profession that should be the embodiment of diversity and inclusion is met with suspicion when one looks at not only the imbalance of women compared to men as a whole, but also the reverse dynamic of higher percentages of men that occupy levels of senior management (Willox, 2007). Thus, as the literature review will indicate, there are two gender imbalances at play: high levels of
females in the HR profession and the dichotomy of comparatively low representation at the senior high ranking levels. These two imbalances may also embody other gender discrepancies such as pay, and the ongoing stereotypes which have impacted both genders (Klie, 2008).

Ironically, when compared to other professions, HR has one of the highest percentages of women in top executive positions according to executive recruiter John F. Johnson who places executives in Fortune 100 companies. He states, “You find a higher percentage here than in finance, legal or other functions” (Anonymous, Aug. 1997 p. 79).

The imbalance issues are varied and complex. The issues are not only difficult for some to articulate, it is unclear how the gender disparity came to exist (Dobson, 2009). There is also the impact such an imbalance may have on strategic initiatives, and the credibility boost some feel may be a benefit to the profession if more men were recruited into HR. Others shy away from even discussing the implications of the imbalance, and may take offense at the term, as it denotes something is wrong (Willox, 2007). Thus the debate is raised as to whether the percentages are even important enough to muster concern.

However, has the ‘elephant in the room’ been conveniently overlooked? Claude Balthazard, Toronto’s director of HR excellence at the Human Resource Profession Association (HRPA) notes, “It hasn’t been discussed all that much. It’s a funny topic because there’s no doubt it’s there but nobody wants to deal with it. You know there is a relationship but you don’t know which is the cause, or which is the effect” (Dobson, 2009, p.11).
Klie (2008) uses data from Balthazard’s Pulse Survey conducted by the Canadian HR Reporter. The survey reveals that over 50% of the nearly 500 HR professionals surveyed expressed that the profession should at the very least be concerned about the high proportion of women in HR. Nearly 70% stated that a more even representation would be beneficial. The Pulse Survey created by Balthazard (2008) becomes a powerful window into the thoughts of Canadian HR professionals, particularly when the qualitative data is explored. Klie (2008) uses the survey to expose a credibility theme that permeates throughout the nearly 500 qualitative comments. As Klie quotes from one of the respondents, “It’s still a patriarchal society and the influence of men within a profession is still stronger than a woman’s influence. I don’t like to say that, but it’s a reality” (p. 12).

A subtext to this issue is the extremely low levels of women in CEO positions in Fortune 500 companies (Figure 2-1). The gender imbalance becomes even more prominent when one looks at the overall percentage of women at the CEO or C-suite level, where the representation is considerably less than the percent of females occupying positions as HR executives. Qualitative data (Pomeroy, 2007) suggests that women may lack the sufficient role models and mentors necessary to lead them to the higher ranking board room level or the CEO level.

**Figure 2-1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN AT THE TOP 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labor Force</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Officers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Board Seats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEOs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women as part of labor force and as percentage of</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As of June 2009, only 15 CEO’s in the United States top Fortune 500 companies were women. Of the Fortune 1000 companies there were only a total of 28 women CEOs. The 10 largest of these companies were represented by all white males in CEO positions, yet six of the top HR executives were female (Hansen, 2009). To further complicate the discussion, research would suggest that for those women interested in a CEO position, a sole focus on HR may not be the right career path. In terms of rotating into HR to gain experience, it may not be the most influential piece of a CEO’s portfolio (2009).

Hansen (2009) states that it is hard to ignore the research which suggests that companies are attempting to address the imbalance in HR at the executive level, by filling their top HR jobs with women, and then leaving them there. As Hansen (2009) states,

Companies that place a woman or a person of color in the top HR position may score diversity points, but they also take those executives out of the running for the CEO job. Until HR morphs into a function that can send candidates into the CEO position, the top HR spot represents an end point, not a career path, and corporate leaders will have to decide if their organization truly benefits from placing exceptional female and minority talent in that post (p. 16).
Hansen (2009) begins her article by citing a warning from the International Labor Organization (ILO) from ten years ago; indicating that the human resources function in the United States was becoming a sex-stereotyped occupation. Interestingly enough, the warning included the statement that a “single gender representation” (p.16) would include an 80% workforce population for both male and female—indicating that the disparity would be at both the functional and executive level.

The demographics of those who enter the HR profession and the labor market in general will be influenced by another major factor: women are surpassing men in college degree attainment. A 2007 survey conducted by The Society of Human Resource Development (SHRM) revealed trends that will continue to influence the gender imbalance (Schramm, 2007). Trends suggest that women will increase their presence throughout the ranks of HR. Women, who are surpassing men in college degree attainment, are likely to increase in number within the profession. Moreover those trends most likely will increase the numbers of female HR executives (2007).

Though this trend is encouraging for qualified women choosing to enter the executive levels, the trend exacerbates the issues related to the gender imbalance, and seems to bode poorly for men in general (Schramm, 2007). It may also emphasize the need to actively recruit men not only for the HR profession but as college attendees. The survey also suggests that young women are entering the profession directly from their college experience with many colleges and universities offering degrees in human resource management. Schramm (2007) notes:
[HR] is a knowledge-based profession with an increasing need for more skilled and educated professionals as baby boomers approach retirement, a profession tapping into the growing base of women, particularly young women, with college degrees (p. 96).

**HR Competencies and Gender**

As HR strives to position itself as an active organizational business partner, the question of HR competencies is raised. Specifically, given the gender imbalance, are there areas of competency where women excel and are more suited as strategic partners? A detailed study of HR competencies was conducted by authors Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, and Younger (2008). The authors explore a new model of HR competencies, seeking to discover the most important competencies related to individual and business performance. Six major competency domains were identified (Figure 2-2). For each of the six major competency domains, the research identifies the impact of each domain by gender. Their methodology in gathering data is supported through a series of survey data collections over the course of 20 years. The most recent round of surveys began by first identifying HR trends through collaboration with a variety of global HR professional institutions which included India, China, Latin America, Europe, North America, and Australia. The approach is both quantitative and qualitative and segregates competencies by gender (Ulrich et al., 2008).

Gender was the first demographic used by the authors in their analysis of each domain (Ulrich et al., 2008). Figure 2-3 shows the relative impact of the six competency domains on business performance by gender.

*Figure 2-2 – HR Competencies*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Six Major HR Competencies</th>
<th>HR Competency Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credible Activist.</strong></td>
<td>“HR with an attitude”, they are respected, admired, and listened to. They actively offer a point of view, challenges assumptions, and take a position. Professionals who are credible but not active may have little impact. Professionals who are active and not credible may have ideas that go unimplemented. Note the relationship between <em>Credible Activist</em> and <em>Fierce Conversations</em> introduced by Scott (2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture &amp; Change Steward</strong></td>
<td>Change agents and facilitators, who help shape company culture. They coach managers through change and understand history of the organization and disciplines needed for change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talent Manager/Organizational Designer</strong></td>
<td>Masters in theories and research practices in both dimensions. Focus is on competency requirements and the organizational design necessary to embed capabilities into the structure, politics, and processes of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy Architect.</strong></td>
<td>A vision of how the organization can “win” in the marketplace. Focus is on customer–driven strategies and the recognition of business trends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Executor</strong></td>
<td>Operational aspects of managing people and the organization in terms of drafting and implementing policies. Includes the basic administrative needs involving hiring, training, pay, outsourcing, communication, and services using technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Ally.</strong></td>
<td>Attuned to business success by setting goals and objectives that respond to external opportunities and threats. They know the value chain of the business, meaning they know who the customers are and why they buy the product. They possess good understanding of the finance, marketing, R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
& D, and engineering components of the business. They can grasp the synergy of these components and how they work together to make money or produce a service.

Figure 2-3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative Impact of Six Major Competency Domains on Business Performance by Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credible Activist</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Change Steward</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent Manager/Organizational Designer</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Architect</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Executor</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Ally</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HR Competencies Mastery at the Intersection of people and business (Ulrich, et al 2008 pg 54)

Focusing on just a few of the competency findings, the authors conclude that females have a higher percent impact, or influence on the business, than their male counterparts when they demonstrate specific competency domains (Ulrich et al., 2008).

- **Credible Activist**: Has slightly greater impact on performance for women than for men, suggesting that women stand to gain a bit more than men by developing their “HR with attitude” capabilities (p.68).
- **Culture and Change Steward**: A man’s individual performance is derived slightly more from *personalizing culture* than that of women. However, women may have more influence in *defining the culture*. 

This is a seemingly small difference but statistically significant due to the large sample size. The corollary finding is that women get more performance mileage out of their ability to define (i.e. ‘craft’) the culture. Could it be that we value take-charge women and sensitive new-age men? Of course, we pose this question with tongue firmly implanted in cheek, but the slight difference is intriguing (p. 87).

- **Talent Manager/Organizational Designer**: Women ranked higher than men in fostering communications while men ranked higher in *Ensuring Today’s and Tomorrow’s Talent*.

