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GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Women's career equality and leadership in organizations: Creating an evidence-based positive change

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Funding information
Purdue University

Research on women's career equality and leadership is growing in importance for advancing social justice, equal employment opportunity, and global and national economic goals. Despite the increased attention being paid to gender equality for decades, progression has slowed or stalled around the globe, in many countries, such as United States. The goal of this special issue is to address the persistent research-to-practice gap in developing and implementing practical solutions for a positive change to advance women's career equality. In this introduction, we provide a brief overview of the approaches used to study women's careers and discuss how research and practices that are more inclusive of women's needs, values, and career experiences should be broadened to include more expansive and less-gendered notions of careers. Then, we introduce the articles in the special issue that inform current directions in (a) career and leadership theory, research, and methodologies for gender equality and (b) the application of scholarship to organizations. We conclude with a summary of some lessons for future research and practice on closing the women's career-equality gap.

KEYWORDS
gender diversity, gender equality, women and leadership, women and work, women's careers

1 | INTRODUCTION TO THE HRM SPECIAL ISSUE ON WOMEN'S CAREER EQUALITY

Scholarly and practitioner interest in human resource and organizational initiatives to enhance women's career equality has exploded in recent decades (c.f., Joshi, Son, & Roh, 2015; McKinsey and Company and Lean In, 2015). The reasons for this growing attention are complex and varied across organizations, industries, and nations, often including societal justice, equal employment opportunity, and economic objectives. Although women are seen as equally qualified to be corporate and political leaders, about half of the U.S. public believes the gender leadership gap persists due to gender bias (PEW Research Center, 2015). Indeed, women remain underleveraged as a source of talent and leadership in nearly all occupations around the globe—from CEO positions to corporate board members, (Catalyst, 2017) from college presidents to Silicon Valley executives (Fenwick & West, 2013) and software developers in rapidly growing well-paid STEM (Science, Technology, and Engineering Math) jobs (Lubinski, Benbow, & Kell, 2014). This gap endures even though women are about half the world population.

A recent World Economic Forum (2016) report cites persistent gender inequality as a top global economic risk, noting the inability of nations and employers to fully use women's paid labor talents is slowing world economic growth. Analysis by a nonpartisan economic think tank of nearly 22,000 companies in 91 countries reported that half were lacking senior women in key leadership positions, and a 30% increase in representation could generate a 15% increase in profits (Nolan, Moran, & Kotschwar, 2016).

Yet, progress in women's career equality has stalled in many nations, most notably in the United States, which used to be a leader—but now at 45th in the world ranks far from the top (World Economic Forum, 2016). While women's labor force participation has grown over the last few decades and continues to grow in many parts of the world, it also has peaked in some nations (e.g., United States in 1999) and has declined globally between 1995 and 2015 (from 52.4 to 49.6%) (Catalyst, 2017). Furthermore, equality in women's career paths, rewards, advancement, and retention remains uneven, at best, and discouraging, at worst. Globally, women earn 77% of what men do, and pay and advancement vary depending on the career stage,

marital status, birth and number of children, nation, racio-ethnicity, and other factors (Catalyst, 2017).

1.1 | Need for HRM special issue on *Women's Career Equality*: Addressing the research-to-practice gap

In light of these statistics, this special issue was designed to address the need for current evidence-based research to underpin practical solutions for a positive change to advance women's career equality. Our chief goal is to address persistent research-to-practice gaps in the women's career-equality literature. Most of the research on gender equality does a better job at *describing* problems in human resources practices and organizational structures and climates than in coming up with evidence-based *solutions* to address women's underutilization at the top of organizations and across professions. As a case in point, Eriksson-Zetterquist and Styhre (2008) found that highly committed and competent scholars involved in large-scale gender equality programs often emphasize reflection to a greater extent than practical action. Such an emphasis is well intentioned and consistent with scholarly aims but can impede attempts to develop and deploy productive practices that might be transferrable. Even so, such emphases need to continue side-by-side as empirical findings substantiate and/or counter assertions about well-publicized advantages of difference in organizations (Eagly, 2016).

