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THE
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THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL® AND THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION®

BLACK WOMEN
EXECUTIVES
RESEARCH INITIATIVE

FINDINGS

THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL®

AND

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Black Women Executives
Research Initiative

FINDINGS

THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL®

The Executive Leadership Council™ is an independent, non-profit 501(c) (6) corporation, founded in 1986 to provide African-American executives of Fortune 500 companies with a professional network and forum to offer perspective and direction on excellence in business, economic and public policies for the African American community, their corporations and the community at large.

The Council is a unique, individual membership organization representing a cadre of senior-level corporate men and women who bring unparalleled insight to a variety of issues that affect American business. The Council's membership—400 strong, a third of them women, representing more than 200 Fortune 500 corporations—brings a new level of visibility to their corporations and especially to their leadership on the issue of workplace diversity.

The goal of The Executive Leadership Council™ is to enhance the professional effectiveness of the membership, the work of member corporations and to ensure business opportunities for future generations of aspiring African-American corporate executives and entrepreneurs.

THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION®

The Executive Leadership Foundation™, a 501(c) (3) organization, was established in 1989 as an affiliate of The Executive Leadership Council™ to promote and implement charitable and educational activities designed by the membership of The Council. The goal of The Foundation is to leverage Council expertise and resources in a manner that makes a powerful impact on business, social and economic policy and the quality of life in ELC member communities.

To accomplish this goal, The Foundation focuses its attention on programs that promote education and leadership opportunities for future generations of African-American corporate executives, as well as economic empowerment for African-American-owned businesses. Foundation programs also focus on socioeconomic and business policy research. A key component of The Foundation's efforts is the recognition of achievement by or on behalf of African-Americans in business.

INSTITUTE
FOR LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT
& RESEARCH

The Institute for Leadership Development & Research (Institute) strives to be the preeminent institution for research and development of African-Americans in the corporate world: we pursue understanding and growth in the context of truth and excellence. The Institute provides executive-level seminars, peer mentoring, coaching, networking with top corporate executives, and leadership development training. The culmination of our mission is to help high-potential African-American business leaders achieve stellar performance and recognition. Additionally, the Institute offers cutting-edge research in the interest of more fully understanding the experience of African-American executives and managers.

The Institute for Leadership Development & Research distinguishing features:

- A programmatic focus on the unique leadership needs and strengths of African American leaders;

- A distinctive coaching initiative for African-American leaders and other managers who may be culturally or socially different from the success model of their organizations;

- Teams of academics, business management consultants, and executives committed to examining and facilitating inclusive business leadership;

- Participant access to The Executive Leadership Council network of senior African-American corporate executives, pro diversity CEOs, scholars and business leaders;

- Research that identifies and benchmarks diversity issues affecting leadership;

- Metric systems that can help organizations assess their inclusion gaps and progress;

- Publications which include scholarly research, periodicals, books, and articles;

- Curriculum designed, facilitated, and supported primarily by African-Americans for African-American managers.

To make fundamental positive changes in the landscape for African-American executives, the Institute is preparing managers for critical roles in leadership. Simultaneously we are building a body of research and analysis that highlights both need and opportunity for African-Americans to succeed in business. Towards this goal, the Institute is structured around five central components: Coaching, History, Programs, Publications, and Research.

Message from Carl Brooks, President & CEO of The Executive Leadership Council®
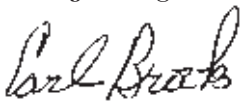

The Executive Leadership Council® is proud to present the release of *Black Women Executives Research Initiative.* This first of its kind research from our Institute for Leadership Development & Research presents a powerful tool in analyzing the great strides and many challenges facing African American women executives in the corporate world.

African-American Women Executives are a rising force in corporate America and have long been positioning themselves as power brokers. This journey is remarkable when you realize that they did not have a set road or pathway to follow in their early corporate careers. They were true trailblazers in every sense of the word! With nearly one third of our membership made up of African-American females, I am witness to these trailblazers everyday! They handle both their stunning successes and daunting challenges with grace, agility, acumen and attention to detail.

This report represents a critical first step for us as we hope to create a rigorous, reflective and transformative suite of leadership development programs, benchmarking research, and mentoring/coaching initiatives which we hope will assist Black women executives in their journey for self-awareness and self-fulfillment.

We also consider this report a challenge to *all* CEOs, senior executive leaders, and black women executives to examine their own opportunities for enhancing the relationship each has with the others. It is through self-awareness and introspection that real change can occur. It must then be matched with distinct action steps that can put these plans into motion for the benefit of all parties.

As we watch our world change ELC will continue to advocate for the corporate leadership pipeline to remain an inclusive, thriving avenue for all people regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity. We thank our great partners in this endeavor – the Moody's Foundation and the JPMorgan Chase Foundation – for their support on this important initiative.

Carl Brooks, *President & CEO*
The Executive Leadership Council®
The Executive Leadership Foundation®

Message from the Executive Director of The Executive Leadership Council's Institute for Leadership Development & Research

When we chose to do a study on black women executives and the success factors and impediments to their reaching the C-Suite, we did so knowing that the women we were interviewing had achieved great success despite the fact that they had no road map to guide their careers. These were women who found time to be interviewed even though they had extreme schedules and multiple pulls on their attention. These were women who were willing to share their experiences – some painful, some wonderful – so that they and others could better understand the landscape in which they were working. These were women who wanted to be interviewed because they were committed to helping younger women who are just now building their own careers.

Further, we had more than 50 others, CEOs and peers of the black women, who also stopped their hectic schedules to help us understand their view of the experiences that black women executives were having. These interviewees put themselves on the line and shared information that would force them to examine their own views even as it pushed black women to do the same. It is through this kind of partnership, this willingness to honestly share and question our perceptions that we all grow.

Because of people's gift of openly discussing what has often been undiscussable, we are better able to demarcate the path to the C-Suite for black women. We believe that both the women and the organizations will be the better for it.

Thank you to all of the interviewees who gave us this chance to not only help ourselves, but also to help those who follow.

Sincerely,

Ancella B. Livers, Ph.D., *Executive Director*
Institute for Leadership Development & Research
The Executive Leadership Council®

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This research report represents a year-long study on success factors and impediments for black women executives as they aspire to the most senior positions in corporate America and includes interviews with 76 black women executives, 18 CEOs, and 38 peers. The report was commissioned by The Executive Leadership Council and The Executive Leadership Foundation and conducted by Springboard—Partners in Cross Cultural Leadership.

K E Y   F I N D I N G S :

Relationships with Senior Executives Need More Work:

Black women executives suffer from the lack of comfortable, trusted, and strategic relationships at the senior level with those who are most different from themselves, most notably white males.

Aspiration Is About Really Wanting It:

Every aspiring executive must ask: "Do I really want to do what it takes to compete for the top slot?" If the answer for a black woman executive is "yes," she must have a plan to get there and put that plan into action at each step of the way.

Feedback Is Alive and Not Well:

Networks for black women executives do not provide enough strategic feedback about how they are doing and how best to advance.

Experiences That Lead to the C-Suite Are Not Visible Enough:

CEOs are often unaware of the breadth of skills and experience of black women executives. At the same time, the bar is higher for all C-Suite candidates.

Alignment of Values Is Highly Correlated To C-Suite Success:

The most successful black women executives are aligned with the values and culture of their companies. Having passion for the company's mission allows black women executives to draw on their full capability and gain greater career momentum than would otherwise occur.

Work Life Balance Means Getting Your House In Order:

Mastering the personal dimension, and particularly being proactive about managing the integration of work and life, increases the ability of black women executives to compete at the highest levels.

Bias and Other Negative Factors Can Be Trumped:

Black women executives demonstrate daily through their own performance, political acumen and personal attributes their ability to overcome bias and other negative factors that are not within their direct control.

A New Leadership Model Emerges:

The interview data clearly defined a new leadership framework for black women executives based on critical success factors for rising to senior levels in their organizations. The framework provides the foundation for a leadership assessment that black women at all levels can use.

While a primary focus of the research was on what black women executives can do to be most successful, there is recognition from CEOs and other executives that they and organizations can do much more to be supportive. Implications for organizations resulting from this research are summarized on p. 22.