- **Strategy Architect**: Commenting on the gender comparison relative to the key HR competencies as Strategic Architect, Ulrich et al. (2008) found:

  The difference between the two factors (*Sustaining Strategic Agility* percentage minus *Engaging Customers* percentage) is much larger for men than it is for women – double in fact (Figure 2-4). Perhaps this reflects a difference in stereotyped expectations, where men are ‘expected’ to be strategists and women are ‘expected’ to be relationship builders, working more closely and naturally with external customers (p. 134).
In terms of business performance by gender, men have more impact on policy, whereas women have more business impact on technology. According to the authors, “Men seem to have somewhat stronger Luddite tendencies – their impact on the business is disproportionally (3:2) from policy area rather than from technology” (Ulrich, et al, 2008 p. 152).

- **Business Ally:** The authors (Ulrich et al., 2008) focus on individual performance impact by gender stating:

  Little difference is seen between men and woman in these factors.

  The Business Ally factors (Figure 2-5) have a strong correlation to performance overall for men than women, as seen in the higher $R^2$ values. Interpreting Social Context clearly has the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Architect</th>
<th>Business Performance Impact by Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male vs. Female</td>
<td>$R^2$ %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining Strategic Agility</td>
<td>0.101 62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging Customers</td>
<td>0.062 38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HR Competencies Mastery at the Intersection of people and business

(Ulrich, et al 2008 pg 135)
greatest influence on an individual’s performance competence. For women, Leveraging Business Technology has slightly less relative impact than for men (p. 171).

**Figure 2-5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Ally</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Performance Impact by Gender</strong></td>
<td>R²%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>R²%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting Social Context</td>
<td>0.204</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>0.177</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving the Value Chain</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulating the Value Proposition</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveraging Business Technology</td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *HR Competencies Mastery at the Intersection of people and business* (Ulrich, et al 2008 pg 171)

Though there are apparent levels of gender difference within each competency domain, the authors (Ulrich et al, 2008) resist making broad generalizations about current and future performance based on gender. Like most data, the HR competency research can be used to support several points of view. However, the Ulrich et al study (2008) on gender competency is only a small piece of a much larger study which looks at the entire competency needs of the HR professional, regardless of gender. Therefore the gender study is less focused on determining the *suitability* of professionals based on gender. The
gender section of the study seems centered more on using gender as a baseline to identify areas where components of individual performance might need improvement.

**Research Question 2:**

*What are the reasons and effects of the imbalance?*

*Credibility and Pay*

Depending on perspective and point of view, there may be a subtle discrimination and gender role-play that might see women as naturally suited to the skills and temperament necessary to be successful in HR. At the same time there is the assumption that only men can be strategic and therefore more worthy of the senior ranks. Aside from the HR competency study by Ulrich et al (2008), which seems to challenge or at least better articulate this theory, other HR professionals make their own observations. Klie (2008) notes one female corporate HR manager who stated that although progress has been made, there is a tendency to treat a female-dominated profession with less credibility, and more men would enable the profession to be seen more as a “business” profession.

One Canadian HR executive commented, “Often men are brought in from another department suggesting there’s an attitude men are needed so HR will be treated seriously as a business” (Dobson, 2009, p.11).

Just as impactful is that both spectrums of the imbalance may affect credibility and also pay. There is concern that “the job [HR] may not be treated the same way, in the sense that –overall women jobs tend to pay less for a given level of qualification”
Research suggests that perceived credibility and perceived lack of power-influence, coupled with lower pay, may be some of the reasons why HR has not attracted more men.

According to another HR professional: “Until more men are included in the mix, unfortunately our pay and credibility as professionals is imbalanced” (Klie, 2008, p.20).

However, there are other professions dominated by females, or as some refer to as “pink collar jobs”. Yet, what makes HR unique from other professions such as health services, and pharmaceutical sales, is that HR is a profession that should be moving organizations through strategic initiatives, bringing them to the cutting edge of societal changes (Ulrich, et. al, 2008). Yet the profession seems mired in gender distinctions and old models of gender role-play.

Balthazard (2008) is concerned that the profession has become a “gender ghetto” or a profession predominately occupied by women. As a result, other stereotypes may have surfaced. Matters of corporate conscience are typically considered qualities associated with matriarchal instincts, and decisions based on intuitive rather than strategic thinking. Commenting on how such stereotypes might impact credibility, Dobson (2009) quotes Balthazard:

People still say they went into the profession because they like people, [and] women also dominate other “caring” professions, such as teaching, social work and medicine. So how do you explain the connection of women and caring professions? It’s somewhat easy to stereotype but is there something going on? (p.11)
Ironically, this notion may be further perpetrated –either consciously or subconsciously -by men at the executive levels who typically dominate the board room. The argument Klie (2009) makes through the survey results is that a greater percentage of men would boost the perception of the profession at the executive and C-suite level, since more men occupy these influential positions. More to the point, it would appear that ideas, strategies, and proposals presented by women may not hold as much credibility as those presented by men, given that the audience may be gender-biased. This may be particularly true in manufacturing settings, where men have historically held the majority of top management and CEO positions. As Klie suggests (2009), where there is a lack of credibility, monetary worth may also be impacted.

The Glass Ceiling

So long as the results are good does it matter if more women are in the profession? As one observer noted, “HR is one area where women have less of a glass ceiling to worry about. It is empowering to be surrounded by strong successful women [and] to be part of an occupation that promotes women and their career paths” (Klie, 2008, p. 20).

However, this view is not a view shared by all women, and the circumstances might mask a more important issue (Anonymous, 2003). Women can certainly celebrate these high numbers, but when compared to the relative low numbers of women at the executive and C-suite level, some may suspect that HR is a placeholder for women who might otherwise excel to higher goals given the right career opportunities or fair treatment.
Data indicates that in some respects the proportion of women in the HR executive ranks has changed little over the past 10 years despite some progress (Pomeroy, 2007).

Commenting about the glass ceiling one female professional (Anonymous, 2003) stated:

I recently completed a research study on diversity, and evidence suggests that opportunities for females to reach executive level positions within organizations are still rare. HR Magazine highlighted five HR professionals who have “made it”. All three of the males achieved roles with COO (C-suite) as part of the title. The two females achieved roles as chief administrative officer and Executive VP (p.21).

Pomeroy (2007) attempts to understand the slow progress for women in HR reaching executive ranks. Pomeroy (2007) talks to several women in HR executive-level positions, and asks why there are not more like them at the top. One executive brought out that women face challenges and confront trade offs and choices not usually faced by male counterparts—often making critical choices between marriage and children over a career (Pomeroy, 2007). Clearly women face both the hurdle of moving up in the HR profession in addition to the struggle the entire profession faces to gain more influence and credibility (2007). Most women interviewed (Pomeroy, 2007) agreed that these choices rarely have to do with competency, but more with a need for flexibility, since they are still seen as the primary caregivers. One woman cited the example of her husband taking her two girls to the doctor for a routine checkup and how “everyone in the waiting room
was so impressed that he actually brought his children to their appointment all by himself, and wasn’t that ‘wonderful’ (Pomeroy, 2007, p.49).

However, the traditional models are changing, particularly among Generation X females who may have stay at home husbands or even nannies to help with the children.

To further define why a 75-80% representation of women in HR should not necessarily be a cause for celebration, not only does this type of dynamic historically suppress wages, the International Labor Organization (ILO) notes, “In the organizational structure of corporations, career paths in human resource management and administration are less likely to lead directly to the top than other strategic areas such as product development or corporate finance” (Hansen, 2007, p.16).

The ILO data shows that in 1970, 21% of women made up the population of HR managers in the U.S., compared to 66% in 2009. In operational HR positions and HR support positions, women represent 71% and 85% respectively.

Dobson (2007) states:

If there aren’t barriers, is it really such a big deal that there are more women? It’s not something we’ve looked at because we are not sure why [there is an imbalance]. It’s hard to do anything about it without knowing…if there are barriers. So we haven’t had any programs to attract [more men] (p.12).

To many, the fundamental skills needed to be proficient HR professionals are what really matter- regardless of gender. Dobson (2009) states:
While companies are coming around to better appreciate HR’s function, there is definitely a perception HR is almost like a woman’s thing, its soft skill, and you don’t need a lot of business experience, which is not true. Quite often there are not quick resolutions to HR problems. Maybe there is not enough value placed on emotional intelligence either” (p. 12).

Research Question 3:

What are some recommendations offered by the literature?

Diversity Needed

The issues of the imbalance in HR seemed to be an honest discussion among several men in a roundtable forum (Willock, 2007). One HR executive director expressed concern that there is something problematic about having too many of one gender, especially as high as 75%. The executive echoed the opinions of many at the forum when he states, “there is something wrong here” (p.26).

Willock (2007), also a member of the forum, states, “I’ll push it further. Imagine having an all black workforce and an all white HR department. Would that be different?” (p. 26).

Willock (2007) revealed that some men on the forum believed that an organizational population that is gender-split at 50:50, does not warrant a similar split in
the HR department. Rather, an HR staff that has the fundamental competencies—the breadth and depth of skills and behaviors—are what really matter.