Similarly, leaders in organizational practice can also contribute to the lack of progress by often limiting initiatives to those emphasizing awareness and consciousness-raising training in leadership development more than other more ambitious structural and policy changes. Also, rather than partnering with leading gender and diversity scholars to rigorously develop and evaluate the state-of-the art initiatives, corporate-diversity experts sometimes feel more comfortable with hiring consulting firms that will keep issues confidential and 'not rock the boat' by challenging prevailing organizational cultures and structures. Thus, the charge of this special issue of *Human Resource Management* is to showcase articles that bridge interdisciplinary multilevel and evidence-based research and practice for a positive change in women's career equality. In the first section, we define women's career equality and briefly review competing and complimentary current research perspectives. Then, we review the articles in the special issue, organizing them into themes. We conclude with lessons learned for future research and practice.

2 | WOMEN'S CAREERS AND CAREER EQUALITY: DEFINITIONS AND OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

In a recent review, Kossek, Su, & Wu (2017, p. 229) define women's career equality as "a multilevel, multidisciplinary dynamic phenomenon that reflects the degree to which women, compared to men, (a) have equal access to and participation in career opportunities and (b) experience equal work and nonwork outcomes: intrinsic (job, life, family satisfaction) and extrinsic (pay, promotions)." The authors note these outcomes can be measured at individual, group organizational, occupational, and societal levels and

that individual-level effects are often nested or related in a higher-level social context. For example, when women are better supported demographically and culturally in the collective, individual women are also more likely to experience better outcomes (Kossek et al., 2017). Furthermore, the authors noted whether women "opt out" or are "pushed out" is interconnected as are competing narratives such as work-family, discrimination, and career-values explanations for the gender gap.

2.1 | Women's career and leadership approaches: Expanding conceptualizations

Women's career equality and leadership in organizations can be studied from a variety of career and leadership perspectives providing insights into the complicated nature of women's advancement, spanning decades with numerous definitions and interdisciplinary theories of career. These conceptualizations range from traditional advancement throughout career as narrative, scripts, contracts, relationships, competitions, and callings over the course of lifespans (e.g., Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006, 2013; Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Hall, 1996; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Inkson, Dries, & Arnold, 2015; Lee, Kossek, Hall, & Litrico, 2011; Rosenbaum, 1979; and Valette & Culié, 2015). This expansion is notable because it highlights the point that singular career models, especially those originally designed for men in corporations with the assumption that one has limited to no caregiving responsibilities—gave rise to the ideal worker, ideal leader, and ideal career conceptualizations (Acker, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Such models are increasingly inadequate to explain many women's (and men's) lives.

2.1.1 | Extending career as advancement and extrinsic success models

Historically, career as advancement models has been popular to guide individuals and organizations in predicting and cultivating talent for leadership, hierarchical advancement, and organizational influence. Advantages often accrue for employees in these traditional models as career-development phases and expertise and influence acquisition are accompanied by the increased objective (e.g., pay and promotions) and often subjective symbols of success (e.g., recognition, status, referent leadership power). Considerable attention has also been paid to how these career and leadership theories assist in and reflect individuals' lives and organizational goals. For instance, Schein's (1971; 1985) classic model of five career anchors of self-motives and intraorganizational advancement along a career path included autonomy, general management, technical competence, security, and entrepreneurial creativity, which was validated largely on males attending MIT. It was only later in the 1980s that Schein added some additional values that might be viewed as more feminine in roots such as service and dedication to a cause, and lifestyle (Schein, 1985). Similarly, Hall and Goodale's (1986) time and mobility graphs and orderly depiction of career in four discrete phases of exploration, mastery, maintenance, and disengagement with embedded value preferences have given way to career and leadership theories that inform women's entrepreneurial,

sequential, or entangled strands of personal life-career pathways (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991; Lee et al., 2011). These gender-inclusive models incorporate relational, material, and embodied experiences over the course of diverse women's lifespans, including dependents, race and ethnicity, class, and occupation (Alfred, 2001; Buzzanell, Long, Kokini, Anderson, & Batra, 2015; Gatrell, Cooper, & Kossek, 2017; Huopalainen & Satama, in press).

