

Full Length Research Paper

Understanding “Why” One University’s Women’s Leadership Development Strategies are So Effective

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One research university has brought formal training to campus to support women and provide the needed leadership training in a cost-effective manner. Based on a coaching method used at Harvard in their Women’s Leadership Forum, our initiative has completed its fifth cycle and provides an on-campus leadership development and support program for women. This paper offers insights into the Women’s Leadership Initiative provided by focus group participants and also highlights the overall impact and effectiveness using survey data.

Keywords: Women, leadership, higher education, skill-development

Introduction

Leadership development programs are necessary and valuable for women in higher education. It is abundantly clear that fewer women than men make it to the senior-most leadership positions at colleges and universities (June, 2015; Kellerman & Rhode, 2014; Cook & Kim, 2012). This dearth of women is not due to a pipeline issue, as there are plenty of qualified women to do the jobs. For example, the number of female college and university presidents hovers around 26%. In 2006, the number of women who were Chief Academic Officers was 38% and the number of women who were senior administrators was 45% (Cook & Kim, 2012). While the majority of presidents come from the ranks of Provosts or Chief Academic Officers, there is a disconnect between the number of women who *could* become presidents and the number of women who *do* become presidents. It is obvious that the numbers are not proportional.

Ely, Ibarra and Kolb (2011) point out that overt gender bias may not be the culprit, but instead it could be *second generation* bias, or less obvious forms of bias. Ely, Ibarra and Kolb (2011) stated that “Organizational hierarchies in which men predominate, along with practices that equate leadership with behaviors believed to be more common or appropriate in men, powerfully, if unwittingly communicate that women are ill-suited for leadership roles” (p. 475). How, then, can women become leaders despite this inadvertent bias? Leadership development

programs can assist them in feeling more comfortable taking on larger roles by increasing their competencies, self-confidence and networks.

By modeling the behavior of women in academic leadership roles, Universities will help to reduce future inadvertent bias in all areas of employment for students, who will have experience with women in positions of power during their formative years. Having more women in leadership roles in higher-education institutions and on their boards will help shift the way many people think about women as leaders. It will encourage the most qualified persons to reach their potential (Ely et al., 2011). It will also enable more women to consider themselves as possible leaders. Elders (1994) stated that “You can’t be what you don’t see” (p. 16). Women need to see themselves in other women who take on positions of leadership. If not, the domain of senior level leaders will remain an essentially male-dominated club, a result which limits the perspectives of the leaders and the followers themselves.

Research indicates that “the representation of women in leadership positions has a positive correlation with economic performance, measured in tangible terms such as organizational growth, increased market share, and return on investment” (Rhode, 2003, p. 17). Though correlation is not a synonym for causation, there are specific reasons to promote a culture of

equality. Those include improved employee morale and better recruitment and retention of top talent. Organizations that provide opportunities for employees, such as a leadership development program, may be better equipped to keep their most valuable resources—their people.

Numerous leadership-training methodologies exist for developing individual female leaders. DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Reed and Wheatly (2014) suggest that a common methodology is a leadership institute for women such as the HERS Institutes or the Women's Leadership Forum at Harvard. While effective for the participant, overall change within the participant's institution is unfortunately not generally achieved due to the concentration of training on only the participant.

Women's Leadership Initiative Program Design

One research university began an internal, on-campus training initiative, called the Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI), solely for female participants in January 2012. Planning for the WLI at the Research University originated in the fall 2011 as a legacy of the Provost, a STEM researcher, whose education and career had benefited from all-women initiatives targeted at enhancing success and persistence in a male dominated discipline. The vision was to invest in the future of women's leadership at this institution by providing an in house executive coaching program along the lines of that at Harvard University. To this end, two coaching consultants were hired to design and deliver the content for the first twenty-six participants at the Research University.

After the initial coaching of the first group of participants, individuals volunteered to coach the next phase of women in the WLI. The consultants were brought back to campus to "train the trainers" and develop materials that the Research University coaches would use. Once trained, the new coaches prepared to facilitate the next round of leadership development for participants in January 2013.

The WLI steering committee separated subsequent phases of women into groups, called pods, with two leaders assigned to a team of between four to five participants. The organization of the pods centered on matching the newer participants with professional women leaders on campus allowing for: insight into professional networks, coaching on a particular leadership challenge, and developing cross-disciplinary relationships that extend well beyond the initial pod sessions. To date, there have been five phases of training for campus women and 132 women have completed the program with an overall completion rate above 90%.