In terms of diversity, Sue Tempero, 1995 winner of the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) Award for Professional Excellence stated, “men should be encouraged to enter and remain in the profession because HR needs to reflect a diverse employee base” (Anonymous, Aug. 1997, p. 80). To further hit home on a relevant point Tempero continues by saying, “If you really believe in diversity, you need that balance, and that includes gender balance. It [is healthy] and gives HR more viability and legitimacy as a profession” (p. 80).

In support of this view, there were members of the male forum who believed the imbalance should be a more burning issue which needs to be addressed for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is a potential talent pool of competent men that is not being utilized. The forum did not consider such an observation an invasion of a female-dominated profession at the expense of qualified women, but rather a missed opportunity. For example, one forum participant wondered if HR discussions or debates would be different if more men were present at HR meetings (Willock, 2007).

_Career Opportunities and Role Models_

Previous to the all-male forum, several female executives from the United Kingdom debated whether HR is a good career choice for ambitious and motivated women (Macafee, Gill, Barclay, and Monaghan, 2006). A recurring theme among these women raises the issue of gender role-play. As previously stated in this research, women may often have different family commitments than men. Women are expected to work and take care of the family which may limit their opportunities (Macafee, et al., 2006).
Another participant echoed this concern, by stating that women have to make sacrifices in their career, such as a lesser job and less pay in order to meet home life commitments. Macafee et al. (2006) offers this opinion:

Men also tend to be better at asking for bigger salaries, as they don’t appear to doubt themselves as much. Generally women are seen as better at less tangible competencies and their delivery is sometimes masked. Males in HR tend to be in more hardnosed areas like employee relations and wage negotiations where results are more tangible (p. 8).

Macafee et al. (2006) includes the comments of another executive addressing the need for HR to shape roles based on the needs of the top talent. For example, flexible work schedules or alternative work-styles which are typically associated with HR strategies for retention, maternity leave, and work-life balance. These suggestions from the female forum are not just focused on the general female staff, but also the initiatives needed to enhance the female population in the upper ranks of HR, including representation at the board room level. As one account director stated when commenting on the favorable outcome of such initiatives, “The future of HR is about leading strategic programs, talking the language of business and having metrics to demonstrate impact on the bottom line. What talented woman could resist such a challenge?” (2006, p.8).

In the all-female forum, many of the women cited survey data from research they had either personally conducted or read. One executive stated:”HR is seen as a mostly
female profession-yet there tends to be more men in board-level HR roles and female HR managers earn less, according to a CMI survey” (Macafee et al., 2006, p. 8).

Another managing director sees HR as having an “appalling reputation as a career for ambitious women” (Macafee, et al., 2006, p. 8). She sites the CMI survey which reveals the lack of role models for women at the board level which tends to have more men- with female HR managers earning less.

However, these women also stated the need to take proactive measures to create opportunities for women. Not only was the lack of role models at the board room level seen as a problem, but also the criteria in which these high level positions are obtained. As one participant pointed out, “Suitability for top roles should be assessed on objective measures, rather than subjective criteria, such as length of service and ability to work after 5:30pm” (Macafee, et al, 2006, p.8).

One professional consultant commenting about the lack of female mentors as a common complaint stated, “One solution is [for women] to look outside your company to find friends and colleagues at other organizations who can fill that role” (Pomeroy, 2007).

The impact of role models and mentors becomes very important, not just for women in HR interested in the higher ranks, but also for men who may not have given much thought to HR as a profession (Willock, 2007).

Most women surveyed seemed to agree that for women to reach executive level positions and especially C-suite status, requires a strategic approach to their own career path by taking control and aggressively seeking opportunities (Anonymous, 2003).
Though the glass ceiling is not unique to HR, there are those of the opinion that a career path focused on HR does not necessarily afford men or women the skill sets necessary for executive level positions, let alone C-suite positions. Coupled with what might be a male dominated hierarchy system, many concede that women seeking these positions need to find opportunities that avail them of operations and line-management experience. The link between the attitudes of CEO’s and the appointment of female HR executives should not be ignored. According to one female HR executive (Anonymous, 2003):

Male CEOs may have felt more comfortable hiring men for the top HR executive positions. That attitude may still exist in the workplace. There may still be a little bit of the vestige that we hire people who look like we do. [That] comfort level should increase as more women take over the CEO Job at major corporations (p. 80).

Ironically the same skill sets necessary for women to achieve these levels apply equally to men. However, by choice or design, women may not take the more traditional career path as men. Experience in functions outside of the HR realm or what might be referred to as developing the business acumen, can help in making the leap (Anonymous, Aug. 1997).

As an example, Ursula Burns became the first female CEO of Xerox in 2009, joining an exclusive club occupied by only a handful of women. Katherine Giscombe (Alleyne, 2010) VP of the advocacy organization Women of Color Research for Catalyst, makes this observation about Burns, “Her mechanical engineering background has been
key. This type of technical degree opens the door to a broader set of career opportunities” (p.89).

Figure 2-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CEO PROFILE</th>
<th>Characteristics of S &amp; P 500 CEOs, 2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Male</td>
<td>97.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>56 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median tenure with company</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median tenure as sitting CEO</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Experience</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Degree</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA Degree</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of MBAs percentage from Harvard</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced degree other than MBA</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Work Experience</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Most Common Role Prior to CEO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General management</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Spencer Stuart (www.spencerstuart.com)

Though Burns’ business acumen, personal drive, customer focus, and personal mentors cannot be ignored as part of her ascent, Alleyne (2010) also notes that, “the number of roles Burns played within the organization provided her with an intimate understanding of Xerox’s broad range of business operations” (pg. 89).
This varied professional experience seems to be a common path taken by women who have reached the executive levels of HR and for those women in the C-suite positions. Many have zigzagged into many careers that involved finance, marketing research, and business and strategic planning to gain experience. This enables them to “talk the business with the same degree of understanding as the sales and marketing people” (Anonymous, Aug. 1997, p. 77). Line management and operations management provide the broad financial experience, as well as the ability to sell ideas and tie initiatives into business goals, and is a critical competency needed for women to advance to HR executive positions (Anonymous, Aug. 1997). As one HR executive commented on her own career path:

To advance in HR, [I] realized that [I] also needed union relations experience, a necessity 20 to 25 years ago. Swallowing hard, [I] asked for a four level demotion to an employee relations position where [I] could get that experience. It was the real world of manufacturing and you saw the problems that first –line supervisors faced. I think having that type of experience puts you in a much better position to make valid judgment (p.77).

One experience cited was that of a woman being considered as a successor in a top job, only to be told that a male candidate was given more consideration because he had more experience at other companies. She was told, “you can’t get there from here” (Pomeroy, 2007, p.50). However, she found ways within her current company to fill the
experience void by working with various companies in mergers and acquisitions. This experience and visibility eventually led to an executive vice president position. She suggests that women who want to compete for executive positions should “find opportunities that will test you [and] you need to be opportunistic and aggressive to show you can play at the top levels” (p. 50). However, when it comes to aggression, women may also fear being labeled as emotional, arrogant, or even by the “B-word” (2007).

**Recruitment and Promotion**

HR continues to struggle with its role as business partner verses functional contributor and legal compliance officer. Whether this changing dynamic to business partner will be attractive to more men in the future continues to be an issue of debate and dialogue. At the all-male round table discussion, Willock (2007) concludes that men will be more attracted to HR in the future based on what the profession is actually doing, verses what the profession *perceives* itself to be doing.

Aside from comments about the actual imbalance, the forum discussed whether recruitment of more men is a viable and necessary option. It was the clear opinion of many at the forum that HR has a public relations problem in the sense that it is difficult to describe to people what HR does outside of the administrative functions and the people-based interactions most associate with the profession. One member of the panel described the difficulty of explaining change management or organizational development to someone who has no experience in the field. How then do you communicate these functions of the profession to a young college bound male as a viable career opportunity? As some participants commented,
There are not many other disciplines within an organization where you need to explain what it means. I have three kids who cannot quite grasp what I do. So I talk to them about a coach improving a soccer star’s performance, because it is tangible. HR is often not visible to the average person working in the organization. So how can we expect them, as parents, to influence their kids to go into HR? (p. 27).

If potential recruits understood the breath and depth of the profession as a results-orientated catalyst for organizational growth, there might be more interest. A suggestion is that HR has poor public relations, yet at the same time there are a number of women saying “I will do that”, and a lot of men saying: “I won’t do that” (Willock, 2007, p.28).

When responding to the suggestion that men in operational roles should cycle into HR as part of their development, another forum participant hit on a very poignant observation when he states, “The problem is that HR is just not one of the boxes you have to tick on the way up” (Willock, 2007, p.28). He further points out that there are initiatives to bring more women into the sciences and marketing, but there is no time to focus on the same initiatives to attract more men to HR.

However, the difference here is that women may be actively pursuing fields of science and technology, but may be shut out for one reason or another. The issue with the lack of men in HR has more to do with attracting men to a profession that they might never have considered or desired as an option (Willock, 2007). As the male forum participants point out, it then becomes an issue of promotion and salesmanship.
A key question was also raised at the all-male forum: Should the HR profession make a conscious effort to attract more men? There are actually two issues inferred by this question: 1). Making HR more attractive to college-bound or undergraduate males through education and recruitment; and 2). Promoting HR as a viable assignment within the organization as part of the career growth of high potentials.