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PREVIEW: What's Inside This Report

This report reveals a meaningful disconnect between the views of black women executives and CEOs. The perception of black women executives about their progress on factors such as quality of their relationships and networks, the availability of feedback and their openness to feedback, and the all-important skills and experience metrics differs from the views of CEOs and peers.

IN INTERVIEWS WITH CEOs...

- **What CEOs said about black women executives and performance.**
  - 'Just say no' to leaving Profit & Loss (P&L) roles too early.
  - Seek big operating roles.
  - Those in staff roles should apply for P&L or significant operating roles.

- **CEOs and peers believe that black women executives fall short on the relationship meter.**
  - Relationships between black women and senior white males need to improve; more trust and comfort is necessary to enable black women executives to have better relationships with senior white males.

- Black women spend too little time developing strategic relationships.
- CEOs recommend that black women be the first to forge stronger relationships with white male executives.

- **CEOs and peers highlighted factors they believe would propel black women if they aspire to higher levels.**
  - Increased risk-taking, more visibility, and optionality (making yourself valuable in and out of the company).

INTERVIEWS WITH BLACK WOMEN EXECUTIVES

- **Black women executives have mixed views about their relationships with white males and other executives.**
  - Black women are generally positive about the quality of their relationships with senior white males.
  - Many black women have enjoyed strong mentoring relationships; fewer have experienced meaningful sponsorship relationships and sustained advocacy.
  - Black women's networks are not providing enough strategic feedback about how they are doing or how best to advance.
  - Black male executives have played important roles in translating between black women and white males.

- **For those black women in closest proximity to the C-Suite, alignment of values with the business goals and objectives of their company appears to be a crucial factor in their success.**

- Passion for the business and the company matter.
- Non-alignment leads to lower retention rates, even at senior levels.

- **The most successful black women executives are effective at managing the integration of work and life.**
  - Black women who aspire to the C-Suite clear the decks on work life balance issues.
  - Contrary to perceptions, 'off-ramps' and 'on-ramps' have been an important tool for aspiring black women.

- **Virtually every black woman interviewed talked about bias (race and gender) stereotypes and about being token executives—factors over which they have little or no apparent control.**
  - Black women executives neutralize bias and other 'no-control' factors with performance, political skill, and personal elements such as resilience and self-awareness.
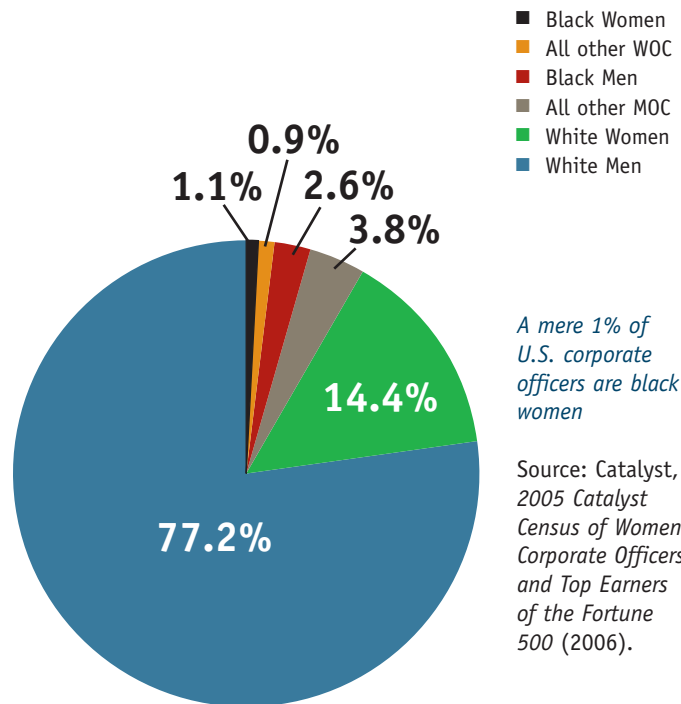
INTRODUCTION

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

The representation of women at senior levels in corporate America is grim. However, the condition of black women* is far more alarming, suggesting that the experience of black women in corporate America merits specific focus. A sense of urgency was made very clear in a week-long report on NBC Nightly News.[1] In spite of the fact that black women are graduating from college and graduate school at unprecedented rates and are joining the ranks of U.S. companies in equally impressive numbers, they are not moving into the senior positions at the levels one would expect from such a robust pipeline of talent. Instead, because both their race and gender are beyond the norm in corporate America, black women like other women of color, face the burden of being "double outsiders." Consequently, they cope with barriers to advancement at senior levels that are not well understood and are thus more easily overlooked. In fact, black women have long noted that their credibility and competence is constantly questioned. Additionally, they point to their lack of influential sponsors and mentors as additional evidence of their marginalization.[2]

While their outsider status has clear implications for black women, they hold only 1% of corporate officer positions at Fortune 500 companies[3], the repercussions are also clear for corporations. The lack of black women executives can hinder retention of younger, talented women, particularly black women. Beyond that, organizations with few or no senior black women limit their access to talented leadership. In a rapidly changing demographic and business environment, black women have skills desperately needed by major organizations. The life experiences of many black women, for example, have prepared them to effectively maneuver through multiple social and cultural environments. In an increasingly multicultural world, this ability is invaluable. Because of their diverse backgrounds and experiences, black women tend to champion new viewpoints to companies mired in status quo thinking. Hence, their inclusion in the workforce, particularly at the most senior levels, can help heighten the chance for broader and more innovative approaches throughout the organization. Further, black women have the highest workforce participation rate of all U.S. women and have

2005 U.S. Corporate Officers

- ■ Black Women
- ■ All other WOC
- ■ Black Men
- ■ All other MOC
- ■ White Women
- ■ White Men

0.9%
1.1%
2.6%
3.8%
14.4%
77.2%

A mere 1% of U.S. corporate officers are black women

Source: Catalyst, *2005 Catalyst Census of Women Corporate Officers and Top Earners of the Fortune 500* (2006).

*Note: The authors of this report use the term "black woman" rather than "African-American woman" to be inclusive of those women of African descent who do not identify with the term African-American, however, the report retains "African American" when quoting an interviewee or other source data.

[1] NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams, "African American Women: Where They Stand," November 26-30, 2007.

[2] Jessica Faye Carter, *Double Outsiders: How Women of Color Can Succeed in Corporate America*, (Indianapolis: JIST Works. 2007), 6; Ancella Livers, "Black Women in Management," in Gender, Race, and *Ethnicity in the Workplace*, ed. Margaret F. Karsten, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 205-221; Catalyst, *Advancing African-American Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know*, (New York: Catalyst, 2004).

[3] Catalyst, *2005 Catalyst Census of Women Corporate Officers and Top Earners of the Fortune 500*, (New York: Catalyst, 2006).

significant purchasing power in their communities.[4] Such data suggest that the C-Suite and corporate America in general could benefit from increasing the number of black women executives in their ranks. This report is to help provide a greater understanding of what is impeding this undertaking. Because there is very little research focused on black women and their advancement opportunities at senior levels, it is difficult to draw conclusions and develop action plans.

The Executive Leadership Council, whose members are black corporate executives within three levels of their CEO, is uniquely positioned to undertake this important research, which will lead to the development of strategies and interventions for black women executives and their companies.

WHAT DOES C-SUITE MEAN AND WHY IS THE RESEARCH FOCUSED ON THIS LEVEL?

Chief officers of a business organization who rank in nearly equal authority in their respective positions comprise the group known as the C-Suite. These officers include chief financial officer, general counsel, chief information officer, chief risk officer, chief marketing officer, and chief or corporate human resources officer.

Chief executive officer, president, and chief operating officer are the highest ranking of the group. Not every C-Suite office leads to the CEO position; however, this research is oriented towards those C-Suite members who would be selected for the executive or operating committee or its equivalent of the company, and as a result would have the breadth of knowledge to make contributions to the overall strategy of the company.

This research focused on C-Suite because there is no playbook for black women executives to help them attain C-Suite positions, although there are a number of black women executives (BWEs) who are viable candidates for advancement to more senior levels.

Finally, this research will serve as a useful guide for all black women in corporations and other organizations who desire greater career success at all levels.