2.1.2 | Broadening career and leadership experiences and structures

Attention has also been paid to how career visioning metaphorically highlights or backgrounds certain aspects of career and—with attendant developmental experiences and structures—bridging individual, collectives, and societies (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Inkson et al., 2015). Imageries of careers now are increasingly varied: linear and nonlinear, shape shifting/protean and deterministic, bounded and boundaryless, arrow and kaleidoscopic, and journeyed (with actual and/or aspirational) end points (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991; Hall, 2002; Inkson et al., 2015; Mainero & Sullivan, 2006). This imagery both focuses activity, such as the linear career as advancement notions regarding career opportunity structures and leadership development, and expands priorities, meanings, and borderlines and content, such as protean and boundaryless careers. As a whole, the field of careers, offers multifaceted frameworks for understanding, explaining, predicting, and critiquing individual, organizational, and societal interests in career and leadership. How careers and leadership are conceptualized and visualized have profound consequences for who presumably has a career and leadership potential and who does not. Such frameworks affect how individuals, organizations, and societies think about, and do not think about, leadership qualities and activities, thus determining who and what is included in preferred career and leadership maps.

2.1.3 | Recognizing the gendered nature of career and leadership conceptualizations and imagery

Overall, the concept of "career" is inherently gendered. The term "career" is infused with prominent (and hidden) power dynamics with complex and nuanced resistance-control and desire dynamics belying the seemingly straightforward criteria and trajectories for idealized career forms (advancement) and most valued identities (e.g., work over nonwork) (e.g., Driver, 2018). In terms of perceived differences between men and women in career processes and attainment or leadership, the sex (biological) and gender (psychological) difference literature typically views perceived patterns of difference through theoretical bases as socialization, identity, and psychodynamics. These differences are presumably stable—aligned with masculine and feminine differences, although queer leadership theory usurps the fixed nature of difference aligned with biology and normative assumptions of gender (e.g., Muhr & Sullivan, 2013; Muhr, Sullivan, & Rich, 2016). Despite evidence from theories such as role-incongruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), relatively consistent relationships among sex, gender, perceptions, and actual behaviors surface in our popular media, research, HR and management practices, and everyday conversation. In this tradition, what women and men career actors and leaders actually do in terms of how they enact career and leadership may differ from what others' expect, perceive, and evaluate (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 2007). With regard to gender and career equality, the consequences are that women and men are valued differently with the meanings and trajectories of their careers constituted by hierarchical valuing of stereotypical masculine rather than feminine characteristics. In short, the focus on career actor or leader identity has been relatively fixed and focused on the dominant prescribed sex and gender roles. New HR and organizational practices are needed to disrupt individuals' alignment of men-masculine-career-leadership ideals, and prevailing organizational career pathways and leadership hierarchies, affording space for difference and norm-challenging ways of supporting and enacting career systems.

Besides sex/gender differences, the doing of "gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987) focuses on the gendered performance of career and leadership and related gendered discourse and social interactions. The notion of "career" is gendered insofar as this performative lens questions how, when, why, and in what space career aspirations and attributions are ascribed, thwarted, developed, embodied, resisted, and rendered as dignified (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006, 2013). For instance, work–family conflict is manifest in different patterns but heteronormative assumptions and 'doing' of family as LGBQ raise questions about stigmatized interactions, identities, and networks for career development that often go unaddressed in the career and leadership literature (see Sawyer, Thoroughgood, & Ladge, 2017). Similarly, prescriptions for judging merit and meritocracy are rarely challenged or broadened to consider linkages to more sustainable career paths with new work forms and workloads that support work-life well-being (Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014) jointly with career advancement. Rather than often conceptualized in the HR literature as a rational taken-for-granted human resource procedure, using HR policies to support caregiving is a new "contested terrain" (Edwards, 1979). The configurations of workplace pregnancies, maternity and paternity leaves, flexible work arrangements and/or "accommodations," and motherhood/fatherhood career penalties or bonuses, and parental- and elder-caregiving stigma are often fraught with mixed messages, in sometimes ambivalent and passively unsupportive and other times actively sacrifice-seeking climates, with noninclusive policy implementation, sites of contestation and struggle for women and men within and across organizations and nations and policy agendas (e.g., Buzzanell & Liu, 2006; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Gatrell et al., 2017; Hodges & Budig, 2010; Kossek, Hammer & Lewis, 2010; Kossek, Noe, & Colquitt, 2001; Kossek, Ollier-Malaterre, Lee, Pichler, & Hall, 2016; Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011; Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Cross-country comparisons of work-family policies, career advancement, and wage inequities point to contradictory findings insofar as extended leaves relieve parents of childcare burdens but also result in lower advancement and workforce participation for women and are often associated with wage and career penalties (e.g., Cukrowska-Torzewska, 2017).