One member felt that though spending time in HR would broaden organizational understanding, he suspected it would be seen as taking away focus from the front line or line operations. This again raises the issue of credibility and importance. If spending time in other facets of the organization are considered useful to career growth, why not HR? Again, as the forum brings to light, the reason may be the perception that HR is all about soft-skills and people related issues.

Ironically, HR is often just the opposite: a very tough environment requiring people who are “tough as nails” and are able to have difficult conversations (Willock 2007, p.27). Discussing the importance of what she refers to as “fierce conversations”, or *real* conversations, author Susan Scott (2002) states:

Conversations are the work of a leader and the workhorse of an organization. Practicing and championing Fierce Conversations companywide enhances employees’ capacity to serve as effective agents for strategic success, structuring the basis for high levels of alignment, collaboration and partnership at all levels within the organization (preface xix).
In order to attract more men the all-male forum came back to the fundamental issue of HR credibility and the alignment of HR with strategic initiatives particularly those associated with organizational SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) and environmental scanning, focused on external competition.

As Willock (2007) implies, theoretically as organizational environments become more complex due to the outside regulatory forces such as health and safety regulations, aggressive technology, employment legislation, and corporate social responsibility (CSR), so too will the complexity of the relationship between HR and the business. The need to understand and react to the ever-changing complexity will require organizations to seek more help to prepare for and manage the changes. Strategically speaking, opportunities for organizational growth and the ability to maintain a competitive edge will be critical (2007). This important cog in the business wheel may increase the credibility of HR, and therefore increase its public relations as a career option for more men. This holds true so long as the profession is ready to be at the table to engage in and lead these strategic initiatives without being perceived as a prescriptive element, waving the proverbial finger indicating “you can’t do that, or you must do this” (p. 28).

Though acknowledging he is not sure the gender imbalance is really a problem, one Ontario based health and safety coordinator at a major Canadian manufacturing firm suggested that HR associations could do more to recruit men, stating, “I would like to see more opportunities for men” (Dobson, 2009, p.12). Many HR professionals contend that the focus should be on the promotion of HR itself, and the education needed to enter the profession as a viable respected, and critically needed occupation in today’s changing work environment. However there was also agreement that there is some culpability
among the various HR associations like SHRM in order to make this happen. “[I’d] like to see HR associations focus on giving the work more credibility. As awareness builds around the kind of education needed for HR, more men will probably enter the profession” (p.12).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Fundamentally any profession that dominates on the side of one gender over another, at the very least, requires inquiry. Historical factors, gender-role play, and stereotypical factors are all influences toward an imbalance. As noted, the gender imbalance in the HR profession clearly exists, including the reverse imbalance at the executive level (Klie, 2009). The question then becomes: Why does the imbalance exist, and does the high percentage of women -or low percentage of men- harm the profession?

Inequities exist in other professions such as technology –related fields dominated by men, and the pharmaceutical sales, teaching, and health services fields dominated by women. What makes HR unique is that the profession should be looked upon as a model of diversity, inclusion, and organizational change. The issue of recruitment may be as simple as the profession internally advocating for the same diversity initiatives they encourage in the rest of the organization.

As the research from this literature review indicates, there are varying and complex opinions as to why the imbalance exists or if the imbalance in fact matters in the final analysis.

However, how the profession is perceived is clearly important to its effectiveness. Arguably the perception of the profession as a viable strategic partner remains an issue among board members, CEOs, and certainly HR professionals. These
perceptions are often demonstrated intentionally or subliminally through stereotypes related to lower pay and unequal opportunities for women to succeed to higher executive and C-suite levels. This issue along with reverse stereotypes labeling HR “a women’s profession”, has impacted both the credibility and the number of men who enter the field.

In summary, this literature review reveals the following brief recommendations to bridge the imbalances:

- The imbalances should be a more burning issue which needs to be addressed
- Continue and encourage dialogue regarding the imbalances
- Men should be encouraged to enter and remain in the profession because HR needs more diversity; there is a potential talent pool not addressed
- Create flexible work schedules or alternative work-styles that afford women the opportunity to balance high-potential careers with family
- The profession should increase its public relations to promote HR as a career option for men by emphasizing the strategic component as the future path of HR
- The profession should utilize the HR competency domains created by Ulrich et al, as a way to market and attract potential talent, and as a platform to develop robust career paths
- Include HR as a career option for male high school students and undergraduates
- Women should seek bonfide mentors and role models; there is a potential talent pool unutilized at the executive levels
- Women should aggressively seek opportunities for exposure in line-management and operations to increase opportunities for growth
The research related to HR competencies and gender conducted by Ulrich et al (2008) and included in this research study, opens the door for further dialogue. This is particularly true as the profession as a whole and organizations specifically continue to determine the competencies necessary for HR professionals to meet future business demands.
Chapter Three  
Methodology  

The purpose of this original research study is to reveal some of the reasons, and impact, for the high percentage of women in HR, and the comparatively low percentage of women at the executive levels of the profession. Chapter Two presented literature research from a variety of sources. This next chapter reveals the methodology used to conduct both the interview and survey portion of the study. For the interview portion, sample, brief participant biographies, interview questions, and data analysis will be addressed. In addition, sample, interview questions, and data analysis, will be addressed for the survey portion of the study.  

*Interview Sample*

Six HR professionals, two women and four men agreed to participate in the study. The participants were chosen as a convenience sample. These individuals have first hand experience at different levels of the HR profession ranging from functional administration to senior level vice president.  

*Survey Sample*

Surveys were conducted with both Cohort 12 and Cohort 13 from the Organizational Learning and Human Resource Development (OL/HRD) Masters Program at St John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. The survey participants represent both male and female HR students and HR professionals at different levels of HR experience. Some of the survey participants have little or no HR professional experience.
Interview and Survey Sample Results

The result of each research method offers a broad variety of opinions and insight regarding the gender imbalance in HR, and the opportunity to compare different data. The qualitative data from both the interview and survey methods offers an unfiltered, raw emotional response to the research questions. Respondents for both methods were not paid for their participation.

Confidentiality and Security of Data

All interviews were conducted by phone, email, or a combination of both. Prior to the interview, each respondent was assured that the information he/she provided would be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this research paper. However, the use of the respondents’ first name and the name of their organization were presented as an option. In all cases this information was used with their permission.

A similar statement of confidentiality was provided to both Cohort 12 and Cohort 13 via email.

Interview Participant Bios

Interview 1: Claude

Claude works as director of HR excellence at Toronto’s Human Resource Professional Association (HPPA). As he describes it, Claude’s major contribution is quality assurance, regulation, and compliance. He states, “I’m the cop, providing registration and rules of conduct for all the professionals”. Claude also creates and analyzes surveys, including the Pulse Survey used by Shannon Klie (2008) for the article in the Canadian HR Reporter.

Interview 2: Howard
Howard works for a non for profit health agency as an HR Business Partner. After serving as an HR Manager, Howard moved into his current role, which includes large-scale operations responsibilities, strategic planning, and working with executive level employees.

**Interview 3: Craig**

Craig worked for a major manufacturing company as a production operator, supervisor, and operations manager, before accepting a special assignment assisting the HR department. This eventually led to a permanent position in the HR department. Though it required a pay cut, he felt it was in line with what he had been doing in a management role and considered it an opportunity for career progression.

**Interview 4: Ed**

Ed is currently Director of Organizational Learning and Human Resource Development at ST John Fisher College. He worked at Xerox for 38 years where his most recent role was Vice President of Human Resources for North America.

**Interview 5: Janet**

Janet is the VP of HR for a regional chapter of a nation-wide non profit agency. She gradually moved up the ladder to the VP spot, after various roles in administrative management, staffing, and payroll. She has adapted to the ongoing changes in employee relations, employment law, and more recently, the competencies necessary as a strategic partner, working closely with the CEO.

**Interview 6: Susan**

Susan is an HR professional and consultant.
**Interview Questions**

There were five core questions asked of each respondent. However, the interviews were semi-structured to allow for a more conversational dialogue and follow-up questions. For this reason, not all respondents were asked the questions in the same order, and may have been asked additional questions based on their responses.

1. What are the reasons for the high percentage of women in HR compared to men?
2. Should measures be taken to recruit more men into HR and increase the number of men in the profession?
3. Does the disproportionate number of women in the HR profession harm the profession?
4. Would more men in HR impact the credibility of the profession?
5. Have women been victims of a glass ceiling, even within the HR profession?

*Additional questions asked to specific interviewees where noted*

6. Do you see any difference between profit and non profit organizations in terms of the gender imbalance? For example, the difference between a large manufacturing company versus a smaller not for profit?
7. Do you think the discussion of the imbalance is a taboo subject?
8. Do you think women deal with the “human side” of issues better than men?
9. Research shows a very low percentage of women in CEO positions for the top Fortune 500 companies. The opinion of many is that HR may not be a pathway to the CEO spot. What is your opinion?
Survey Questions

The following statements were posed to Cohorts 12 and 13 in an effort to seek their own opinions. The comments were collected in conjunction with the Likert Survey sent to both cohorts via a Survey Monkey. (For quantitative data refer to the graphs in Appendix A).