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[4]Ella L. J. Edmonson Bell and Stella Nkomo, *Our Separate Ways: Black and White Women and the Struggle for Professional Identity*, (Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 2001), 175-176; The Hunter Miller Group, Inc. Marketing Snapshot, "The Power of the African-American Female Consumer, Update #3, Issue 39, (Nov. 2005). *http://www.huntermillergroup.com/MarketSnapshots/Issue-39-The-Power-of-the-African-American-Female.html*.

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DETAILED FINDINGS: Relationships

BWE RELATIONSHIPS WITH WHITE MALE EXECUTIVES NEED TO IMPROVE

Despite a decade or more of focus on network building, BWEs still suffer from the lack of comfortable, trusted, and strategic relationships in and near the C-Suite with those who are most different from themselves, most notably white males. 'Relationships and networking' was the single most frequently discussed topic by all interviewees, BWEs, CEOs, and peers alike. However, the big disconnect is that more than 90% of BWEs viewed relationships and networking as a success factor, whereas CEOs and peers viewed it as a significant impediment for black women executives.

> *"White men and black women in the organizations I've worked in have not really formed close enough relationships to understand each other." (CEO)*

> *"Black women tend to form more support networks than strategic networks." (Peer)*

> *"Black women collaborate well among themselves, but have difficulty coming into an environment with white men." (CEO)*

One BWE explains why relationships (generally with white males) may not be as successful as more than 90% of BWEs interviewed believe they are:

> *"The more senior you get, the more the illusion of knowing someone because they've been here a long time... I don't think we can get over the 'comfort factor' because I'm not like them... They are naturally going to be more comfortable with someone who really is just like them. Then think of the stretch for women of color..." (BWE)*

Relationship building is clearly a two-way street. Both parties share the responsibility. Overcoming the degrees of difference is challenging.

- **White men do not make it easier when their discomfort level is heightened due to race and gender factors. One BWE reported that some men in her business won't even have lunch or dinner with women, let alone black women.**

- **Yet, Springboard's informal survey of 60 senior white male executives supports a different viewpoint. The chart suggests that white males network with a variety of people, though there is room for improvement.***

White Male Executives' Business Dinner Partners
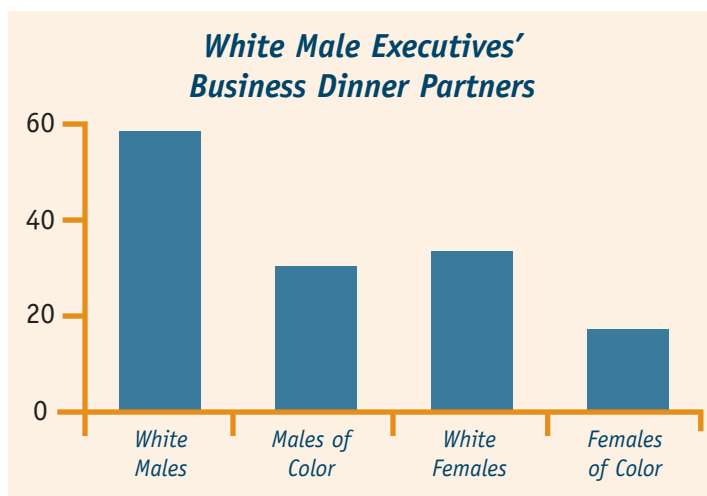
*Note: Springboard conducted a survey in September 2007 of white males executives to learn about their networking activities.

CEO Advice: BWEs Should Make The First Move

"White men don't have a frame of reference. Most of them don't know any black women in this setting. Black women need to be aware of this and work on it. And it is up to them to take the lead on working on this. The burden is on black women to figure it out."

Use Cross Cultural Competence Tools

"A big piece of the work... is how to authentically work particularly with white males and white females in corporate America. Discover areas of relatedness and common interests; build a personal relationship from shared experience." (BWEs)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CEOs and peers agreed that BWEs must take the first step in developing relationships rather than wait for senior white male executives to figure out how to build comfortable, trusted, and strategic connections with them.

Preparation and conducting due diligence on an individual or group can be important tools in taking the first step toward building relationships.

"Black men and women don't do enough research. [However] if you start looking at factors that make a black woman successful, [ideally] it would be that they are analytical, they do their research and they study people." (Peer)

2. Rather than viewing relationships from the historical race and gender lens, successful BWEs must continue to use cross-cultural competence tools: (a) finding areas of commonality, (b) being willing to acknowledge differences, both of which require self-awareness and authenticity.

"... you start to expand the discussion into not just the [quick easily managed] issues that you came to discuss, but you expand it where you get to know the whole person and they have a chance to know you, but you also start to build a relationship with an individual." (BWE)

3. BWEs should build on successful relationships with black males as a model for relationships with white male executives.

Often, but not always, a key relationship for a black woman inside the organization is with a black male. Black male executives have, for example, been helpful to BWEs with no role model at the top.

"My mentor, a senior African-American male, is one of my success factors. My dreams were not anywhere near what they could have been, and I think that's why mentors have been so powerful in my life, because in some ways I feel they saw it first. They dreamed for me; they put ideas in my head." (BWE)

Black male executives also have been important in translating between BWEs and white male executives. BWEs should use their successful relationships with black males to gain insight into ways they might overcome barriers to better relationships with white males. Connecting with black males can be a helpful way to get good ideas about ways to solve race and gender differences.

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DETAILED FINDINGS: Aspiration

DO YOU WANT IT? IF SO, YOU HAVE TO HAVE A PLAN AND ACTIVATE CAREER GOALS TO GET THERE

Before goal setting or career planning, getting clear on your aspirations is a critical first step. CEOs, peers, and BWEs discussed aspiration as an important factor underlying career success. That many BWEs achieved a certain level of success with little career planning is clear from the interviews:

> *"I never had a long-term 'this is where I want to go in the company' kind of plan … I think I've gotten dinged for not doing it." (BWE)*

> *"My strategy is to do well and see what happens." (BWE)*

CEOs and peers did not suggest that BWEs need to know from day one that they want the C-Suite. But the connection between aspiration and planning is key for BWEs who might otherwise miss the steps a majority male would take because she never knew she could get there. There is a greater urgency if BWEs want to influence their chances of getting to the C-Suite. **Waiting to be tapped is simply not good enough.**

> *"What's clear is that you don't stumble your way to the top. You can get a lot of things on the way that you didn't know you wanted, but you are not going to trip over any of the CEO slots… you'd have to be activating against it." (BWE)*

As would be expected, for those BWEs closest to the C-Suite, aspiration is a factor that has been a positive contributor to success. A periodic assessment of one's aspirations and the self-awareness that is required can be a guidepost for BWEs.

> *"I could stay and be relatively comfortable, but it could end my dream of being a [C-Suite member]. I decided I would rather change trains than change destinations. I wasn't going to accept their assessment that I could only be number two." (BWE)*

RECOMMENDATIONS:

If BWEs can balance between the job at hand and long-term planning, they can take advantage of the following CEO/peer recommendations, which individually and together can leverage career aspiration:

- **RISK-TAKING** – "The notion of stepping sideways and seeing the door close behind you is a risk [BWEs] are not comfortable with. For successful people, it's the breadth of experience they are looking for..." (CEO)

- **CREATE OPTIONALITY** – "What is the next level in or out of the company that will give me 'degrees of freedom'? People need to know that they have options, and this requires getting experiences that will make [them] valuable inside and outside the company... People need to know [they] have options." (CEO)

- **VISIBILITY** – "'I'm the best choice for this job, and I'm probably not on your radar screen.' Black women have to put themselves in a position where they can [be visible] and where they feel comfortable doing it." (Peer)

A CEO said:
When it comes down to it, do they really want it? ...You really have to get in touch with what it is you want. And once you understand that, you focus on what it is going to take to get there.

Career Activation is:
Setting your career plan in motion by 1) prioritizing the experiences that you need and want, and 2) creating opportunities for significant growth.

DETAILED FINDINGS: Feedback and Coachability

Feedback and coachability are alive but not well for black women executives in corporate America. Black women's networks are not providing enough strategic feedback about how they are doing and how best to advance.

The importance of feedback and the need to learn from that feedback are well documented. The lack of feedback and poor coachability are impediments to advancement for BWEs. There is a perception among many black women that much of the feedback they receive is not honest or particularly useful.