The mission statement for our university's Women's Leadership Initiative is to "empower women in leadership roles by providing them the tools, resources, development opportunities, and professional networks that will enable them to reach their full potential." It is important to note that this mission statement was developed after the initiative was in place for one year. In many ways it was written to reflect what was already happening and what we thought should keep happening within the initiative.

The training contains four major components: 1. The podwork: participants are systematically sorted into 4-5 member "pods" with faculty and staff participants from across the campus. Former participants serve as coaches/facilitators for the groups for a 15-week period where they lead them through a series of prepared readings and exercises; 2. Beginning and end-of-year events; 3. Monthly breakfast meetings, and 4. Regular skill-building workshops with invited on- and off-campus speakers/practitioners leading the discussions. The WLI utilizes a small, twelve-person steering committee, in addition to three staff members from the Provost's office (working part-time on the initiative), to plan events for the upcoming academic year.

The vision is quite ambitious with plans that this leadership initiative be "a driving force in supporting the University's goal to be a diverse and inclusive institution that advances, values, and rewards women for their leadership contributions" (<https://womenandleadership411.wordpress.com/>).

New qualitative data, as well as updated quantitative data from three prior waves of participants in our WLI, indicate that this initiative had a consistent positive impact on participants. Specifically, pre- and post—test self-assessments from the first two phases on the initiative indicated that these women consistently rate their effectiveness on a number of skills significantly higher/improved at the completion of their training than in their initial self-assessment. In our current research, we add a third phase of self-assessments and use discussions from focus groups with these women to help us understand "why" this initiative has been so successful.

Self Determination Theory

To promote the success of women's leadership programs, the recipients of the training must be considered. Programs that assist women in becoming leaders need to be designed in a way that benefits those who participate in them. "Leadership development programs designed to meet the needs of women leaders are necessary in order to specifically address the challenges that women face within higher education" (Sulpizio, 2014, p. 98). Leaders are most effective when their personal values are aligned with their purpose and goals—and ultimately advance the collective good (Ely et al., 2011). Therefore, basing leadership development programs on theory that is predicated on advancing one's authentic self is critical. Doing this benefits participants by "satisfying a basic human need for relatedness, and thus, are inherently rewarding to pursue" (Ely et al., 2011).

The theoretical framework for this research is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a theory of motivation by Deci and Ryan (1985). According to Vallerand, Pelletier, and Koestner (2008), self-determination theory is a high quality, creative, efficient theoretical perspective where "similar findings have been consistently obtained across a host of domains and outcomes" (p. 257). Kovjanic, Schuh, Jonas, Quaquebeke, and Dick (2012) add further that self-determination theory is "one of the most detailed and best validated frameworks of psychological needs" (p. 1032).

Deci and Ryan (2000) have found that people are more likely to engage in and sustain their participation in initiatives for their own reasons with limited external support (i.e., they are intrinsically motivated) when those initiatives fulfill the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. According to this theoretical perspective, these three psychological needs are the “nutriments that are essential for survival, growth, and integrity of the individual” (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004, p. 2046). *Competence* is defined as “succeeding at optimally challenging tasks and being able to attain desired outcomes” (Baard et al., 2004, p. 2046). *Autonomy* involves “experiencing choice and feeling like the initiator of one’s own actions” (Baard et al., 2004, p. 2046). Deci and Ryan (2000) refer to this as the integration and freedom of an individual to organize an experience to be in line within one’s sense of self. It also refers to “integration and freedom” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). *Relatedness* concerns “establishing a sense of mutual respect and reliance with others” (Baard et al., 2004, p. 2046). Deci and Ryan (2000) define relatedness as “the desire to feel connected to others—to love and care, and to be loved and cared for” (p. 231), thus to be integrated into the larger whole.