1. A recent 2009 article shows that on average, women represent 75% of all HR positions. This high number harms the profession.
2. Should St. John Fisher should actively recruit more men.
3. Our current Cohort represents the diversity of the HR profession
4. It would be good for the HR profession if it were more evenly represented across genders
5. The OL/HRD program would benefit, if it were more evenly represented across genders
6. The HR professional associations should develop and implement specific action plans to address the gender imbalance
7. The organization I work for has a high proportion of women in HR roles
8. The success of organizational outcomes through OL/HRD may be impacted by gender
9. In ten years what will the gender representation be like in HR?
   Do you believe a change in the imbalance matters? Why or why not?
Note: Question 10 was given only to Cohort 13
10. Ironically, research suggests a high percentage of men in HR senior level positions vs. a lower percentage of women. What are your opinions about this imbalance?
    Why do you think it exists?
Conclusion

Chapter Three has described the methodology used to gather information for the foundation of this research paper. Three primary methods were used to gather data: 1). Literature research (Chapter Two) compiling over twenty peer reviewed articles and several books; 2). Qualitative and quantitative data through surveys conducted with both Cohorts 12 and 13 in the OL/HRD program at St John Fisher College; and 3). Convenience Sample Interviews conducted with several HR professionals.

Data Analysis

The content of the interviews and survey results are reviewed in Chapter Four. Data analysis will be based on common themes, and will include recommendations.
Chapter Four

Interview Research Findings

Introduction

The interviews summarized below were conducted by phone or in person. The first names of the interviewees and the name of their organization were used only with their permission. The participants agreed to share their opinions and insight regarding this research topic, based on their personal experiences. For information on additional interview methods please refer to Appendix B.

Qualitative Interview Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claude</th>
<th>Comments:</th>
</tr>
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| **Question One (reason for high percentage)** | “First of all, the gender imbalance is a fact not an opinion. The HRPA is a regulatory body which has confirmed 80% female representation in the HR profession. Historically this was not always the case, when there was 50-60%. I don’t know the social or logical reasons. Perhaps women had more clerical routes; maybe it’s a variety of factors.”

“HR was at first an administrative function and not a very caring profession. It adapted female values, but over the years it tried to harden up. Now on a statistical basis, if you look at a Senior Management Team composed of eight people, the one woman on the team will be the VP of HR. It won’t always be the case, but very often it’s true.” |

| **Question Two (recruitment)** | “In terms of recruitment, in the survey I created for Shannon Klie (2008), there were comments where I was criticized. Accounting is a male-dominated profession, but there are programs to bring women into the profession.” |

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question 3 (imbalance causes harm)</th>
<th>“When you focus on the numbers, the charts, regressions and predictions, then your credibility has a “male perspective”, or 'show me the facts, show me the numbers'. It can be difficult to link the “caring side” of HR to hard numbers. The hard data is a stiffer approach.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Question 4 (credibility)   | “In terms of credibility, it depends on how it is linked. The arrows [high and low credibility] can be flipped around to make a good story one way or another. The administrative parts of HR are clearer. The organizational development part is a bit more fuzzy”.  

“The credibility issue is still true, but there are areas of HR more credible than others. In terms of accepted outcomes and gender, I think credibility often comes from being too “hard”. In some ways, HR lost some of its values by being too hard and too fact-based; driven by the numbers and HR metrics. Some people don’t like the “hard side” of HR, and there is a high overlap between credibility and “male values” in the business.” |
| Question 5 (glass ceiling) | “HR has a high percentage of women at the lower levels, and then there is a flip, where men are more represented at the higher levels. That is what I should have focused on: the ‘flip’. But the purpose of the survey was to get people talking.”  

“People certainly reacted to the article (Balthazard 2008, Klie 2008). It’s as if I had gone to the edge of political correctness, or as if to say, ‘He dared to go there’. The criticism is that the focus should have been on the other end of HR, or the male-dominated percentages.” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Howard</th>
<th>Comments:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question One (reason for high percentage)</strong></td>
<td>“HR began as predominantly female because HR began in personnel with transactional functions, but has evolved over time. HR has taken on a ‘different look’ as a more “hard line” business type role.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question Two (recruitment)</strong></td>
<td>“People don’t think of it as just filing and typing forms and that type of thing anymore. There are higher expectations now like finance and marketing that make the profession more attractive to men. There are new challenges in finance and marketing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think it important to recruit for the best individual. I think more men will gravitate toward the profession and there will be an increase in the number of men, but still a bigger percentage of women. There will be a need for more business minded people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 3 (imbalance causes harm)</strong></td>
<td>“Not a negative effect at all. Women in leadership roles in HR do the job well. To some degree they may have to work harder. They are good at what they do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There’s no real negative piece; women bring a positive piece. Women bring a greater level of compassion than a man would. That may sound stereotypical but in my experience I would have taken a much harder line than women leading the initiatives.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 4 (credibility )</strong></td>
<td>“I think you have to look at the size of the organization. In a mid size to large size organization it doesn’t matter. Once you reach a certain number in the organization you don't get biased over whether it’s a man or a woman, it’s [a matter of] who can do the job. In a smaller organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
maybe men would bring more credibility, but again is the owner a man or a woman?”

“A small business may be a few hundred people. A male might bring more credibility if the business is male owned.”

**Question 5 (glass ceiling)**

“I think they have experienced a glass ceiling. It goes back to history and gender in the workplace. You do have men running in positions of authority of power; subsequently they made a glass ceiling or barrier. Personally I look for someone who can do the job. I can do the job it doesn't matter.”

**Additional Question 6 (profit and non-profit)**

“I have never worked in manufacturing but when I worked for profit companies, it was mostly in call centers and sales-based organizations. Coincidentally, most of the time in each situation the HR department was headed by a female; it is all about meeting the expectations of where the organization is headed.

“If the organization is just operating at status quo and no gain in market share, in which case they may look to a man to run the department-not to discredit women. But in a larger organization it’s only about who can do the job.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craig</th>
<th>Comments:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question One (reason for high percentage)</strong></td>
<td>“Most females were brought into the profession out of school and saw it as a career. Men especially, took another career path into HR through business leadership positions to round out their skill sets, or they needed help in meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Two (recruitment)</td>
<td>“Yes! It’s not your father’s HR. If you’re not impacting the bottom line, what do I need you for? Coming out of college and then experiencing five to seven careers, HR might be the perfect fit. Companies need to value strategic partnership. HR needs to be at the table and include the administrative part.”</td>
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<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Question 3 (imbalance causes harm) | “Would it benefit with a better gender balance? Yes. Anytime you increase your diversity in an organization you look better from the inside and the outside. If women see only men, the glass ceiling is right in front of them. The gender issue is the same as race. If they don’t look like you there is a lack of diversity and a lack of diversity is a lack of trust. How do you think customers respond to that?”

“HR does not hold itself accountable. The behaviors they will not tolerate within the client group they represent, they will tolerate among themselves. For example, succession planning: we make clients do this but HR does not. They have to go outside to fill needs, but they should be growing in-house, growing the business acumen in house –even if not immediately—but waiting in the wings.” |
<p>| Question 4 (credibility) | “Yes, I think there are credibility issues. They recruited me because they felt I was right for the position and didn’t worry about my perquisites. Even if a woman has the perquisites they will go “outside” and look past [her]. She may have the credentials but they go outside because they are uncomfortable thinking of her in any other role except their original place in administrative. They hang out in |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 5 (glass ceiling)</th>
<th>“When I applied for a manager position once, I was pulled aside and given advice; they didn’t see me in a manager position because I hung out in supervisory circles. The top people did not come through HR. They came through another route. They spent time in the trenches, and viewed their position as a career not just an assignment. Women in HR will not bring issues to higher populations of management.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additional: Question 7 (taboo subject)</td>
<td>“Yes and if you challenge, they will go to ‘qualifications’. You can use that data to do anything you want to do. It’s an issue in HR. The ‘human’ part of HR can’t be learned. The strategy and business part you can learn. If you’re a business manager the human side might be a difficult subject.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional: Question 8 (human side)</td>
<td>“It’s not gender specific. It’s either in you or not. It’s about relationship as a business partner and the serving of the client’s needs and meeting deliverables.”</td>
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**Ed**

| Comments:                                                                                   | “Historically, HR has provided options for women that might not have existed in other places; particularly woman seeking higher level positions. It provided a motivating factor for young women as another option outside of becoming a teacher, a nurse, or even a nun. It’s a matter of women going into a profession based on where women have historically proven successful. For example, women have been successful in public relations, as lawyers in industrial relations or legal patents, HR, and marketing.” |

| Question Two (recruitment)                                                                  | “There should be more Affirmative Action in general and more qualified people in HR in particular. Over-population can make gender a criteria. It should be based on the community served by HR and the organizational environment. If the |
Community has more men and HR does not have [this balance] then it should be made an objective. This should not be based on opinion, but the statistics of the population."