> *"We have a person (black female) here who just hasn't been shaped by feedback that would improve her performance. But over here (white male) we have this person who has been shaped by feedback because you (another white male) can talk to him like a son…" (BWE)*

Feedback isn't window dressing; lack of feedback impacts careers in real ways:

> *"I didn't get feedback about why I wasn't considered for the GM role. I was given the feedback that 'this position is not for you' rather than hearing, 'this is what you need to do to become the GM'." (BWE)*

Coachability is also a challenge for BWEs who do not trust the feedback giver:

> *"But black women, especially, don't want to hear it, don't seek it out, because they are so accustomed to getting the negative feedback, especially from white women. So what should they believe? Why should they get their egos battered?" (BWE)*

Since the state of feedback for BWEs is not well in corporate America, BWEs are forced to look at alternatives.

> *"It's important to talk to the right people, women and minorities if need be, to give you the feedback in a way that you will hear it, be receptive to it, and do something about it. We cannot hear feedback from certain people. The first step to coachability is a willingness to hear the feedback" (BWE)*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Find sources of feedback that are effective.**

> *"You really need some trusted sources who are politically astute, who have a pulse on the company." (CEO)*

2. **Organizations need to take on the feedback issue.**

> *"There are thousands of people who are stuck in the environment because managers don't have the capacity; they haven't been trained how to give constructive feedback to people who are culturally different." (Peer)*

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DETAILED FINDINGS: Experiences Leading to the C-Suite

Black women executives have more experiences leading to the C-Suite than commonly believed, but the bar is being raised for all candidates.

The interviews led to defining a dimension called C-Suite Experience which is the combination of skills, knowledge and experiences that allow a BWE to see the entire corporate playing field and become a most valuable player on the management team. A majority of CEOs led off their interviews with perform-ance-related comments, suggesting that hard skills are the greater impediment for BWEs. By contrast, most BWEs do not appear to believe that lack of skills is the problem. Three possible explanations for differences in CEO emphasis and BWE experience include:

1. **CEOs may be justified in their belief that BWEs need more skills and experience.**

2. **CEOs may not be fully aware of BWEs' full range of capabilities.**

3. **Conscious or unconscious bias: CEOs may feel that BWEs (and other women/ minorities) have to be better than others.**

BWEs discussed development opportunities and gaps, contributions as change agents, and commercial instinct. CEOs discussed broad skill sets, diversity of experiences and tough assignments in describing BWEs and C-Suite experience:

> *"We have a lot of women in functional roles. But [they are] not able to cross over. It's a different skill set to be a general manager. Don't make the move from line to staff…" (CEO)*

> *"First and foremost is experience running large organizations, and in the field …" (CEO)*

> *"Diversity of experiences is the most important for the next generation. International experiences are crucial." (CEO)*

CEO said:
One of the biggest problems for black women is that jobs are not commensurate with the title. In other words, the job title is more impressive than the job responsibilities and experience of the person. We really needed women with the experience of having run a line position and/or an entire service area.
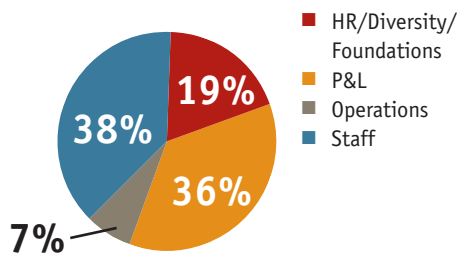
CEO said:
The criteria for women and people of color are stiffer. There is no question but that there is bias based on degrees of difference. The difference from the center [white males] is pretty substantial. First of all, there is a pretty substantial distance and difference between men and women.
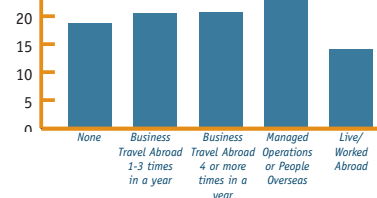
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There appears to be a perception by CEOs and peers that BWEs are largely in staff roles.
There are more BWEs running significant P&Ls and operations than they may be getting credit for.

BWE Interviewees by Function

- HR/Diversity/Foundations
- P&L
- Operations
- Staff

19%
36%
7%
38%

International Exposure of BWEs*

| None | Business Travel Abroad 1-3 times in a year | Business Travel Abroad 4 or more times in a year | Managed Operations or People Overseas | Live/Worked Abroad |

There appears to be a perception that BWEs do not have international experience.
Yet, BWEs have had meaningful global experiences.

Peer advice:
"If there's one piece of advice I can give to women of color, it's take a line job. You don't have to knock the ball out of the park, but do pretty well..."

BWE advice:
"When you're in the C-Suite, everyone who's at the table wears the company hat, not just a functional hat. You're really up at a high enough level where you're representing and should be able to speak to all aspects of the company. They see you as someone who can embrace change and who knows how to look through the windshield and help lead."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The bar is getting higher for every C-Suite candidate. These are among the things BWEs can do more of:

1. **Stay in line positions as long as possible or negotiate for a P&L or operating role.**
   "What was missing was an operating experience. This was a definite developmental gap that could have kept me from the CEO position. When it was clear I was in the running for the position, our COO suggested I assume an operating/P&L role." (CEO)

2. **Apply for international experience in the emerging markets.**
   "Black women have been to Europe. But they haven't spent a lot of time in China, haven't spent a lot of time in India… or Vietnam or some of the other places. And I think they could really excel at doing that. Our ability to appreciate cultural differences is much higher." (Peer)

3. **Expand responsibilities to become a bigger player in the organization.**
   "You need to be dedicated to understanding far more than you need to understand. So I spent time studying parts; I spent time walking up and down the assembly line." (BWE)

4. **Get accomplishments on the radar screen of CEOs and peers to combat misperceptions.**
   "There is an issue whether black women have emphasized whether they have taken on the most challenging assignments, but are not getting the credit for it and not getting the value for it (in the next assignment). You want to anticipate what you want, and what you think is owed to you, and ask for it in advance." (CEO)

*Note: Springboard surveyed 72 BWEs at ELC's Black Women's Economic Forum on June 19, 2007, using Meridia's instant polling technology (The Meridia Survey) and surveyed an additional 32 BWEs during the 2007 interviews (Springboard Survey). The data were aggregated where possible.

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BWEs closest to C-Suite made more positive comments about alignment of values than other BWE interviewees.

Alignment of Values

- Most Likely C-Suite Candidates
- Possible C-Suite Candidates
- Less Likely C-Suite Candidates
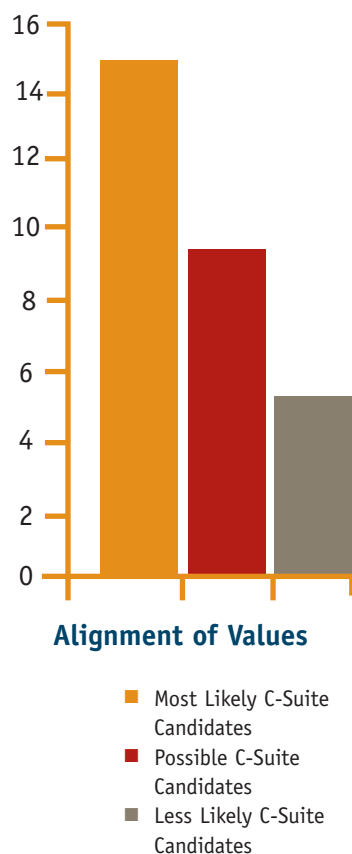
(See p.25 for the methodology of how BWEs were grouped)

DETAILED FINDINGS: Alignment of Values

ALIGNMENT OF VALUES IS HIGHLY CORRELATED TO C-SUITE SUCCESS

For many black women, alignment of values allows them to stay passionate about their work. 'Alignment of values' means full partnership in the strategy, full partnership as a leader with other leaders, and a mutual comfort level between company and BWE.

> *"It's really about understanding the culture of the company and understanding how you fit into that culture." (BWE)*

Alignment of values appears to be a crucial factor for BWEs and an important determinant of success. As a BWE advances to positions that are closer to the C-Suite level, the values and methods of operation of the company become clearer, and the importance of matching those values with personal ones becomes more important.

> *"It is important to fit in with the culture. You have to have passion for the business and fit in with the culture." (BWE)*

On the other hand, BWEs whose values are not well aligned with those of their corporations are not in the best position to contribute to the business objectives of the company. Non-alignment may eventually lead to low retention rates for otherwise highly talented BWEs.