So how does this process work? According to Deci and Ryan (2000), “it is part of the adaptive design of the human organism to engage interesting activities, to exercise capacities, to pursue connectedness in social groups, and to integrate intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences into a relative unity” (p. 229). The researchers have found this to be true in their experience working with the Women’s Leadership Initiative. Therefore,

opportunities to satisfy the three intrinsic needs will facilitate self-motivation and effective functioning because they facilitate internalization of extant values and regulatory processes, and they facilitate adjustment because need satisfaction provides the necessary nutriment for human growth and development. In contrast, thwarted satisfaction of the needs will undermine motivation and have maladaptive consequences. (Baard et al., 2004, p. 2047)

It is also important to note that the context matters. Deci, Connell, and Ryan (1989) make the case that the interpersonal context (i.e., whether it is supportive or controlling) in which the change is occurring is critical in that contexts that support self-determination have a more positive impact on “intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and perceived competence” (p. 581) and thus have been found to “positively affect creativity, conceptual learning, emotional tone, and self-esteem” (p. 588).

Within our context as a University, an autonomous work environment exists in far more areas than would be the case in a typical business environment. This situation is not only true in the classroom and in conducting research, but also in the academic administrative environment. Autonomy means allowing individuals to act with choice and of their own volition. Competency speaks to the human desire to get better at things. Specialized trainings can help with competency as can continued practice in the work or outside environment. Finally, providing

an environment with an imbedded network allows for individuals to feel connected to others at the institution and for faster integration with the whole, rather than forcing individuals to blaze his/her own path, which is a considerably more time-intensive endeavor.

The implication for this research is that key University leaders (in relation to faculty and staff) must engage in actions that support autonomy and provide “non-controlling feedback, and acknowledgement of the subordinate’s perspective” (p. 581) from Deci and colleagues’ (2000) work. More specifically, the person in power must take the faculty or staff member’s

frame of reference. They must understand and acknowledge his or her needs, feelings, and attitudes with respect to the issue at hand. When this is the case, the target person will be more trusting of the context and believe that it will be responsive to his or her initiations and suggestions (Deci et al., 2000, p. 581)

Social contexts can vary in terms of how much they promote autonomy. “*Autonomy support* involves the supervisor understanding and acknowledging the subordinate’s perspective, providing meaningful information in a non-manipulative manner, offering opportunities for choice; and encouraging self-initiation” (Baard et al., 2004, p. 2048). This means that the context for autonomy support is “an interpersonal climate created by the manager in relating to subordinates and carrying out managerial functions, such as goal setting, decision making, and work planning” (Baard et al., 2004, p. 2048). Sturm (2006) argues that autonomous departments and lack of accountability structures complicate academic change efforts; solutions must include empowering faculty, students and staff and providing the critical skills they need to become organizational catalysts and initiate change within department and institutional decision-making processes. Therefore, we need initiatives that empower faculty and staff to develop the organization.

To continue motivating the employee, the WLI addresses Deci and Ryan’s (2000) suggestion of providing an environment where competence is promoted. Given the explicit charge stated in the mission statement of empowering women with increased tools and the pre-existing relatively autonomous state of an academia, motivation should increase with the addition of the constructs from Self Determination Theory.

Within this academic structure, the mere existence of the Women’s Leadership Initiative on a continuing basis and in a dynamic institution with considerable administrative change shows the commitment of the organization and those in it to the promotion and retention of women in leadership positions. Several studies document the implications of self-determination/intrinsic motivation for general well-being. According to Edmunds, Ntoumani and Duda (2006), “understanding the conditions that foster versus undermine psychological need satisfaction holds great practical significance. Such awareness can contribute to the creation of social environments that satisfy the three needs and promote self-

determined motivational regulations, personal development, and well-being” (p. 2258).

The inability to satisfactorily get these psychological needs met leads to “negative functional consequences for mental health and often for ongoing persistence and performance” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 262). Thus, they affect job performance and psychological adjustment. When the three needs are equally supported and satisfied “people experience more vitality, self-motivation, and well-being” (Ryan, 2009, p. 1). In addition, high levels of self-determination are associated with “more adaptive cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes” (Vallerand, Pelletier, & Koestner, 2008, p. 257).

Trepanier, Fernet, and Austin (2012) found that “managers who engage in their job out of pleasure or from a sense of personal significance perceive themselves as leaders who can inspire others and stimulate interest” (p. 275). Thus, leadership initiatives that promote self-determination, also improve participants’ professional functioning which then affects the lives and experiences of those who directly report to them. “By valuing teamwork and respect for others, organizations can create social conditions that foster high-quality relationships among members” (p. 276).