"HR should look like the community it does business with. The leadership is in the decision making position. If gender balance is one of the objectives then it needs to be established by the leadership as an objective. Xerox made it a goal. If men are not available, then go look for them. You have to establish it as a priority."

**Question 3 (imbalance causes harm)**

"The gender imbalance does not impact HR’s credibility. Our contributions to the bottom line or business effectiveness impact our credibility."

**Question 4 (credibility)**

"Leaders are looking for their HR Executives to be business partners and activists on the part of business strategy, the objectives, and ensuring the organization has the right people in jobs. These business partners should be surrounded by developmental enablers, if they have knowledge or behavior gaps that may negatively impact performance. They also want HR to have a Talent Management system that looks at the entire enterprise, ensuring that the right people are hired. In addition, there should be an ongoing assessment of knowledge and skill level to ensure they can perform at an appropriate level. Development is part of one’s work, not ancillary to one’s work, and Leaders are looking for the HR organization to impact the culture in a way that HRD is engrained in the culture."

**Question 5 (glass ceiling)**

"I’m not sure there is a glass ceiling for women in HR at the present time. I would have agreed several years ago, however, today I do not agree. In fact, many companies have used HR intentionally to
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Janet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question One (reason for high percentage)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Women were in the trenches [of the profession]. Women are mothers and raise kids; it does not wear as thin with women. Many women were not looking to advance. Similar to women social workers, [HR] required the more natural instincts of women. There was no higher appeal, but this kept the salaries lower at the trench level.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Question Two (recruitment)** |
| “In tandem and in partnership; organizations should try to bring gender diversity. When we looked for a diverse HR person, we had contractors in the meantime—while we searched. We invested the time. If SHRM and NHRA can help, that would be great. We recently recruited minority owned recruitment agencies. If an organization really wants to find [a diverse candidate] it can be done. College bachelor programs, or even at the high
get female and minority representation on their Senior Staff.” |

<p>| <strong>Additional: Question 9 (CEO positions)</strong> |
| “I do not view HR as an individual function as a pathway to the CEO position. In many companies, like Anne Mulcahy at Xerox, CEO’s have spent a couple of years in HR as a developmental step getting one ready for the CEO position. Those with a financial career path identified as a candidate for CEO will often take a senior level position in sales or marketing in their developmental process. I don’t view any one function as a direct line to CEO. The most successful CEO’s have led a few functions in their path to the corner office.” |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3 (imbalance causes harm)</th>
<th>“The upper levels [of HR] are predominately men. HR is viewed as overhead, a necessary evil; more diversity of thought would bring a different perspective, and impact the profession as a more strategic entity.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 4 (credibility)</td>
<td>“I think it would.” Janet explained that she is part of a diverse organization. “We have to live up to do what we say. When we had a male [HR person] we had looked for the best candidate. We wanted a man for diversity of thought. Women look at things differently; I feel the absence of that now [that there are no men in HR].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5 (glass ceiling)</td>
<td>“In the mid eighties for example, there were predominately management-level men attending the HR Forum at the Rochester Business Alliance. Overnight, about 20 years ago, the HR field was starting to transition; the caliber [of people attending the RBA Forum] changed. RBA used to be geared towards higher management. Does [the imbalance] harm the profession? Yes, [it harms] the diversity of thought. It continues to perpetuate the stereotype, and it helps make it harder to break through the glass ceiling. It goes back to the inequity of what women are paid; we tend to hire people who look like us, though not necessarily intentional.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Susan**  
**Comments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question One (reason for high percentage)</th>
<th>“I think many women by nature want to help people and being in a profession like HR enables them to do so. We tend to be more nurturing which can both help and hurt in HR when it comes to taking action that will upset an employee.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Question Two (recruitment)              | “No, because to do so could encourage less qualified individuals to move into the profession since the consensus of men in upper management is
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3 (imbalance causes harm)</th>
<th>“No, I don't think so. I think women have made it as successful as it is today, and helped it rise to a greater visibility.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 4 (credibility)</td>
<td>“I don't think men will positively or negatively impact the credibility unless they don't rise to the level and do as good a job as their female counterparts.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5 (glass ceiling)</td>
<td>“I think so. Because many companies still have men at the top, and often those of an older generation, the perception of women in higher positions isn't looked upon favorably. Women are often considered too emotional to be able to handle the stress that comes with upper management positions, when often, the exact opposite is true when you actually see them at work in the position. Women can often play hardball better than men, and the men don't see it coming because they don't recognize that quality in the female nature.”</td>
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</tbody>
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Qualitative Survey Findings

Introduction

A Likert Survey was conducted with Cohort 12 and Cohort 13 from the OL/HRD Masters program at St John Fisher College. The Likert Survey included both a quantitative and qualitative portion. The quantitative data of the Likert Survey is in graph format and appears in Appendix A and Appendix B of this research.

The cohorts were also asked to provide qualitative comments for each of the Likert Survey statements or questions posed. Question 9 was in two parts, asking what the gender imbalance will be like in ten years and if the imbalance even matters. The following comments represent the qualitative data from Cohorts 12 and 13. For each question or statement, common themes emerged. Three or four comments that represent common themes are summarized below. Unique comments that may not represent common themes are also included. The participants agreed to share their opinions and experiences regarding this research by responding to the survey. The cohort survey participation is confidential, and no names were used for this portion of the research. In addition, the comments are not specified as being from Cohort 12 or Cohort 13. In the rare case where the identity of a respondent might be recognized based on their comments, special permission was asked by this researcher.
## Qualitative Survey Findings

### Common Survey Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question One (high percentage harms profession)</th>
<th>Most participants said:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Lack of practitioner credibility harms the profession, not gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Practitioner incompetence will call gender into question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Lack of gender diversity harms the profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A male perspective is needed to increase credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A balance is needed because HR is not taken seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two participants said:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The imbalance leads to increased drama and moodiness; HR is known as the most dysfunctional department, a balance would even things out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A balance would help HR to be taken seriously</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Two (the college should recruit more men)</th>
<th>Most participants said:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Recruitment should be based on qualifications, not gender</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A push for more men will better the profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Professionals should encourage men to enter HR</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- More men creates diversity of thinking and ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Three (cohort diversity)</th>
<th>Most participants said:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The Cohort has one male, far below the 25% average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Our Cohort represents the diversity of HR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The range of ethnicity is not as broad as it could be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Our Cohort has diversity across ages, races, and socioeconomic, but not gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One participants said:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                                   | - It depends on what you mean by
| Question Four (the profession should be evenly represented across genders) | Most participants said:  
- It is advantageous [for HR] to reflect the population they serve  
- Certain professions have been dominated by more men in HR would provide a more comfortable environment  
- If the profession is effective and efficient, gender it should not matter  
- We would gain from a male perspective  
One participant said:  
- Based on the OL/HRD classes, it doesn’t matter; gender does not play a role in discussions or experiences or making the classes more effective. |
|---|---|
| Question Five (the OL/HRD Masters program would benefit from a more even gender mix) | Most participants said:  
- Yes. It would provide a variety of different perspectives in the program.  
- It would give a different dynamic  
- There may be a bias that men should not be in hr  
- So long as a person is doing what they love, any addition to the program would be good  
- HR would be more credible if represented by more  
- We would gain from a male perspective  
One participant said:  
- Sometimes I feel I cannot be honest because there are so many women in the Cohort. |
| Question Six (professionals associations should help address the gender imbalance) | Most participants said:  
- I agree to an extent  
- It may become reverse discrimination or showing a preference towards a candidate based on gender not qualifications  
- Some actions should be taken if a company realizes that one gender is not fairly represented.  
- Especially in this field, people should |
strive for fairness and EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)
- Something has to be implemented to change the current situation.
- There is a need to remove the bias that it’s a woman’s job

Two participants said:
- These associations should raise awareness of the issues, but action plans are not necessary
- What would it hurt? It would raise the awareness of the gender imbalance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Seven (my organization has a high proportion of women in HR)</th>
<th>Most participants said:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- There are no men in my HR department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- There is only 1 male in my HR department</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In my department there are 4 women and 2 men</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The hr department has only one person who is a woman. However, the HR committee is equally balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Of the four highest HR people, 2 are men, and 2 are women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One participant said:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Men rarely apply for open HR positions</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Eight (organizational outcomes may be impacted by gender)</th>
<th>Most participants said:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Not necessarily. It depends on KSA (knowledge, skills, and attributes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- It depends on the practitioners abilities, strengths and competencies - not their gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Representation by more men in the field may positively influence the implementation of HR initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- From my experience I don’t see this to be true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One participant made these comments:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This might be a stretch. Organizational outcomes may be impacted by gender however I don’t think it would be such a dramatic change [if we had] more gender equality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The positions in HR might be worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Nine (HR in ten years; relevance of change; does it matter?)</td>
<td>Most participants said:</td>
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</table>
| | • There will be an increase in gender once the economic crises ends  
| | • It will be socially acceptable to have more men in HR as more positions become de-gendered  
| | • It matters; different points of view are not represented  
| | • No relevance to change. Gender is not an issue. It depends on qualifications.  
| | • Over time, less people will look at the profession as a woman’s job  
| | • It would matter greatly, but no significant shifts will be seen soon |
| Other participants said: | • It doesn’t matter  
| | • Change matters. Just as cultural benefits are gained by having minorities in positions.  
| | • There should be a change to have better gender equality in HR |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Ten (Cohort 12 only; why the low percentage of women at HR executive levels)</th>
<th>Most participants said:</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| | • It’s the proverbial glass ceiling and the “old boy’s network” employing the Peter Principle.  
| | • It is reflective of society in general  
| | • Companies may need to help guide women who are qualified for senior level positions  
| | • Women typically leave their careers- short or long term- to raise a family.  
| | • Pay and career path imbalance is a reality of today’s situation  
| | • A mans mobility up the corporate ladder is based more on financial figures and statistical aspects of HR.  
| | • Maybe female HR practitioners are disinterested in the financial and statistical portion of HR.  
| | • It may be easier for men to climb the corporate ladder and they are less likely to hit a ceiling |
- More men have MBA’s, but women are pursuing these degrees

Other participants said:
- There should be more equal distribution of senior level HR professionals.
- Men are more aggressive towards getting these positions
- I don’t think women like to be in those positions
Chapter Five

Research Analysis and Recommendations

This chapter will briefly review and discuss several key research findings as a result of this study. This chapter will also discuss the implications of this research on the HR profession, and future recommendations.