> *"I have tried to align myself with the company's philosophy and goals. I have left companies for non-alignment reasons." (BWE)*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Alignment of values is an important leverage point for BWEs.**
   > *"When I was free to draw on my full capability, personality, and culture, I was much more of a powerful leader… Once you reach a point where you feel comfortable with yourself in that environment and you don't have to conform, that you're confident and on top of your game, then a different momentum takes over as you can operate out of your full set of assets." (Peer)*

2. **Due diligence and honest self-assessment are required.**
   > *"It is so important for us to be judicious about our selection of companies we want to join. There needs to be values alignment, and I would say we need to do homework about what kind of culture they have." (BWE)*

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DETACHED FINDINGS: Work Life Balance

DETAILED FINDINGS: Work Life Balance

A BWE headed for the C-Suite must have her 'house in order': the personal dimension has to work in concert with corporate aspiration.

The personal dimension comprises factors that involve the most individual and personal aspects of one's life. Interview data suggest that lack of mastery of the personal dimension is an impediment to BWE success. Work Life Balance can be defined as achieving personal satisfaction in the career and non-career aspects of one's life. Accordingly, Work Life Balance, in particular, is a factor that has to work for BWEs and not against them.

As one of the most frequently discussed factors from BWEs interviews, it is not surprising that Work Life Balance would elicit strong responses given the primary earner status of many black women[*] and the extreme demands of their corporate responsibilities. Yet, CEOs did not discuss Work Life Balance as an issue for BWEs, which suggests that the challenging nature of Work Life Balance for BWEs was not a pressing concern for the CEOs.

EXTREME JOBS

Extreme jobs include the majority of the following work characteristics: average of 60+ hours/week, work across time zones, frequent travel, insufficient staffing, unpredictability, unrealistic deadlines, 24/7 connectivity expected, and face time culture.[5]

BWE Type of Job

■ Extreme Jobs
■ Non-Extreme Jobs

37%

63%

Meridia Survey and Springboard Survey data
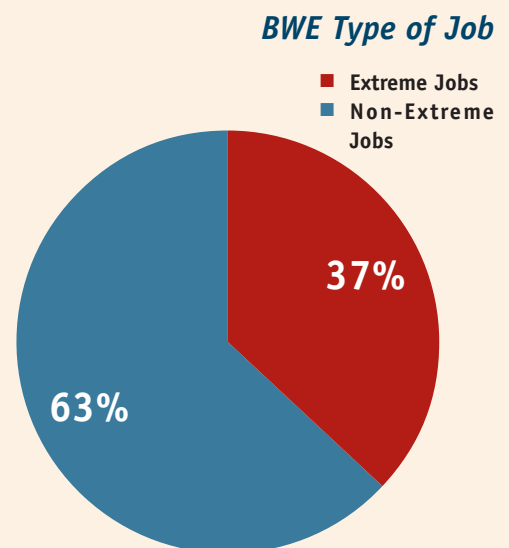
Some BWEs don't aspire to the C-Suite, for work-life reasons.

> *"I don't believe in work life balance; there is no balance. I work on work life integration. I don't want the CEO job because I truly believe it's 24/7." (BWE)*

Some peers believe that work life balance issues often get in the way of BWEs' aspiration.

> *"Many women don't see themselves in the C-level roles because they are over-conflicted about work/family issues. Many have said 'no' to corporate relocations, travel, etc. for family reasons. To be in the C-Suite, you have to put your career ahead of other things." (Peer)*

*Note: In the Meridia Survey which captured data for only a portion of the interviewees, more than 80% of the BWE respondents were the primary earner in their household. Please see note on p. 16.

[5]Sylvia A. Hewlett and Carolyn B. Luce, "Extreme Jobs: the Dangerous Allure of the 70-Hour Workweek," Harvard Business Review, (Dec. 2006)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The most successful BWEs are taking necessary actions to manage their careers, home life and health/fitness issues in an integrated fashion. We call these BWEs 'corporate athletes.'

1. Many BWEs believe that 'taking a time out,' known as 'off-ramps and on-ramps'[6] is not an option for BWEs in managing complicated career, family, and potential health challenges...

"On-ramps and off-ramps are not in the woman of color lexicon. If we are at the senior level, we are for the most part the major breadwinner who doesn't have the luxury to off-ramp." (BWE)

… the data suggest otherwise. More than one-third of 103 BWEs surveyed responded that they had an off-ramp/on-ramp experience sometime during their career (part-time or time off).

2. BWEs at the highest levels appear to be taking pro-active steps in planning for their career ascendancy with respect to managing family.

"My husband recently decided to stay at home. We have two children. That is the only way we're able to manage; we have very active children and we're very specific about how we want to raise the kids, so he stayed at home." (BWE)

"My husband is a stay-at-home dad, which is tough in the black community. But it was a family decision." (BWE)

3. Adding an integral focus on health and fitness to the concept of work life balance is also critically important.

"If you don't find a way to keep it fit, you will definitely not have the stamina to do the things an executive needs to do." (BWE)

Meridia Survey and Springboard Survey data
36% of the BWEs interviewed have taken career off-ramps and on-ramps

BWE off-ramp/on-ramp experience

- Never; I have worked straight through
- Worked part time but work full time now
- Work part time currently
- Took time off and came back full time
- Took time off between jobs

16%
15%
4%
4%
64%

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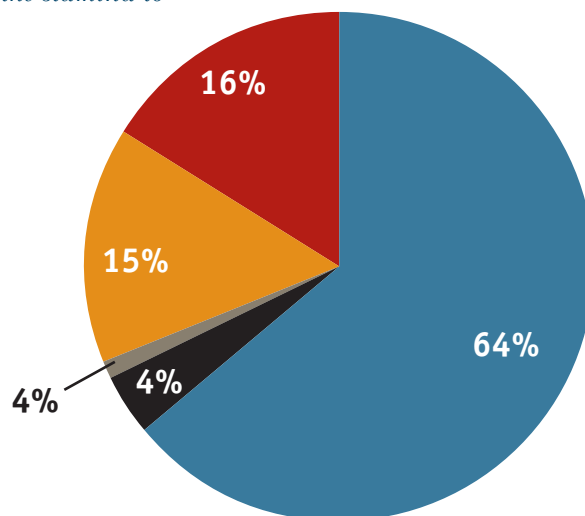
[6]Sylvia A. Hewlett and Carolyn B. Luce," Off- Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success," Harvard Business Review, (March 2005)

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DETAILED FINDINGS: Bias and Other Negative Factors

Peer said:

"Gender is an additional overlay; there is an additional challenge that black women have. Because at least with guys you can find affinity groups, affinity things to do like golf."

BWEs said:

"Younger women don't realize that racism and sexism are still a factor."

"First being black was a hurdle, then female."

ARE BIAS AND OTHER NEGATIVE FACTORS UNDER CONTROL OR OUT OF CONTROL?

The research and interviews indicated that there are factors over which BWEs have little or no control: race and gender bias, stereotypes, tokenism, and the glass ceiling ('No Control' factors). Of these factors, glass ceiling was little discussed in the interviews. That said, BWEs openly acknowledged the challenges that other 'No Control' factors represented in their advancement. They recounted many historical and more current instances of bias that made indelible impressions on them.