In summary, Self Determination Theory provides an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding the consistent positive impact on this leadership initiative on female participants. Thus, it is expected that the following major themes would emerge within the focus group transcripts of WLI participations: that the WLI provides connections with others/experiences of belonging (relatedness), builds opportunities to interact effectively (competencies), and reinforces overall feelings of autonomy.

Methods

Focus Groups

This research study employed multiple methods to collect data. The focus group questionnaire was designed independently by each of the researchers, then two of the researchers took each of the desired questions and put together four comprehensive research questions designed to illicit responses from the participants. Each of the researchers then met the requirements set forth by the Research University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the four questions were submitted for approval. After three iterations, the four questions and the procedures for obtaining participants was approved by the IRB (see Appendix A).

An email was sent to participants in the Women’s Leadership Initiative at the Research University asking them if they would be willing to participate in a focus group. Those women asked to participate were part of the first three phases of the program since they had fully completed all of their pod training. Women in the fourth or fifth cycle of the Women’s Leadership Initiative were not solicited to participate in the focus groups. There were three specific dates, times, and locations for the desired meetings and an RSVP was requested if a person planned to attend. Care

was taken to ensure that information revealed in the focus groups remained confidential by ensuring that focus groups did not include women in direct supervision of other participants. These meetings were set to accommodate individuals on different campuses with different teaching, research, administrative, and service schedules.

These focus groups met at the appointed times and two of the researchers conducted the focus group interviews. The responses were recorded using two electronic devices and notes were taken by a research assistant. The research assistant was introduced to the group in each of the meetings, but was not a part of the conversation and was not present at the table where the conversations were taking place in each of the interview sessions. One researcher asked for commentary using the questions and the second researcher facilitated more detailed responses to each of the questions where appropriate. The research assistant was charged with note taking to include a summary of each person’s commentary and to ensure that each person’s responses were recorded separately with a number assigned to each respondent to ensure anonymity. Each focus group was recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Although many of the women in the room knew one another, names were not recorded and were deleted from the transcripts.

Each of the focus group meetings were scheduled for one hour at which time the researchers stated that the end of the hour had come, but allowed for further commentary when desired by the participants. Each of these meetings went for slightly longer than the hour, but none exceeded 90 minutes.

The researchers then used an individual with transcription experience to transcribe each of the interviews. These transcriptions were checked against the original recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions by one of the researchers. The transcript data were evaluated inductively using the coding model developed by grounded theorists Corbin and Strauss 2008; Glaser 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987.

A student assistant color-coded the transcripts under the direction of one of the researchers. Two of the researchers independently reviewed the transcribed interviews and assigned themes to the responses. These researchers then met to ensure that their themes were consistent and an additional theme emerged and was added to the transcriptions. Thereafter, a third researcher took the transcribed interviews and the themes and reviewed for internal accuracy of the responses. This researcher then categorized all the themes and responses according to the aforementioned Self-Determination Theory categories, of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. All three researchers then met to discuss the outcomes and to select various important aspects for each of the themes; thereafter two of the researchers independently selected quotes from the transcripts.

Survey Development and Implementation: Measuring Change

Prior to the focus group interviews, data was collected from the majority of WLI participants. Collection method at Time 1 (the introductory meeting for each phase of the Women’s Leadership Initiative) and at Time 2 (at least four months after the initial meeting and at the end of the group coaching) were both group administered. We have pre- and post-test data for three phases of the initiative. Approximately 116 females in faculty and staff positions across the campus participated in the program at that point. These same women were invited to participate in the focus group discussions.

The survey asked for the participants to self-assess their effectiveness in the following areas: 1. Strategic thinking (How would you rate your effectiveness at strategic thinking), 2. Influencing others (How effective are you at influencing your supervisors, people you supervise, and your peers), 3. Speaking up and asking for what you need (How effective are you at speaking up and asking for what you need), and 4. Career planning and professional development (Rank the quantity and quality of your professional networks). For each question, participants were asked to rate their responses from one to four with one being “the least effective” and four being “the most effective”.