Key Findings:

1. *Regardless of gender, qualified and competent HR professionals bring credibility* by contributing as strategic business partners

2. *The gender imbalance creates a lack of diversity* in HR which may limit the inclusion of different perspectives, and impact credibility and influence the profession

3. Though many women are represented in the higher ranks of HR, *there is still a glass ceiling in HR due to unfair perceptions and stereotypes*

4. *Recruitment of more men should be pursued to allow for more diversity,* but not at the expense of qualified female candidates

Discussion Finding One: *Regardless of gender, qualified and competent HR professionals bring credibility*

Based on the survey and interviews conducted by this researcher, gender does not determine whether an HR professional is qualified or competent. One gender is not more suited than another to making strategic contributions or providing input as a stable business partner to an organization. However, the interpretation of credibility applied to administrative or functional HR roles verses organizational outcomes through strategic
organizational development, can be quite different. The administrative aspects of HR are typically easier to measure, whereas a person’s *individual performance* as it relates to credibility and contributions to organizational outcomes may be less tangible.

Prejudicial preference may in some cases give more weight to a male perspective regarding strategies and organizational development, e.g. buy-in for organizational change has a greater chance of success when the ideas come from a man. Intellectually this should not be the case, as most respondents from this research indicate. However, based on the quantitative data it appears that the *acceptance* of ideas based on gender, and not the ideas themselves, continue to weigh heavy within the profession.

This brings to mind one interviewee who made a revealing observation about HR credibility: “The consensus of men in upper management is that ‘anyone can do HR!’” This is a key and valid point, and opens the door to useful dialogue: If more men were part of the HR profession or exposed to HR as a career path, there would be less dismissive attitudes towards the profession and perhaps more credibility. Part of the credibility problem rests with the contradictions and dysfunctions within the profession itself, and the vulnerability of being the “heart” and moral compass, while at the same time partnering to execute hard-line business strategies.

Individual credibility should be the key starting point regardless of gender. If a person is not credible to begin with, strategic contributions may have little effect, or acceptance, regardless of gender. In terms of HR, the linkages associated with organizational outcomes—the *how* and the *what*—becomes a more realistic factor than gender.
Putting individual credibility aside, the HR profession as a whole may seem suspect and therefore less credible because the gender balance is skewed. For example, a candidate in Canada interviewed for several different HR positions before finally landing a job. In all of the interviews he encountered only one male HR person (Klie, 2008). Many might disregard this situation as an innocent or unintentional extreme. Yet, how credible is this situation for a profession that is supposed to be at the frontline of diversity efforts?

This type of imbalance is not unique to HR, but is particularly relevant based on the nature of the profession. When these types of imbalances exist they raise potential questions of equity, preference, and gender bias. These conditions harm the profession by eroding its influence.

Survey results from the cohorts indicates a high standard deviation (STDEV) and therefore less consensus in response to Survey Question One: *This high number harms the profession*, and Survey Question Eight: *Organizational outcomes may be impacted by gender* (See Appendix C).

At least 25% agreed that the high percentage is both harmful and may impact organizational outcomes. The qualitative data indicates that the interpretation of “harmful” relates to credibility and more specifically, credibility as a strategic business partner. However, an equal percentage disagreed with these assertions, indicating that it is lack of needed competencies that causes harm to the profession, not gender.

It is interesting to note that none of the cohort respondents disagreed that a more even representation would benefit the HR profession. By the same token, some respondents indicated that the present situation does not negatively impact the profession.
Discussion Finding Two: The gender imbalance creates a lack of diversity

Permeated throughout this research is the clear indication that the HR profession lacks the diversity offered by a more balanced gender pool. Men and women often think differently and bring different perspectives to the table. Though more diversity may seem obvious, the consequences to a lack of diversity are complex. Based on interview and survey results, there are specific reasons why HR gender diversity is important:

- The inclusion of different ideas and points of view (diversity of thought)
- Different perspectives help the profession perform more strategically
- Diversity brings more credibility
- HR will set the example within its own profession
- HR should look like the community or client base it serves, and have clear objectives to bridge any gaps

Survey analysis shows that the STDEV among the cohort was at its lowest in response to Survey Question Five: The OL/HRD program at Fisher would benefit by a more even gender representation. Some of the qualitative comments seemed directed more towards the workplace, and were similar to the responses from the convenience interviews. Respondents felt the benefits to diversity included:

- A different dynamic offered by a male perspective
- More professional credibility

One cohort member expressed the benefit to gender diversity toward a more open and honest environment. This statement was similar in nature to statements found in the literature research (Wilcox, 2007). This is not necessarily a sexist opinion, as it implies
one of the fundamental aspects of diversity: inclusive and diverse environments open the door to honest dialogue

Ironically, the STDEV was higher and the consensus split in response to Survey Question Four: *The profession would benefit from a more even gender representation.* This seems to indicate that though many participants acknowledged the benefits of diversity in a classroom context, the idea that the HR profession implement a self-imposed diversity effort within the profession, was less popular.

**Discussion of Finding Three: There is a glass ceiling in HR due to unfair perceptions and stereotypes**

This discussion is related to the high percentage of men in the senior level positions of HR. Both the interview and survey analysis indicate an almost overwhelming agreement that a glass ceiling exists. More to the point, most attributed the creation and maintenance of the glass ceiling to men in positions of authority and control. Based on data this researcher compiled, from both men and women, there is substantial opinion and support that the glass ceiling exists.

However, the exact reasons for the glass ceiling vary, which in turn offers insight into the complexity and contradictory elements related to the gender imbalance. That is, the glass ceiling also suggests some dysfunctional qualities of the profession. Though HR offers unique opportunities for women, particularly at the senior level, the low percentage of women in these positions- relative to the high percentage of women within the entire profession- should be questioned. The same degree of questioning should hold true for the low percentages the men.
Though unique in some ways, HR appears to have fallen victim to the typical gender constraints and stereotypes experienced by other professions. Research (Schramm, 2007; Pomeroy 2007; Anonymous 2003) indicates the following complaints from women in HR:

- A male-dominated profession at the senior and C-suite level (Anonymous, 2003)
- Men having the advantage of mobility (Anonymous, Aug. 1997)
- Male career choices unfettered by the same family obligations as women (Macafee, et al, 2006)
- A shallow pool of mentors for women (Pomeroy, 2007)
- The “old boys network” (Hansen, 2009)

Research (Anonymous, Aug. 1997) indicates some clear reasons why the internal imbalance within HR exists. Men typically follow a different career path into HR, which may include more technical experience including line management or operations management. If senior executives and CEOs look for line operations experience to fill executive positions, this may prevent mobility. However, there is also indication that men in these positions may tend to hire based on candidates that “look like me”, or a biased male-orientated hierarchy structure, rather than a candidate’s qualifications.

To some extent both women and men are also victims of the professional history preceding them. Ironically, HR began as a more administrative function that was not necessarily a “caring” or values-orientated profession. According to this researcher’s findings, the profession morphed into a more “caring” profession mostly supported by civil rights legislation. As the profession became more complex and geared toward
employer compliance, men moved up the ranks and the administrative duties were maintained by women. More recently the pendulum has swung back, to some degree, to a “harder” profession in an attempt to become more strategic and deliver measurable results. Therefore, history and the carry-over notion that employees still view HR as the “heart” and emotional conduit of the organization, play a role in the way men at the top perceive female influence. The notion that women are too emotional plays into the belief that they are incapable or uncomfortable with financial measures, strategic development, or bottom-line business acumen. Research (Ulrich et al, 2008) indicates that though women may react and think differently than men, and may even possess different levels of competency; there is no evidence that these differences are striking enough to the degree they impact the business (2008). To the contrary, the HR competency study by Ulrich et al (2007) indicates higher levels of competency among women in the role of credible activist and culture change agent. Other more specific HR related competencies were close to the same for both genders.