Moreover, career and leadership systems are organized through seemingly gender neutral but inherently masculine-gendered materialities and discourses found in organizing aspects such as vertical and horizontal industry, occupational, and organizational or institutional structures. Acker (1990, 2006) documented the gendered

hierarchies of organizing and career, then displayed how inequality regimes are constructed from interlocking difference. Career is ideologically aligned with status, money, and meaningfulness in popular and academic works—although scholars proclaim everyone has equal career prospects (c.f. Arthur et al., 1989) women and men continue to differentiate gendered dynamics, expectations, and decision-making criteria in their work-life considerations and in their organizational work (e.g., Kossek et al., 2017). Within this big picture of career research and practice, women managers and professionals operate within socio-cultural spaces of accomplishment and marginalization despite their credentials and ambitions. These spaces are dialectic (either-or) and dialogic (both-and) insofar as women have achieved and/or become plateaued prior to reaching the pinnacle of their careers. These spaces operate in and may reproduce (or challenge) national cultural formations and policies about gender and other forms of difference in sustained employability, leadership, and career attainment (e.g., Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2017; Miller, Eagly, & Linn, 2015).

3 | THEMATIC CLUSTERS OF ARTICLES IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

Given the scholarly legacy reviewed above, it is not surprising that the articles we received still largely focused on the notion of a career as being associated with upward movement and objective or extrinsic success, namely, leadership advancement. Taken together, the articles included in this special issue suggest that women have come a long way toward, but still lack, gender equality in many career processes, outcomes and experiences. Some questions raised for this special issue were: "What are examples of career equality that can be analyzed and potentially translated for different situations? Where has progress in career equality been made? When and how might fresh insights into career equality offer different ways of approaching this issue? For whom, or what segment of women and men, is career equality still contested and with what consequences?"

This special issue had begun to answer these questions, showing "the who and why" most often studied in the HR and business literature are professional and managerial women leaders who are seeking opportunities to advance to top functions in their organizations and industries. The articles demonstrate that the arguments for women's career equality and leadership require complicated and nuanced support that challenges normative patterns and structures and derives a positive change in the form of experiments evaluating the feasibility and outcomes from new policy and practice. We define a positive change as that which is generative, admitting that a singular intervention for the "wicked problem" of gender inequality is likely inadequate, and acknowledging the need for ongoing inquiry and organizational learning with new career design to challenge embedded gendered structures and cultures. In short, our goal has been the publication of scholarship that meets the need for current and positive change-producing discussion and intervention.

Toward this end, this special issue is generative and helped us identify research issues in six main themes. One main cluster of

articles examines issues of theory, research, and methodologies that (a) focus on core career processes; (b) contrast different theories and expectations so that the contradictions within gendered career equality can be foregrounded; and (c) is multilevel, bridging individual and organizational perspectives on the employment relationship. The second cluster moves this scholarship into practice. It does so to (d) affirm a needed employer and field-testing organizational view; (e) derive research-to-practice implementations that can be translated to different contexts and under certain conditions; and (f) generate a positive change for both women and men.

Across these themes, extant scholarship and that published in this special issue are combined to display how the articles selected both extend knowledge and at the same time generate new more complex research agendas and practices. We selected at least one article that was salient to highlight each theme.

3.1 | Cluster I: Career and leadership theory, research, and methodologies for gender equality

One cluster of articles in this special issue provided fresh insights on core career processes, contradictions, and multilevel bridging of micro-meso-macro levels.

Research on *core career processes* typically focuses on identity, time, space, and dignity (e.g., Arthur et al., 1989, 1999; Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006, 2013; Hall, 2002; Inkson et al., 2015) in managerial and professional occupations as diverse as the C-Suite in Fortune 500 companies and workplaces in which employees were trained and work in STEM. These processes bring together diverse knowledge streams for different disciplines. Integrating the breadth and depth of such knowledge is challenging for anyone wanting to write about HR research across organizations and subfields, and particularly about gender discrimination, occupational and career preference, and work and family fields (Kossek et al., 2017). It is also difficult to derive practices for gender equality when similar constructs and aims delve into quite dissimilar theories, samples, and practices. These challenges are exacerbated when researchers present career developmental and flexibility policies and accommodations designed to create greater gender and career equality in particular locales as generalizable exemplars (for examples of diverse national gender equality initiatives and policy goals, see Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre, 2013; Pauly & Buzzanell, 2016; and Örtenblad, Marling, & Vasiljević, 2017).