Results and Discussion

Survey

Table 1

Results of the Three-Phases of Survey Responses

	Phase I Pre-Test	Phase I Post-Test	Phase II Pre-Test	Phase II Post-Test	Phase III Pre-Test	Phase III Post-Test
Effectiveness at strategic thinking	2.86	3.36***	3.12	2.94*	2.95	3.31*
Effectiveness at influencing supervisors	2.95	2.82	2.76	2.76	2.89	3.03
Effectiveness at influencing people you supervise	3.05	3.19	3.28	3.14*	3.12	3.44+
Effectiveness at influencing peers	2.95	3.14*	3.04	3.06	3.06	3.27
Effectiveness at speaking up and asking for what need	2.64	2.77	2.32	2.62**	2.41	2.97*
Quantity/Quality of professional networks	2.45	3.00***	2.68	2.84	2.56	3.0**

Note. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

Focus Groups

This data was categorized into themes, which were further identified according to Self Determination Theory as:

Table 2

Categories of Focus Group Responses According to Self Determination Theory

Blue—Networking Relatedness (R)

Yellow—Mindfulness of Others Relatedness and Competence (R) & (C)
Orange—Mentorship Relatedness and Competence (R) & (C)
Green—Career Development Competence (C)
Red—Personal Growth Competence and some Autonomy (C) & (A)

The general analytical strategy used by the researchers was to use statistical techniques for comparing and establishing statistical differences between groups. Paired samples (*t*-tests) were utilized as the researchers tested the same persons on two separate occasions and compared responses. The results indicate that there are consistent significant positive changes across all three phases of the initiative. For example, respondents in phases 1 and 3 indicated that their effectiveness at strategic thinking had significantly improved. In addition, for phase 2 and 3 participants, there is a significant increase in the post scores for their effectiveness at influencing people they supervise. For phase 2 and 3 participants, there is a significant increase in their effectiveness in speaking up and asking for what they need. Finally, there is a significant increase in the ranking of the quantity and quality of their professional networks for phase 1 and 3 participants¹.

Two new questions were added to the pre/post test surveys of the phase 2 and 3 participant. These questions were designed to measure whether WLI participants felt more connected to other female leaders on campus and if they felt comfortable asking for assistance from someone outside of their department as a result of their WLI participation. There were significant increases in the number of women strongly agreeing to those questions.

Self-determination theory suggests that individuals need relatedness, competencies, and autonomy as characteristics for the success of initiatives. Within each of the focus groups, responses were categorized. Investigating those constructs within the current leadership initiative, leads to the following:

Relatedness. A main benefit of engaging in the WLI is the connections the structure provides. Its members are connected with other members and experience the feeling of belonging as a result of inclusion in this organization. The organization and its members encourage a mutual respect between participants and encourage reliance on other participants. Relatedness suggests the individuals have the desire to feel connected to others and to both love and care for others as well as be loved and cared for in return. This construct is fulfilled by the themes of networking, mindfulness of others (co-themed with competency), mentorship, and personal growth. These themes are echoed in their importance by the women of the WLI in various contexts in the selected quotations from the coded transcripts, selections of which are available in Table 3. These quotations show a sense of community and belonging emanating from membership and interaction with other participants in the WLI, which may have been lacking for many of the women before. This can be illustrated by the following comments:

- it was a wonderful experience to get to know people from other parts of the medical sector and the university and build community;
- it's like a family reunion. You know? We see each other... And then you try to catch up. Because you share in it all;
- [The WLI training taught me] how to listen to someone and reflect back what they're saying and not interject my own sort of assumptions or thoughts or experiences and whatnot unless that was really what was desired. And so how I've spoken to people has really changed because of that session;
- I know if I need something right now, I can call one of my mentors;
- I have other women to contact to get advice; and

- [A fellow WLI member said:] "I'm going to introduce you to this person at the state level. They represent us. This is who you have to talk to. And you need to go do that." ...to make those introductions, to have that happen, was *huge*, and all as a result of, of this WLI and networking.

Quotations obtained in the focus groups within the WLI showed the importance of relatedness. Of the themed constructs, networking, mindfulness of others, and mentorship (the latter two co-themed with competencies), there were 106 quotes distributed nearly equally among the three focus group sessions.