Discussion Finding Four: Recruitment of more men into HR should be pursued

Recruitment of more men into the OL/HRD masters program was positively received by 50% of the Cohort Survey respondents. An equal percentage also agreed that professional associations should create action plans to address the gender imbalance within the profession. However, an equal number of cohort respondents were either neutral or disagreed with any recruitment efforts.

The qualitative data from the Cohort Survey revealed that though more male recruits would increase diversity, college recruitment would be acceptable only if entry qualifications remained gender-neutral. Survey respondents also raised concern that
action plans by HR professional organizations to address the imbalance might cause reverse discrimination problems by encouraging a preference towards men. Others expressed concern that the current situation needs to be addressed to help remove bias which labels HR as a “woman’s job”. As the qualitative data shows, some cohort respondents took a more neutral approach by suggesting that professional organizations should only raise awareness, but create no specific action plans to address the imbalance.

The interview respondents represent six professionals actively working in the HR profession. Not all agreed with actively recruiting more men into HR. However the majority expressed benefits to active recruitment particularly if such recruitment populated the HR department to better reflect the client or customer base served by the organization. In this particular case, one HR professional expressed the need for Affirmative Action planning to bridge the gap. Others shared best-practices implemented by their own organizations to recruit qualified male HR professionals. They emphasized that qualified male candidates exist but organizations need to make a conscious effort to find them, particularly if it reflects their client or customer base.

One of the advantages to recruitment is an opportunity to educate men about the profession and the requirements related to business competency. Recruitment and education at the high school level and through college internships offer the opportunity to develop qualifications early on, thus eliminating the exacerbating negative practice of hiring based on gender and not qualifications. These recruitment practices are no different than those conducted by many organizations like Eastman Kodak in the late 1970’s and 1980’s when there were aggressive recruitment efforts for minority candidates in technical fields. This approach has also served to bring more women into
fields that have been traditionally occupied by a majority of men. For years, HR departments worked in tandem with their organizations to implement these recruitment efforts, yet this research shows these best-practices were never implemented to any exacting degree within the HR profession itself.

Conclusions and Final Recommendations

*Diversity*

The issue of diversity is a recurring theme in the qualitative analysis. The diversity of ideas offered by both genders is a strong asset. Diversity is an important factor in the success of HR so long as the participants have the fundamental competencies to do the job and contribute to business success. Based on research data, the recommendation is that the HR profession could use a serious shot of diversity on all fronts; not only at the executive levels but also in the trenches. Though HR has long been in partnership with organizations to implement diversity and inclusion, the concept seems to have been lost when applied to HR - as if there was some double-standard geared only at the organization HR supports. As this research has revealed, the reasons for the gender imbalances in HR are complex. However, more awareness and dialogue needs to be encouraged by both HR professional organizations and organizational leaders.

As some have commented as part of this research, diversity includes the balancing of HR in an organization to reflect the population that it serves. As a recommendation, this approach serves to offer a diverse representation to a diverse employee base, and it also serves to encourage cultural competency within the organization. This is a positive impact on the customer.
Operational Experience and Credibility

There is debate as to whether the glass ceiling applies as strongly today as it did several years ago. As one interview participant noted, companies have used the HR position intentionally to represent both female and minority participation at the Senior Staff level. However, this does not necessarily negate the fact that the ratio of women to men at the senior level is low in comparison to the overall ratio in the profession.

However, another important point regarding the glass ceiling, though more subtle, requires consideration. As research suggests, roles in benefits and compensation have been the pathway for many women into the senior levels of the profession. Yet many lack the line management experience that men- including CEO’s- might consider necessary career experience. This may arguably be looked upon as a lack of experience and a credibility issue. In this respect the term glass ceiling might be a misnomer; career prejudice might be a more accurate description. In the eyes of those in a position of influence, line management experience might be a fundamental requirement, meeting the necessary competencies for both credibility and experience. It is also fair to acknowledge that the definition of line management has more recently included functions associated with finance, HR, and, risk management.

Emotional Intelligence

There is evidence to suggest that when it comes to emotional intelligence (EI) or the ability to understand, reason, and express emotion, men and women are”socialized to express emotion and empathy in difference ways” (Walker, 2009). In terms of gender difference, women seem to be more in tune and display more sensitivity with
interpersonal situations. Research also suggests that women seek out more social support and emotion-focused coping techniques, whereas men rely more on problem-focused coping (2009).

Based on research literature done in the military, women officers who represent a small percentage of military leadership compared to men, use a unique leadership approach that calls for aspects of femininity, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and teamwork (Walker, 2010). This research seems similar to observations made by several HR professionals and the perception of HR as a role requiring a feminine approach, or at least the ability to assimilate emotions at a high level.

*Competencies*

Competencies for HR professionals are not a new concept. Since 1988 David Ulrich and his associates (Ulrich et al., 2008) at the University of Michigan have been seeking to learn about the skills and expertise needed to define the future HR professional. Put differently the question might be: “What does it take to make it big in HR?” (Grossman, 2007, p.1) Ulrich was ahead of the pack when he determined that HR professionals, who may have been successful 10 years ago, may not be as successful in the future. Being “at the table” is one thing; being able to fully contribute once you get there is a totally different scenario, requiring a new set of competencies to succeed. Digging deeper into the competency study by Ulrich (2008) the suggestion is that there is a link between gender—both male and female—and the degree to which these competencies are effective. (Grossman, 2007).

Within the context of this research paper, further research into Ulrich’s study, might shed some light on why women have succeeded in and have been drawn to the HR
profession. Outside of the gender-role play, and the stereotypical barriers already discussed, Ulrich’s study also offers some indication as to why men have overpopulated the higher ranks of HR.

Ulrich does not provide the final answer as to the imbalance. However, it is important to include his study in the exploration of possibilities and opinions. Regarding competencies, perhaps the best recommendation comes from Ulrich himself, who encourages HR professionals to review and inquire about their own competency level with their business leaders, their HR Team, and especially through self-evaluation. As Ulrich’s recommends, “Then ask yourself whether you really know the business or if you’re glossing on the surface” (Grossman, 2007, p.4). This question posed by Ulrich is not gender specific. It requires the fierce conversations, personal reflection, dialogue with those who mentor, and inquiring with critical business leaders who set the vision and lead the strategic initiatives.
References


Anonymous, (1997, August). For men and women, it’s a good time to be in HR. *HR Magazine*. 42, 76-78


http://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/c-suite.asp


Survey Monkey http://www.surveymonkey.com/MySurveys.aspx


APPENDIX A

Quantitative Survey Data Cohorts 12 and 13

Figure 4-1

A recent 2009 article shows that on average, women represent 75% of all HR positions. This high number harms the profession.

Question 1  N=28

- Strongly Agree: 7.1%
- Agree: 25.0%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree: 28.6%
- Disagree: 28.5%
- Strongly Disagree: 10.7%

Figure 4-2

St John Fisher should actively recruit more men in the OL/HRD program - Question 2  N=28

- Strongly Agree: 7.1%
- Agree: 50.0%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree: 35.8%
- Disagree: 7.1%
- Strongly Disagree: 0.0%
Figure 4-3

Our current Cohort represents the diversity of the HR profession
- Question 3  N=28

Strongly Agree  Agree  Neither Agree nor Disagree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

3.5%  46.4%  28.6%  17.9%  3.5%

Figure 4-4

It would be good for the HR profession if it were more evenly represented across genders. - Question 4  N=28

Strongly Agree  Agree  Neither Agree nor Disagree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

3.5%  51.4%  35.7%  0.0%  3.5%
Figure 4-5

The OL/HRD program would benefit if it were more evenly represented across genders. - Question 5  N=28

- Strongly Agree: 7.1%
- Agree: 53.5%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree: 28.5%
- Disagree: 7.1%
- Strongly Disagree: 3.5%

Figure 4-6

The HR professional associations should develop and implement specific action plans to address the gender imbalance. - Question 6  N=28

- Strongly Agree: 7.1%
- Agree: 42.9%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree: 42.8%
- Disagree: 7.1%
- Strongly Disagree: 0.0%
Figure 4-7

The organization I work for has a high degree of women in HR roles. - Question 7 N=28

42.8%
32.5%
7.1%
7.1%
10.7%

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Figure 4-8

The success of organizational outcomes through OL/HRD may be impacted by gender. - Question 8 N=28

0.00%
28.50%
42.9%
21.4%
10.7%

Strongly Agree
Agree
Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
Figure 4.9

In ten years what will the gender representation be like in HR? - Question 9  N=28

- 42.90% More skewed
- 39.3% About the same
- 17.9% More even but still more women
- 0.0% Uneven, but with significant strides
- 0.0% About even
## APPENDIX B

**Likert Survey Cohorts 12 & 13**

**Data Table**

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### More Skewed

- Question 9: 0.00% | 42.90% | 39.3% | 17.9% | 0.0%
APPENDIX C

Standard Deviation Chart
### LEGEND 
- **5-Strongly Agree**
- **4-Agree**
- **3-Neither Agree or Disagree**
- **2-Disagree**
- **1-Strongly Disagree**

### APPENDIX C (Page 90) 
**Standard Deviation Chart**

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