Despite these challenges in generalizing career processes and goals across contexts, a first theme we identified is that the authors of nearly all of the articles in this special issue explore women's career issues related to issues in *accessing or maintaining organizational membership and selection for leadership roles, and positive career-development experiences across life phases*, noting occupational and organizational differences. They do so using a wide array of theoretical perspectives and with attention to hiring riskiness for leader roles (Van Esch, Hopkins, O'Neil, & Bilimoria, 2018), retention (Ladge, Humberd, & Eddleston, 2018), turnover (Singh, Zhang, Wan, & Fouad, 2018), and use of quotas to lessen the impact of gender stereotypes on evaluation of women (Mölders, Brosi, Bekk, Spörrle, & Welp, 2018) and aspiration and advancement in top positions and spheres of influence (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018; Glass & Cook, 2018; Gould, Kulik, & Sardeshmukh;

Guillén, Mayo, & Karelaia, 2018). The research is quantitative and qualitative, offering generalizable outcomes for policy considerations as well as depth and breadth. Admittedly, the global representation is largely limited to Western countries (i.e., Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States).

For instance, in "Retaining Professionally Employed New Mothers: The Importance of Maternal Confidence and Workplace Support to their Intent to Stay," Ladge et al. (2018) work with the assumption, if organizations want to recruit, retain, and promote women professionals then they need to actively address the implications of motherhood on women's personal lives and careers. From their multimethodological study, they discuss how women struggle in efforts to continue their careers and construct viable work-related identities after childbirth. A unique contribution is that women's confidence in their maternal roles, called maternal confidence, predicted women's work–family conflict and intent to remain in their organizations. Furthermore, perceived organizational support for family was an important positive influence on this relationship.

Second, *scholarship suggests gendered career-equality outcomes can be foregrounded in specific contexts and career and work-life incongruities and pressures.* For example, in "Why Do Women Engineers Leave the Engineering Profession? The Roles of Work-Family Conflict, Occupational Commitment, and Perceived Organizational Support," Singh et al. (2018) focused on women's intent to leave the engineering profession, using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, turnover theory, and the voluntary career-change model. They found occupational turnover intentions and work-life balance may indirectly influence women's decisions about staying in engineering.

Third, published scholarship and that included in this special issue *must increasingly be multilevel, bridging individual and organizational perspectives on the employment, career, and leadership relationships.* Simply put, individual career experiences cannot be fully understood without understanding the organizational and occupational and societal contextual pressures shaping career inputs and outcomes (Kossek et al., 2017). Noting that they focused on availability and not use, Fritz and van Knippenberg's "Gender and Leadership Aspiration: The impact of Work Life Initiatives" found the availability of work-life initiatives can remove barriers to advancement, thus affecting women's leadership aspirations that, in turn, predict hierarchical advancement, occupational status, and objective career success. These initiatives were also important for men. Fritz and van Knippenberg scale up their findings to make recommendations about how such initiatives could be considered part of employees' rights, how they could be embedded within the organizational infrastructure and culture, how women (and men) could avoid the stigmatization and career penalties that seem to come with use of work-life policies, and how supervisors could model and support multidimensional work-life efforts for satisfaction with career, family, community, and other personal life aspects (see Hall, Kossek, Briscoe, Pichler, & Lee, 2013).

In their article "Support for Quotas for Women in Leadership: The Influence of Gender Stereotypes," Mölders et al. (2018) bridge stereotypes and institutional quotas. Their explicit aim is to better understand factors that affect quotas for women in leadership. They use sensemaking, role congruity, female leadership advantage, and

cognition scholarship, noting outgroup biases. They show how gender stereotypes influence political attitudes.

3.2 | Cluster II: Scholarship to practice applications

Turning to the second cluster, a number of articles move this scholarship into research-to-practice recommendations and suggestions for how to make such practices feasible and sustainable. The special issue accomplishes these goals in three ways.