Competencies. A participant in the WLI has the opportunity to interact effectively, to gain mastery over tasks, and to learn different skills that increase her competency. These skills improve her ability to succeed at challenging tasks and to attain a desired outcome or prevent an undesired outcome. The focus groups provide insight into Deci and Ryan's world of desired competency. The themes covered in this construct are: mindfulness of others², mentorship³, career development, navigating unwritten rules, and personal growth⁴. These themes were reflected in each of the focus groups.

Looking at mindfulness, the individual women of the WLI commented on the following aspects of her experiences:

- to really contemplate and dissect and facilitate the other person's ability to work through their own problem; and
- it really made me mindful of others, the issues that others may have, and being sensitive to their development.

This suggests specific growth in the area of mindfulness in allowing an individual to master this important aspect of his/her personal development.

Mentorship was seen to matter to the women in a variety of ways with specific women commenting as follows:

- So, I had two women come to me within my organization who are in a really tough experience, during my WLI experience, and I said I'm going to start practicing what I'm learning in WLI.
- "What are your personal goals? How can I help you accomplish them?" So I think that that's a direct result of the WLI.

Table 3

Responses in each of the focus groups for the identified themes

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Number of Responses
Networking	29	28	25	82
Mindfulness of Others	7	3	6	16
Mentorship	3	3	2	8
Career Development	44	36	32	112

Personal Growth	31	7	8	46
Navigating Unwritten Rules	10	40	10	60

Navigating unwritten rules is also important to one's development and progression in an organization; without such knowledge roadblocks may be encountered unknowingly hindering or stopping all forward progress. These themes are reflected by the following quotations:

- the perceptions and expectations are sometimes unspoken, are sometimes hard to negotiate.
- Then there's a rule that says you can't go there. Then there's a rule that you have to talk, that you have to have permission, or you can't have this, or you can't have that, or sit down, stand up—what do you do? You know? And who do you talk to.
- I try to talk to my team about unwritten rules. I mean, there's no way you're going to know about these unwritten rules unless somebody tells you the unwritten rule.

Career development and personal growth also reflect important areas of competency and can be seen in the following comments:

- I took the job, my current job, I don't know that I would have taken it had I not been part of the women's leadership;
- the way I'm working with my peers and superiors has definitely changed...[the WLI] is allowing me to actually I think be a little more independent, and think a little bit more like a faculty membe; and.
- That certainly gave me a different perspective on who matters, how I can reframe what I'm doing and they'll be on board.

Autonomy. Finally, participation in the WLI reinforces feelings of independence or freedom—helping women feel in control of their own behaviors and goals. Of the themed issues, personal growth (co-themed with competence) is the only construct directly associated with autonomy. The focus group theme of personal growth⁵ illustrated the construct of autonomy. Given that academic environments tend to have much greater autonomy relative to private industry, the skills and relationships forged in the WLI only augment the magnitude of the autonomous environment already existing for the majority of the women in the initiative. The women of the WLI may already have many of these factors associated with their jobs, and thus only one response-type was noted as a co-theme⁶. The commentary here and some of the alternate themes may allow increased competency and relatedness which in term will help empower women with feelings of confidence leading to an evenmore enhanced autonomous environment. The quotations attributable to autonomy are:

- I was in a situation before that I realized wasn't fitting me. And that was tough. Just, this really gave me the confidence to say, "Okay, I need to step back. In a moment when

everybody else is leaning in, I stepped back. Which, you know, is tough for me because, you know, I definitely kind of like to go with the flow and be a part of a bigger movement. So I did step back, and made a change. And that was huge. Having the confidence to do that and kind of put myself first was huge. And I think that that's given me now a stronger voice, as you mentioned, to really speak up more and to put my ideas, my leadership out there, and not constantly kind of give myself up for everything else and everyone else. You know, to really kind of look inside.

- the first year was very much about introspection, about myself and areas of strength and maybe some areas that I could improve upon.

Conclusion

It is quite clear from both the qualitative and quantitative data that participation in our Initiative had a significant positive impact on the women who participated in the program each year. The constructs within Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory of autonomy, competency and relatedness ripple throughout the comments made by the participants in the Women's Leadership Initiative. Due to the environment in higher education, the construct of autonomy is not as highly noted by the participants. In contrast, the women's comments clearly illustrate the importance of the dual constructs of relatedness and competency. Participants articulate the sense of belonging that Deci and Ryan (2000) describe as relatedness within the framework of the Women Leadership Initiative. The existence of a fabricated and intentional network allows for increased performance in one's job and thus greater competency, the last of Deci and Ryan's (2000) constructs.