> *"The impediments are there; the racism and the sexism are alive and well and flourishing. And I would argue that the issue of multiculturalism has watered down the issues around race in the U.S. so that people have rolled this issue up to multiculturalism and inclusion and we have lost some ground on the whole black-white issue. For example, white women get a pass that I don't get. My struggle is very different from a white female." (BWE)*
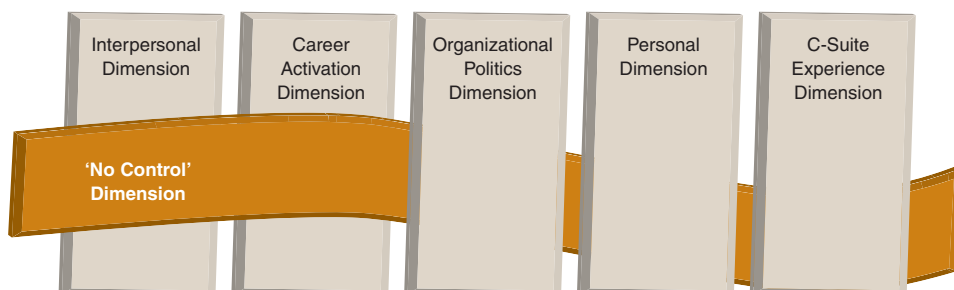
Black male peers also acknowledged the additional challenges for BWEs resulting from race and gender:

> *"There's no denying that the playing field is not totally level for blacks or women. But being black and a woman is even more challenging because first you have to overcome the gender issue and then you have to overcome the race issue… as soon as black women get beyond the race issue, then the gender issue kicks in. And then they're almost inseparable."(Peer)*

None of our interviewees, and no one in the research community, has effectively articulated or measured how the confluence of race and gender operates. Comments of peers above came close, while BWEs often treated the issues somewhat separately emphasizing race followed by gender.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many BWEs have demonstrated that these 'No Control' factors will not deter them from advancing to the C-Suite. BWEs closest to the C-Suite overcome bias and other negative factors through performance, political skill, and personal elements such as self-awareness and resilience.

| Interpersonal Dimension | Career Activation Dimension | Organizational Politics Dimension | Personal Dimension | C-Suite Experience Dimension |

'No Control' Dimension

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A NEW LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK:
Understanding What It Takes To Advance to The C-Suite

INTERPERSONAL	CAREER ACTIVATION	ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS	PERSONAL	C-SUITE EXPERIENCE
			Alignment of Values	
			Competitiveness	
			Resilience	
	Optionality		Confidence	
	Contracting/ 'Just say no'		Style/Fit	Commercial Instinct
Cross Cultural Competence	Risk Taking	Influence	Self Awareness	Change Agent
Mentoring/ Sponsorship/ Advocacy	Coachability/ Feedback	Power	Health And Fitness	Developmental Gaps
Relationships/ Networking	Aspiration	Political Skill	Work Life Balance	Developmental Opportunities

Each dimension includes factors identified in the interview process

Self-assessment is a vital tool for BWEs who want to develop, focus on, or improve personal goal-setting in route to the C-Suite. The Leadership Framework can be used as an assessment checklist for black women executives who want to get a sense of their strengths in developmental areas around the kinds of experiences needed for them to advance to the C-Suite. **A key next step** will be to develop a self-assessment and 360° assessment tool from the Leadership Framework and factors. The extensive data from the interviews can be used to develop a series of questions for each success factor. The 360° assessment tool could be used in conjunction with a more formalized coaching program for BWEs.

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Implications for Organizations and CEOs

RELATIONSHIPS

■ CEOs recommend that BWEs make the first move toward building more comfortable relationships and greater trust. If BWEs are willing to take the initiative, CEOs and other senior executives should reciprocate by being open, accessible, and partner-like. Building on the personal side of relationships can lead to greater understanding of a BWE's aspiration, skills, experience, and readiness for greater challenges.

■ Organizations should explore any systemic or cultural impediments to black women that might prohibit them from being able to make the first move in building relationships with white male senior executives.

■ Organizations can jumpstart and deepen the relationship-building between BWEs and other senior executives by taking advantage of executive coaches to facilitate BWE–senior executive discussions that help each side become more familiar with one another, in order to build partner-like trust and a better working relationship.

FEEDBACK FROM STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS

■ Organizations need to take the feedback issues head-on by training managers in the critical skill of delivering honest and useful feedback across differences, including race and gender. There are positive implications for business productivity as well as talent development and retention gained from feedback to BWEs delivered by well-placed, trained and trusted feedback givers.

■ In addition to informal feedback, organizations should encourage 360° feedback as a tool and make use of executive coaching as an acceptable practice for BWEs.

ADDRESSING SPECIFIC BARRIERS FOR BWEs

■ CEOs can sponsor discussions with BWEs to better understand their barriers and impediments. Using risk-taking as an example, understanding why black women might not take the recommended risks (whether lack of safety net, lack of sponsorship, concern about being unduly punished for failure) is vital. Secondly, organizations can help by being more specific about the types of risks that are appropriate to their organization (take P&L responsibilities, take a global assignment) and ensure that the risk-taking is a career move agreed upon by the BWE and the organization.

EXPERIENCES LEADING TO THE C-SUITE

■ CEOs and other senior executives should take all appropriate opportunities to coach BWEs to avoid moving into staff roles too early in their careers and give them clearer lines of sight to the benefits of larger, riskier P&L and operating roles.

■ Organizations can recognize the vital nature of international assignments and consider that BWEs are willing and able to be competitive in the global arena.

ALIGNMENT OF VALUES

■ CEOs and organizations should commit to greater transparency about what is valued by the organization beyond the stated mission and vision. This is particularly important because alignment of values correlates with C-Suite success for BWEs and can be harder to achieve because of race and gender.

■ CEOs and organizations need to better understand how the values of the company and their black women executives intersect. This knowledge can help companies identify tipping points that lead BWEs to prematurely leave their organizations while also helping the company to more fully engage BWEs for their mutual benefit.

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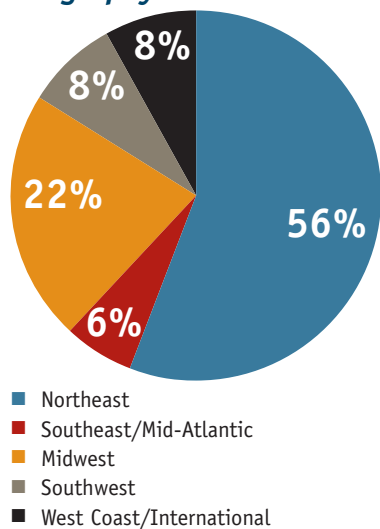# Methodology: Interview Process

STEP 1:

The Springboard research team conducted 60- to 90-minute interviews with 132 senior leaders from June to December 2007. We asked:

- **BWEs:** What has contributed to your success? What are the impediments to advancement to senior levels?

- **CEOs:** What are the impediments to BWEs at the senior level?

- **Peers:** What has contributed to your success? What gets in the way of BWE advancement?
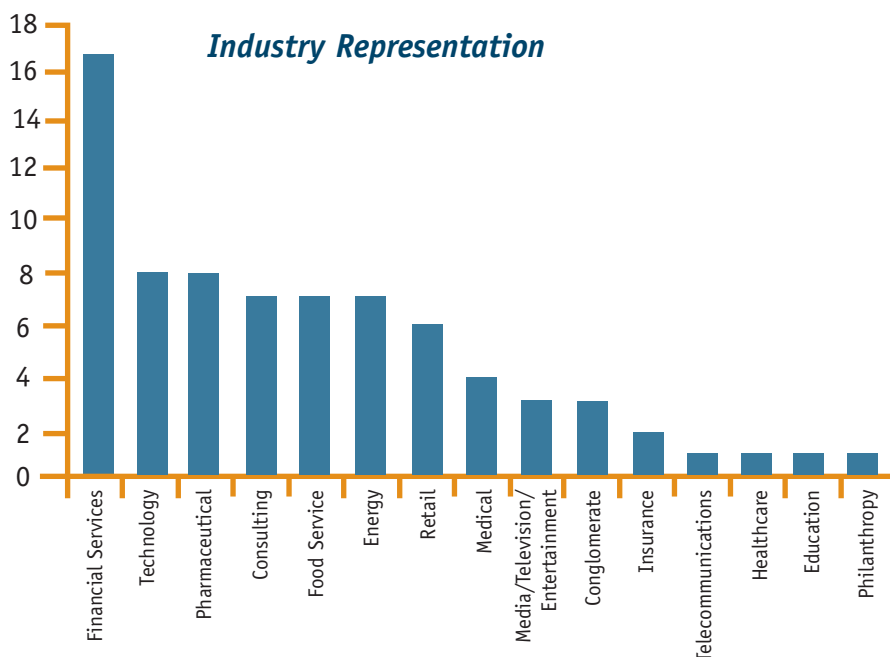
WHO IS INCLUDED IN THE RESEARCH AND HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?
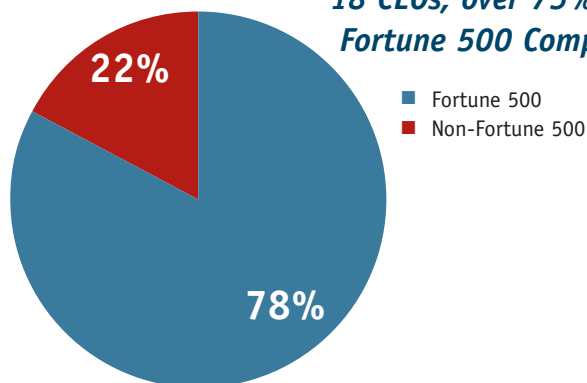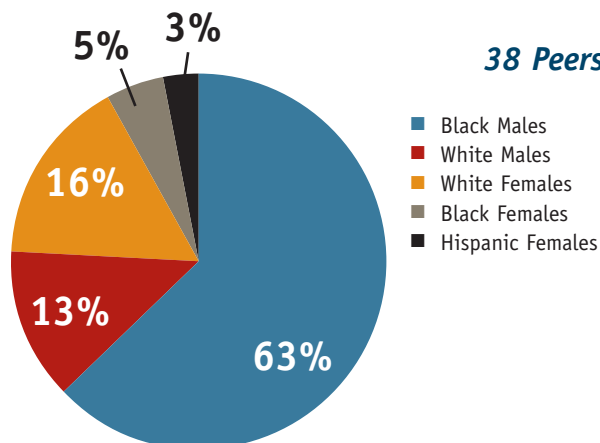
76 BLACK WOMEN EXECUTIVES