First, these articles *affirm a needed employer and organizational view in career-equality studies.* Although there are benefits of employee-centric and national or organizational focused views on gender and career equality, an advantage of research and practice incorporating dual employer and organizational perspectives is that both employee employability and well-being goals and business-profitability goals are examined and both must be balanced in socially responsible ways for mutual gains. One question posed by our special issue call for articles was: How does one display the competence, similarity or likeability, and promotability without being seen as being too aggressive, too ambitious, and too self-interested?

One answer is influence. Guillén et al. (2018) found when women engineers appear to be self-confident—or "are perceived as being able to meet his/her performance standards, or has a sense of agency at work"—these appearances are "precursor(s) of individual influence in organizations" with career effects. Self-confidence appearance also needs to be accompanied by prosocial or communal orientations. Women should be achievement-oriented, competent, self-confident, nurturing, and communal—a tall order for anyone but especially for women in male-dominated careers. Influence, expertise, and authority are developed, accorded, structurally embedded, and performed differently by women and men.

It would be easy to fall into the "fix the woman" trap of stipulating that such research suggests that women should perform well, display self-confidence, and enact feminine qualities. In fact, the authors found low prosocial orientation may disadvantage women engineers by resulting in their not being able to gain influence as readily as their male counterparts. They also observe these time-consuming activities of managing others' perceptions while also engaging in successful role performance could slow down women's advancement. Moreover, they maintain the status quo by failing to change the hegemonic order or the inequality regime, as Acker (2006) phrases it, does not address the deep-gendered divide that produces such inequalities. The authors suggest organizations make membership, rewards, and opportunity structures explicit and disavow bias in phases from selection through retention and promotion. They suggest changing organizational systems to foster greater authenticity in career-developmental activities. Such points can be combined with Singh et al.'s practical implications insofar as they note the high costs of turnover, loss of talent, and the crucial role of organizational work-life support.

Second, *this special issue calls for scholars to derive research-to-practice implementations that can be translated to different contexts and under certain conditions.* While most published research highlights barriers and obstacles for gender-equitable workplaces, the vast majority of studies are not very useful for fostering a meaningful employment change. Many organizations loathe sponsoring true field-based

randomized control intervention studies, sharing sensitive data on women's turnover, disclosing documented experiences of adverse impact and implicit and explicit bias, and discussions of chilly (and sometimes even hostile) climates (with accompanying turnover and litigation). From an individual perspective, women may also be reluctant to be frank on bullying, discriminatory actions, and other toxic interactions they faced that may jeopardize current employment or status and reputation in their fields.

And yet, we are in a time when the #MeToo movement has gone viral on sexual assault and harassment globally with women exercising voice and solidarity online and offline in offices, on media, and in courtrooms. This may be the moment when corporations are willing to exhibit vulnerability so that their transparency can ward off possible future claims about inequalities and mistreatment. Clearly, there is a need for academic practitioner partnerships to bridge science and practice from employee and employer perspectives. In attempts to gain a better understanding of how context and intersectionality relate to organizational change, we can ask several questions. For example, will the same change strategies used in business work in nonprofit or STEM sectors? What about across jobs and occupations such as initiatives employed to support IT workers who can sometimes work from home, compared to employees directly caring for patients, for example. Do strategies need to be adapted across organizational and societal levels? For example, what practices are needed to support those at the top such as CEO or COO compared to those who cannot seem to break through the glass ceiling? What about changing the country cultural context? Will the same employment change strategies that work in New York be effective in Dubai or Shanghai or Des Moines?

Moreover, in what ways does organizational support for women's career equality need to be customized for diverse women's identity subgroups? For example, how do employer talent management and support strategies need to vary across career-life stages and generations from millennials to mid-career to senior high-talent women who are freed from child rearing now propelling rapidly upward before elder care, spouse, or health demands kick in? How about customizing strategies across heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual or transgendered identity groups? What are cross-cutting and unique issues? How do work-family and dual career issues shape career equality? What should support look like for women with geographic diversity such as the need to commute long distance back and forth between work and home to stay partnered or care for their families while advancing in career? Or how about the unique career needs of women with color or immigrant women? What about customizing strategies for those women with special needs or poor women facing accumulative stress or other challenges?

Gould et al. (2018) examine strategies for the Australian cultural context. In their article, "Gender Diversity from the Top: The Trickle-Down Effect in the Australian Public Sector," they found an effect between board representation by women and executive representation by women in Australia. What makes the trickle-down effect work over time is that women in senior leadership roles be present and/or advocate and sponsor other women. This means promotion of qualified women to top corporate levels is important,

with Gould et al.'s results indicating effects would appear within a year.