It is not surprising that women enjoy connection to other women. Eagly and others have pointed out that social norms for women are aligned with them being more communal and concerned with the welfare of others (Eagly, et. al., 2002). Thus, relationships that are developed as part of the pod process enable women to act according to their prescribed gender roles.

It has been previously reported that cohorts have mixed results regarding their efficacy (Beachboard, Beachboard, Li, & Adkison, 2011). However, the researchers have found that the relatedness or networking in the pods of the Women's Leadership Initiative was one of the most important aspects of the program. Helgesen has defined the connection among women with the term *web of inclusion* (1995). She likens these intricate, circular patterns to those webs made by spiders where structures are connected in concentric circles and bound together with interweaving lines. In this system, the leader is at the central point, not at the top of a pyramid or hierarchy. This model posits:

leaders tend to be people who feel comfortable being in the center of things rather than at the top, who prefer building consensus to issuing orders, and who place a low value on the kind of symbolic perks and marks of distinction that define success in the hierarchy. (p. 20)

Critical to the success of this program is the full integration and continued participation of the chief academic officer. In not only the ideas on the structure of the program, but also in the implementation of the four major components of the initiative, effectively placing herself at the center of the “web.” Thus, this initiative utilizes constructs, specifically relatedness and less-hierarchical structures that enable women to feel comfortable in their leadership training.

This type of program may yield even greater outcomes in future years with the expected change in the environment in U.S. universities. Crow and Dabars (2015) suggest that success in these organizations will necessitate changes in the historic structures of departments and academic units. Rather than being contained in individual departments, the authors suggest that research universities will need to be oriented in smaller focused units featuring cross-disciplinary colleagues to conduct research and educate students. This institutional structure will require a flattening of the administrative structure such that administration and faculty at all levels of the institution work seamlessly in order to educate students, conduct research and serve the public. This matrix model requires people to move freely within disciplinary departments bridged and linked by interdisciplinary centers, offices, programs, courses and curricula (p. 187). Not unlike the web structures described by Helgesen where people work from the center of organizations, rather than the top, women may be uniquely suited to the new models of institutional design and delivery.

The outcomes of the WLI show the importance of relatedness, particularly noting the importance of networking within the structure of academia. Given the likelihood of change in the structure of the academic institution such networks will be critical to the success of the individual and the institution in the coming years. Seamlessly transitioning from the traditional administrative structure described as silos with institutional knowledge and teaching and research responsibilities housed within the department or college to a situation whereby freestanding units of all administrative and faculty units are housed together will require the ability to interact with others not necessarily within one’s traditional academic unit. The leadership traits learned through the WLI will help with this transition by allowing such interactions to occur organically through one’s existing responsibilities within the construct of the pod and then the larger WLI organization.

The integration of the constructs provided in Self-Determination Theory are key to making this initiative useful to its participants and in extending the reach of the program throughout the University community through the women who participate in it. Such a program can have wide-reaching impacts and the researchers encourage other academic institutions to

consider the implementation of a similar program within their own organizations to allow for increased women’s leadership within the top levels of the organization.

Limitations and Future Research

This initiative is limited to one academic institution and therefore the results may be different at another institution with different leadership. In future years, assessment will include a longitudinal study investigating the reach of this program both within the Research University and outside it as some participants of the WLI have been promoted both within and outside the University.

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Appendix A. Questions asked of participants.

WLI Focus Group Questions:

1. Has your leadership style changed as a result of your participation in the WLI?

If so, in what ways have you noticed a change and has this led to a change in your actions in your job or outside of work?

2. Do you find that you are better able to tackle a leadership challenge now?

If so, what are some ways in which your actions have been modified as a result of participation in WLI or the experiences you have had subsequently?

3. Have you learned leadership skills or competencies from your experience in the WLI? If so, what are they?

4. Do you believe that having an institutional leadership development program for women at WVU has been helpful to you in your position at WVU? If so, how?

Written question for the end of the focus group:

5. How would you recommend the WLI continue in the future?

- a. participation by members only
 - b. inclusion of more senior leaders
 - c. inclusion for more junior leaders
 - d. inclusion of junior or senior faculty
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