Geography

- Northeast — 56%
- Southeast/Mid-Atlantic — 6%
- Midwest — 22%
- Southwest — 8%
- West Coast/International — 8%

Industry Representation

Industries (left to right): Financial Services, Technology, Pharmaceutical, Consulting, Food Service, Energy, Retail, Medical, Media/Television/Entertainment, Conglomerate, Insurance, Telecommunications, Healthcare, Education, Philanthropy

18 CEOs, over 75% from Fortune 500 Companies

- Fortune 500 — 78%
- Non-Fortune 500 — 22%

38 Peers

- Black Males — 63%
- White Males — 13%
- White Females — 16%
- Black Females — 5%
- Hispanic Females — 3%

Methodology: Data Analysis

STEP 2:

The research team identified success factors and impediments from the interviews with BWEs. Data was captured separately for CEOs and peers.

FREQUENCY OF BWE COMMENTS BY FACTOR (SUCCESS OR IMPEDIMENT)
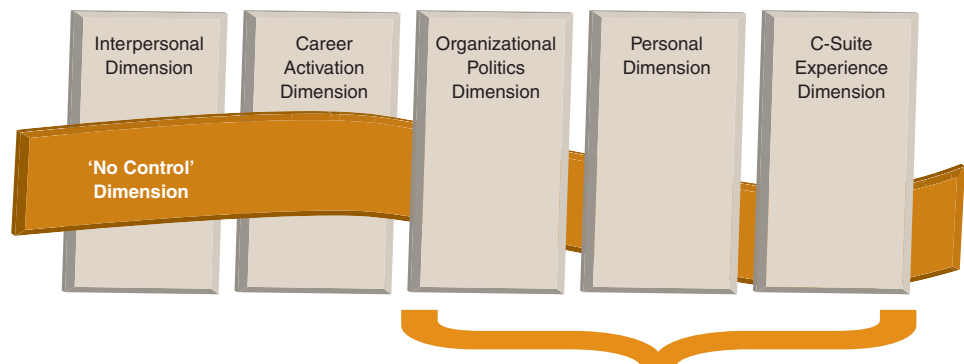
How the Frequency Analysis Works:

The research team pulled verbatim comments from the interview notes and transcripts, combined similar comments in categories (factors), and identified which factors contributed to BWE success and which factors were impediments to the C-Suite.
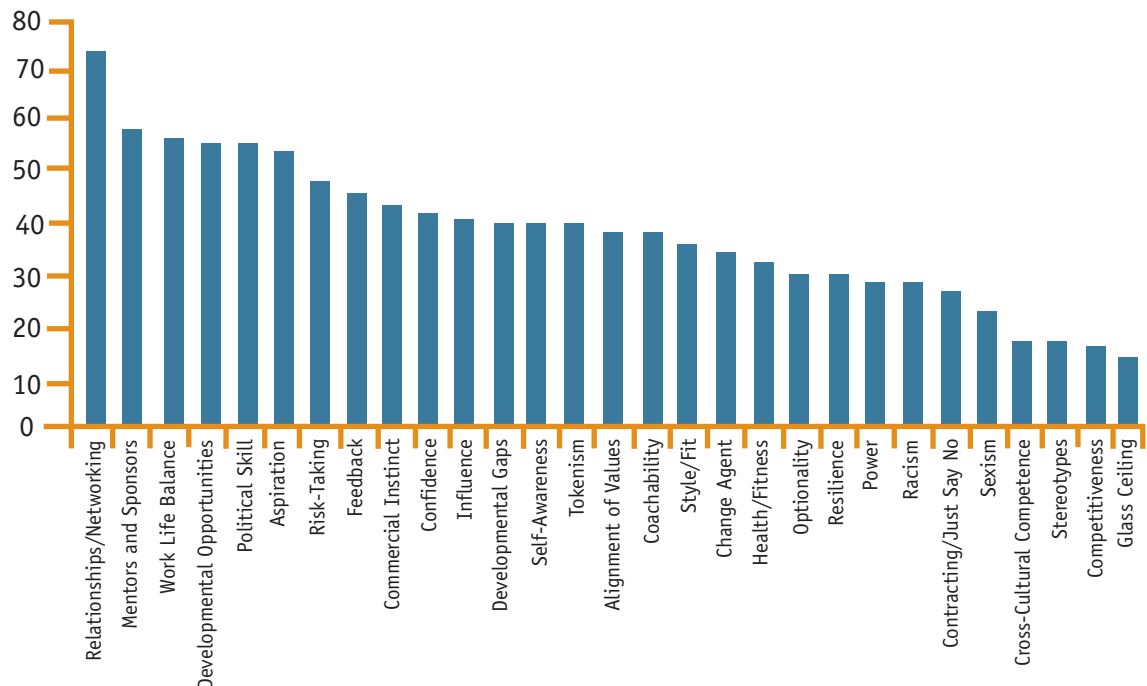
STEP 3:

The ways in which interviewees discussed the factors in the context of their careers allowed the research team to group factors together. This process yielded five "Leadership" Dimensions and a 'No Control' Dimension.

Five 'Leadership' Dimensions and One 'No Control' Dimension

Interpersonal Dimension | Career Activation Dimension | Organizational Politics Dimension | Personal Dimension | C-Suite Experience Dimension

