

Research Statement

1. Research Questions or Problems

This project seeks to investigate the role, contributions, and challenges of female entrepreneurs and leaders in international law firms. The central research questions are:

1. How do female lawyers establish themselves as entrepreneurs and leaders within the highly competitive and male-dominated field of international law?
2. What structural, cultural, and institutional barriers influence their progression into senior leadership roles?
3. In what ways do female leaders influence firm culture, diversity policies, and approaches to international legal practice?
4. How does female leadership in international law firms contribute to broader questions of gender equity, governance, and innovation in global professional services?

The project addresses the gap in understanding how gender dynamics intersect with entrepreneurship and leadership in international law firms—an area that combines legal studies, gender studies, and organizational research.

2. Research Context

The legal profession has historically been dominated by men, particularly at senior levels, despite the increasing number of women entering the field. International law firms, as influential actors in global commerce and governance, present a unique context for examining gendered pathways to leadership and entrepreneurship.

Why this research matters:

- **Academic significance:** Current research often focuses on gender disparities in corporate leadership or the legal profession separately, but less attention is given to the intersection of *female entrepreneurship and leadership within international law firms*.
- **Societal significance:** Law firms play a vital role in shaping international economic and legal systems. Female leadership in these firms can influence diversity policies, mentoring structures, client engagement, and even the interpretation of legal frameworks across jurisdictions.
- **Policy relevance:** Findings may inform institutional strategies for gender equity, bar associations' diversity initiatives, and international guidelines on professional inclusion.

Existing research:

- Studies on gender and law (Sommerlad, 2016; Rhode, 2017) highlight persistent barriers such as the “glass ceiling,” implicit bias, and work-life balance struggles.
- Literature on entrepreneurship in law firms (Heinz & Nelson, 2005) underscores the significance of networks, client acquisition, and firm culture, though rarely through a gendered lens.

- Research on leadership styles (Eagly & Carli, 2007) suggests women often adopt collaborative approaches, which may reshape organizational governance.

Contribution of this project:

This research will:

- Integrate insights from **gender studies, organizational behavior, and legal studies** to create a holistic account of women's leadership in law firms.
- Document the strategies employed by female entrepreneurs to overcome systemic barriers.
- Contribute new empirical data through interviews, case studies, and cross-jurisdictional analysis.
- Provide recommendations for fostering gender-inclusive leadership pipelines in international legal practice.

Target audiences:

- Academics in law, business, and gender studies.
- International law firms seeking diversity and inclusion strategies.
- Professional organizations (e.g., International Bar Association, Law Society).
- Policymakers engaged in gender equity and governance.

3. Research Methods

This project adopts a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and comparative research.

Data collection:

1. **Semi-structured interviews** with female partners, managing directors, and founders of international law firms across Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia.
 - Explore career trajectories, challenges, leadership philosophies, and entrepreneurial practices.
2. **Case studies** of selected international law firms with notable female leadership.
 - Assess organizational structures, diversity initiatives, and cultural impacts of female leaders.
3. **Document analysis** of firm reports, diversity policies, and professional association guidelines.
 - Examine formal commitments and their implementation.
4. **Comparative analysis** across jurisdictions.
 - Identify regional differences in barriers and opportunities for women in leadership.

Justification of methods:

- Interviews provide in-depth personal insights into lived experiences.
- Case studies and document analysis offer contextual understanding of firm-level dynamics.

- Comparative analysis highlights structural and cultural variations, ensuring findings have global applicability.

Role of researcher:

- Conduct interviews, analyze transcripts, and manage case study design.
- Collaborate with professional networks and associations to access participants.

Other contributors:

- Research assistants for transcription and coding of interviews.
- Academic supervisors offering methodological and theoretical guidance.

4. Project Management

Management approach:

- The project will be structured into clear phases with milestones, guided by supervisory meetings and feedback loops.

Timetable (36 months):

- **Months 1–6:** Literature review, development of theoretical framework, ethics approval.
- **Months 7–12:** Recruitment of participants, pilot interviews, refinement of interview guide.
- **Months 13–24:** Main data collection (interviews, case studies, document analysis).
- **Months 25–30:** Data coding, thematic analysis, cross-jurisdictional comparison.
- **Months 31–34:** Drafting of findings and integration into research chapters.
- **Months 35–36:** Final thesis submission and preparation of publications.

Expected outcomes:

- A doctoral thesis offering a comprehensive study of female leadership and entrepreneurship in international law firms.
- A theoretical framework connecting gender, entrepreneurship, and global legal practice.
- Policy recommendations for law firms and bar associations.

5. Publication and Dissemination

Academic dissemination:

- Journal articles in *International Journal of the Legal Profession*, *Gender, Work & Organization*, and *Law & Society Review*.
- Presentations at conferences such as the Law & Society Association Annual Meeting and International Bar Association conferences.

Professional dissemination:

- Policy briefs shared with international law firms and professional associations.
- Workshops/webinars for law firms on fostering inclusive leadership practices.

Public engagement:

- Blog posts or op-eds to raise awareness of gender issues in global legal practice.