Third, *the research-to-practice sections of articles are designed to generate a positive change for both women and men.* Extant scholarship and that published in this special issue are combined to extend knowledge and generate more complex research agendas and practices. Of importance here is determining which interventions might promote equality, or at least equity, within particular types of systems with consideration of the ironic consequences that sometimes arise in the context itself and at multiple levels within systems. Improving careers for women often involves changing careers and systems for *both* men and women. In research-to-practice design, an initial step involves figuring out what the problem is, how to articulate the problem, what perspective or level might be appropriate for integrating scholarship and practice in specific contexts, and how theory and prior research might inform the issues. Afterward, studies should be conducted with attention to how they might serve the stakeholders and organizational contexts, values and beliefs, and reflections about beliefs.

As one example of this approach, Van Esch et al. (2018) provide a list of HR best practices to create a positive process and environment for the selection and success of women leaders in senior positions. Ladge et al. (2018) offer a concise table with listings of actions to support new mothers. These actions are organized according to practices designed to generate internally based organizational support, externally based organizational support, and managerial support. Mölders et al. lay out several practices to highlight and showcase women and their agentic behaviors and to provide members' opportunities to interact with women in leadership. They stipulate that these initial practices are designed to set the stage for and create opportunities for women in leadership. Besides highlighting positive examples, showcasing accounts of women's agentic behavior also implies organizations need to refrain from actions proven to undermine women's success and agency in organizations. These actions include putting women in leadership positions that subject them to failure because they are too risky (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), as well as patronizing women by withholding challenging jobs (De Pater, Van Vianen, & Bechtoldt, 2010) and important resources (Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005). Furthermore, organizations should carefully communicate affirmative actions such as the introduction of quotas. As affirmative action can be interpreted as a signal of women's lack of agency and competence (Leslie, Mayer, & Kravitz, 2014), organizations should highlight hindering factors for women's advancement such as stereotypes to make sure that quotas do not backfire by seemingly confirming gender stereotypes such as women being less agentic than men. This means organizations should enable women to perform successfully in their job, while at the same time, they should ensure all employees understand the reasoning behind the introduction of quotas, avoiding quotas to backfire and hinder women's success.

Glass and Cook (2018) study women's impacts on firms' practices and policies by providing an overview on the contemporary focus on financial performance as indicating impact as well as other variables and processes that can affect firm performance. They focus on Board composition and CEO gender in areas of governance, product

development, and equity at Fortune 500 companies. Using the theoretical lenses of gender difference, homophily, and diversity, the authors test hypotheses about the unique advantages that women CEOs bring to leadership when compared to men, about the ways gender-diverse boards with multiple and/or influential women support women CEOs, and about CEO-Board heterogeneity with men CEOs but multiple and/or influential women foster innovation in terms of business and equity practices, respectively. With limited support for the gender difference and homophily models but consistent support for the diversity perspective, this study demonstrates the presence of influential women in top leadership positions can result in numerous positive benefits. Practical implications indicate influence is a key to successful outcomes for women, organization leaders and members, and firm performance. The research-to-practice takeaway is that Boards should be diversified and should include women leaders for a positive change.

We now turn to lessons learned regarding gender and career equality and closing thoughts that can act as a springboard for further research-to-practice. Consistent with our earlier critique of prevailing career and leadership theories, pathways, and imagery, we bring our discussion full circle questioning how women's talent, competence, careers, and leadership can benefit from more diverse (and expansive) perspectives of career and leadership.

3.3 | Some lessons learned to build on in future research and practice

The articles in this special issue examined a range of topics on women's careers, each with implications for addressing a persistent organizational and societal challenge: "What is the organizational and HR science on how to bridge the research to practice gap to move the needle and improve women's career equality?" Taken together, these articles indicate the complexity in gender equality in terms of women's career advancement and leadership is dependent upon a number of different factors and levels of possible intervention. The contributors to this special issue offer insights into the processes or moderating contextual influences that matter when trying to implement women's career-equality initiatives.