'No Control' Dimension

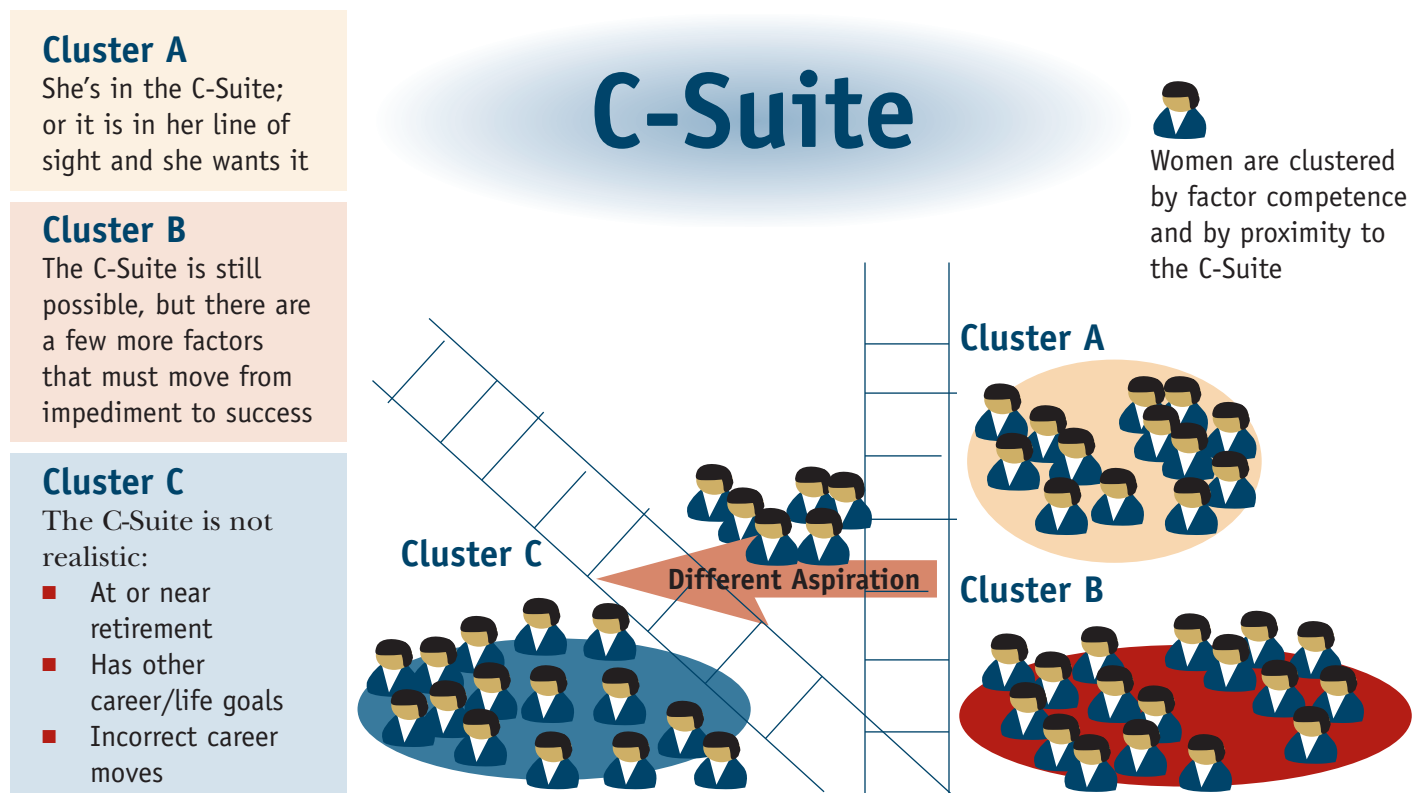**Black women neutralize "No Control" factors**

STEP 4:

Three groupings or clusters of BWEs emerged from the interviews based on:

1. **Their proximity to the C-Suite, according to title, function, and description of responsibilities.**

2. **Self-reporting during the interviews on success factors and impediments.**

3. **Assessment by the Springboard research team.**[*]

The value of clustering the BWEs who were interviewed is that it allowed the research team to determine whether:

- **There is a different prioritization of success factors as BWEs get closer to the C-Suite, and if**

- **BWEs manage 'No Control' factors differently based on C-Suite proximity.**

Cluster A
She's in the C-Suite; or it is in her line of sight and she wants it

Cluster B
The C-Suite is still possible, but there are a few more factors that must move from impediment to success

Cluster C
The C-Suite is not realistic:
- At or near retirement
- Has other career/life goals
- Incorrect career moves

Women are clustered by factor competence and by proximity to the C-Suite

*Note: Springboard directors Pamela Carlton and David Klassen, formerly Managing Directors in the financial services industry, have substantial line experiences and have hired and managed top performing talent.

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About Springboard and the Authors

ABOUT SPRINGBOARD – *PARTNERS IN CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP*

Springboard was founded to address one of the most critical issues facing leaders today: managing effectively across highly diverse teams, organizations, and customer bases. Springboard is an executive and organizational leadership consultant that advises leaders how to expand their personal impact and influence on the organization so that they elicit the full and extraordinary participation of each and every employee in the business—to the satisfaction of employees, themselves, and shareholders. The company develops and delivers leadership assessments, curriculum, executive coaching, and consulting to organizations including American Express, AXA Financial, Constellation Energy, JPMorgan Chase, Macy's, and The International Rescue Committee.

PAMELA G. CARLTON, *President*

Under Pamela's leadership, Springboard co-founded the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement at Spelman College in 2003. A former Managing Director of JPMorgan Chase and a 14-year veteran of Morgan Stanley Investment Banking and Equity Research, she worked for 25 years to model cross-cultural leadership in the investment banking industry. While executing complex financial transactions for numerous global clients and managing highly diverse and global teams across multiple continents, she made major contributions to both firms' leadership and diversity programs. She holds M.B.A. and J.D. degrees from Yale University and a B.A. from Williams College. Pamela has served on the boards of Yale School of Management and Williams College and is on the board of RiverSource Mutual Funds and New York Presbyterian Hospital. She has been featured in *Black Enterprise* magazine and *WomensBiz.US.*

DAVID A. KLASSEN, *Managing Director*

As a Partner at Springboard, David focuses on ethical leadership and executive coaching across cultures. A former Managing Director and Head of Equities at Chase Asset Management, he has been drawn to leadership throughout his successful 19-year Wall Street career, leading teams first at the age of 28. Notably, in the most competitive environments, the teams built and fostered were both diverse and high performing. David has a B.A. from Franklin and Marshall College, a M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary (Psychology and Religion), and is a Chartered Financial Analyst. He also serves on a number of boards, including the UCC Foundation, and recently completed two terms as an elected Trustee in Irvington, NY. He completed the Interaction Associates' coaching program, the Chaplain Residency at Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, NY, and Tavistock Institute's "Leicester" conference on Authority, Leadership and Organization.

Springboard also acknowledges our research team:

- **Marla Baskerville Watkins, M.A., and Ph.D.,** from Tulane University's A.B. Freeman School of Business

- **Morgan I. Craven, B.A.,** Stanford University and Harvard Law School Class of 2011

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COMPANIES AND ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE INTERVIEWS

Alberto Culver
Alcoa Foundation
American Express Company
American International Group
Amylin Pharmaceuticals
AON
Apple Computer
Bank of America
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Mass.
Boston Consulting Group
Capital Guardian Trust Company
Carlson Company (The)
Carpenter Technology Corporation
CEMEX
Citigroup
Comerica
Darden Restaurants
DentaQuest Ventures
Dollar General Corporation
DTE Energy
DuPont
ESSENCE
Fannie Mae
Federal Reserve Bank of New York
First Light Capital
Food Lion
General Electric Company
General Mills
Halliburton Company
Hill & Knowlton
IBM
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JPMorgan Chase
Kaiser Permanente
Kellogg Company
Kelly Services
Kraft Foods
Lardon & Associates
Lazard Freres & Company
Lehman Brothers
Lockheed Martin
Macy's

Medtronic
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center
Merck & Company
Merrill Lynch
MetLife
Moody's Investors Service
Morehouse School of Medicine
Morgan Stanley
National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering
National Urban League
NBC Universal
Nestle USA
New Ventures, Inc.
Novartis Pharmaceuticals AG
Novations Group
Ogilvy & Mather
PepsiCo
Pfizer
Polo Ralph Lauren
PPG Industries
Progress Energy
Prudential Financial
Raytheon
Reliant Pharmaceutical
Robinson Group Consulting
Safeway
Sara Lee
Shell Oil Company
Sun Microsystems
Sunoco
Target
Ted Childs, LLC
The Principal Financial Group
TIAA-CREF
TimeWarner
TXU Energy
Tyco International
UBS
Viacom
WalMart
Xerox
Yazaki North America

Glossary

- **Activate** – when someone purposefully plans and manages her career by prioritizing experiences to achieve specific goals

- **Coachability** – refers to the desire and ability of the recipient of feedback to digest and act on the feedback in order to improve or hone managerial effectiveness

- **Extreme Jobs** – jobs that include such aspects as 60+ hour work week, working across time zones, frequent travel, unpredictability, unrealistic deadlines and constant availability

- **No Control Factors** – issues or challenges such as race or gender bias in a career over which black women executives have no direct control but must manage through in order to be successful

- **Off Ramp** – when someone takes time out of her career or reduces career obligations often for the purpose of raising children or other care giving responsibilities

- **On Ramp** – when someone returns to their career full time after having interrupted it for a period of time

- **Optionality** – ensuring that individuals have the kinds of experience and exposure to give them options inside and outside of the organization

- **Peer** – same level colleagues as the black women executives interviewed in the study

- **Success Factors** – conditions or resources that support the career advancement of an individual, particularly at the senior level