Women tend to experience better career outcomes when perceived overall support for work-life initiatives is generally high across country or company context. Research shows cultural support about the value of investing in work-life initiatives at the employer or public policy institutional level varies across contexts (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010). Although several authors showed both men and women tend to have favorable attitudes and may benefit when there is higher perceived supports for work-life initiatives, such support may mean even more positive outcomes for women. When support is higher, women tend to have higher leadership aspirations, and perceive less family-to-work conflict even when maternal confidence is lower, and feel able to take advance of flexible work arrangements and job autonomy even in lower gender-equalitarian cultures. Several articles showed across multiple societal contexts and levels of analysis, when there is perceived broad cultural support for work-life by men and women alike, the payoff is especially positive for women's career aspirations, stress, and outcomes such as turnover.

The gender cultural context matters for the support for and effects of initiatives on gender equality outcomes. Several articles demonstrate significant moderating effects of the gender cultural context on the effectiveness of initiatives. Whether it is national, occupational, or organizational context, the gender culture such as whether men and women are treated with lower gender stereotyping or the degree to which an occupational is seen as masculine affects the degree to which quotas are seen as viable. Quotas were seen as more acceptable in male-dominated contexts.

Targeted women's leadership development initiatives focusing on building psychological resources for work and maternal and organizational citizen role expectations are helpful. It was surprising to us that 25% of our articles found women's' individual self-confidence for the maternal roles and confidence as a leader matter. We also think such training needs to look at the context and that the differing expectations placed on being a "good mother" versus being a "good father" and how that role is enacted and being a leader that is both agentic but also communal (helping behaviors at work through differing organizational citizen expectations need to be incorporated into leadership and organizational development). The fact that confidence for both maternal and job roles mattered as moderators of career experiences also suggests that leadership development should not just be work-role-based as most companies do, but also should include discussion of maternal values and ambition. Rather than shy away from maternal values and roles, companies need to be more gender and work-life inclusive to support women (and men) as "whole people."

Organizational implicit bias initiatives are needed to consciously combat the different cultural gender role expectations for men and women and performance linkages. We saw for star performers women may be viewed as low-risky leaders than men but that for women who were good average performers men were preferred as lower risks. Similarly, we saw if women were less confident as top performers they were more likely to have negative experiences, as women were seen as being expected to engage in more gender role-congruent helping behaviors. Such findings show to enhance women's career equality, such implicit stereotypes that shape women's own beliefs of role expectations and how others value and perceive these roles as gender role congruent or not is critical to countervail stereotyping that is impeding women's advancement.

3.4 | Closing

These articles in this special issue suggest transformation toward equality is both more complicated and more encouraging than it sometimes seems and requires both individual- and organizational-level change initiatives. The range of articles addresses issues such as linkages between gender and the following issues: quotas, maternal and job confidence, the meaning of work-life supports for leadership aspirations, occupational commitment and family to work interference, differential leadership expectations for extra role behaviors, riskiness in leadership selection, the need for top-down change approaches, linkages between leader and board diversity and business outcomes, and the adoption of equity practices. Overall, women's individual influences such as their self-confidence in appearance and

motherhood as well as organizational support of work-life initiatives and institutional and system-wide interventions such as quotas have been found to benefit women (and men). Moreover, the ironies in these findings are evident—it is never enough for women to be competent, agentic leaders, and perform well in work- and personal-life domains; they often must also embody feminine qualities and they require advocacy, sponsorship, and efforts to determine how to develop equal playing fields.

These findings are from numerous contexts and stakeholder groups such as CEOs and Board members in businesses (Glass & Cook, 2018), women and men engineers (Guillén et al., 2018), women engineers (Singh et al., 2018), women and men employees in the United Kingdom (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018) and in Germany (Mölders et al., 2018), "professionally-employed new mothers in the United States as they transitioned back to work" (Ladge et al., 2018), and experiments looking at perceived riskiness of hiring women compared to men leaders (Van Esch et al., 2018). The studies focused on women in contrast to men or system-level phenomena.

Finally, we hope some of the lessons learned provide some insights to build upon regarding gender and career equality that can act as a springboard for further research-to-practice ideas. In returning to our earlier discussions about the need to incorporate expansive and multiple careers and leadership theories, pathways, and imageries, we reflect upon the possibility that a focus on the diverse career and leadership processes might also provide ways of rethinking career, leadership, and organizational structures to be more gender inclusive. Therefore, the questions may not center on what can be done to change systems and opportunities but what can be done to change the fundamental basis by which careers are organized, valued, and embodied.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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