Leadership Styles and Philosophies of Women University Presidents
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Abstract

Although progress has been made, it remains clear that women are still underrepresented in administrative positions in all types of higher educational institutions throughout the world. While the issue is often now addressed in the literature, there are still few articles reporting research findings on the experiences and perceptions of university presidents, particularly women. Ten women university presidents were interviewed using the phenomenological research methodology. This paper reports the results of this research related to the presidents' perceptions of their own leadership styles and philosophies.

Leadership Styles and Philosophies of Women University Presidents

Although progress has been made, it remains clear that women are still underrepresented in administrative positions in all types of higher educational institutions throughout the world. Berryman-Fink, Lemaster, and Nelson (2003) reported that only 15% of chief academic officers in the post-secondary academy were women, with 70% of these positions being held in colleges with less than 1,000 students. They explained that of the women college and university presidents in the United States (who make up 19.3% of the total), 70% of them "head schools with 3,000 or fewer students, religious or women's colleges, or two-year institutions" (p. 60). Some have speculated (while others have reported research findings) about reasons for the continued underrepresentation of women in administration. These include the challenge of obtaining effective mentoring, strategic committee assignments, and work experiences; lack of leadership opportunities and experiences; devalued mental models (from women and men); lack of self-confidence, isolation, deep-seated traditions, overall discrimination; and other cultural, attitudinal, political, and structural constraints (Berryman-Fink, et al., 2003; Bickel, et al., 2002; Collins, Christler, & Quina, 1998; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995). Researchers (Bickel, et al., 2002) continue to report challenges for women in leadership positions that men often do not confront.

Since the 1970s, significant efforts have been made to increase women's participation in higher education administration (Glazer-Raymo, 1999, as cited in Berryman-Fink, et al., 2003). The Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) opened its office in 1972 (Astin & Leland, 1991). It had initial funding for a two-year project and still continues to serve the higher education community by focusing efforts and
programs on leadership development for current and future women administrators. In 1973, the American Council of Education (ACE) opened its office of Women in Higher Education, and it has offered leadership development support and programs for many years (Astin & Leland, 1991). In addition to national organizations and agencies, numerous local programs, such as the University of Cincinnati's Women's Leadership Program (WLP), have been funded and designed. The WLP was a four-year initiative that attempted to "redress the limitations of the glass ceiling" (Berryman-Fink, et al., 2003, p. 6). Even with these leadership development advancements, Glazer-Raymo (1999) (as cited in Berryman-Fink, et al., 2003) makes it very clear, however, that women's equality in higher education is still a myth.

Even with these ongoing concerns, literature reporting research on high-level women leaders in any type of organization is scarce (Thompson & Marley, 1999). Further, according to Olsson and Pringle (2004), "much of the women in management literature has focused on the 'glass half empty', the perceptions and experiences of women who may be constructed as victims of organizational structure and culture that privilege masculine characteristics" (p. 31). They explained that the literature is missing "studies of women who have succeeded and may feel comfortable participating in such a culture" (p. 32).

The purpose of this paper is to do just that. It will report the findings of a research project that studied women who have succeeded and feel comfortable in cultures that are often male-dominated. It is designed to hear the voices of women who lead in higher education and to make their perspectives and experiences more visible. More specifically the focus of this paper is to disseminate the findings related to a phenomenological research study exploring the leadership styles and philosophies of women university presidents.

Leadership Style and Philosophy: Theory and Literature

Leadership style and philosophy are sometimes viewed as generic and vague terms. Much of the extensive work in this area before 1990 was summarized in Bass (1990), and now there are a multitude of books (particularly trade) published on this topic. Furthermore, thousands of academic, scholarly, and practitioner-oriented articles appeared in a large assortment of publications throughout the past three or four decades. The number intensifies each year. However, the literature currently shares little with regard to leadership style and philosophy of university presidents (particularly women). As most academicians and practitioners will attest, there are substantial differences between higher educational and corporate environments and perspectives. Hence, research investigating the philosophies of styles of women university presidents is needed.

Two leadership theories provide helpful frameworks for constructing meaning from exploring these presidents' leadership styles and philosophies as well as the skills, abilities, and competencies they believe are necessary for effective leadership: 1) emergent leadership theory or leadership emerging from context, and 2) androgyny or the ability to lead in styles acceptable across many subgroups.

Emergent Leadership Theory

Emergent leadership theory is based on the belief that society is changing (Nidiffer, 2001). "Old-style leadership is anachronistic in today's complex, global, information-rich, interconnected culture in which higher education's leaders deal with multiple constituencies" (p. 108). According to Nidiffer (2001), "emergent leadership is more collectivist in nature, assuming a 'relational context' in which leaders share power, information, and decision-making with other group members" (p. 108). These types of leaders are participatory, flexible, ethical, authentic, connective, and team-oriented. They have developed and apply skills such as empowerment, communication, collaboration, and healing. Regardless of their official position, individuals who are perceived by others as influential are often known as emergent leaders. According to Collins, et al. (1998), these emergent leaders often become assigned leaders.
A review of the literature with regard to women's perceptions of effective leadership characteristics is helpful in understanding this type of leadership. Although not specifically noted, it appears that some studies have reported results related to the presence and effectiveness of emergent leadership. First, in Aldoory's (1998) sample of female educators, the most common terms these women used to describe their own leadership included the following: have a vision, build consensus, incorporate heart into leadership, provide direction, motivate others, demonstrate commitment, provide good coaching, and show a human side. Second, Keown & Keown (1982) found that successful woman executives not only held positive attitudes about themselves and their work environments, but they "used a 'selling mode' as their leadership style and 'expertise' as their power base" (p. 450). Third, Matz (2002) concluded that women in academe, business, and government preferred the consensual style of leadership, which is characterized by empowering others, enhancing others' sense of self-worth, sharing power, energizing others, and encouraging participation. Finally, Haring-Hidore, Freeman, Phelps, Spann, and Wooten (1990) studied women administrators and found that participants "espoused a participatory, cooperative, and collaborative style of leadership; thus, each indicated a strong preference for involving others in decision-making" (p. 179). These women gathered as much information as possible (through reading, listening, and talking) before making decisions. They did not like conflict or confrontation and tried mediation strategies to reduce it. The participants appeared to care considerably about other people, and they were aware of the effect of decisions on them. According to Haring-Hidore, et al. (1990), "most of these women voiced standards, principles, and underlying moral beliefs about working with people" (p. 179).

Other studies also provide additional insight into these phenomena. The women school leaders in Dunlap and Schmuck's (1995) book used terms such as connectedness, coactivity, shared and expandable power, empowerment, reciprocal talk, emotional energy, pondered mutuality, matured growth, collaborative change, integrity of power, relationships, web of human interaction, enrichment, caring, interdependence, and commitment. Wilson (2004) claimed that women have greater inclusiveness, empathy, connectiveness to others, perspectives of society and community, and other skills (e.g., relational, communication, listening, focus on broader issues, and collaborative). Lamis and Sintonen (2001) wrote of the importance of ethics to women leaders, and Bennis and Goldsmith (2003) claimed that consistency in values is of critical importance to effective leaders in general. Fennell (2005) studied women principals and found that they were concerned with "creating a positive, open, common language with teachers, students, parents and community members to build positive, collaborative learning communities. They viewed power and knowledge as interchangeable and expandable" (p. 163). They were good listeners, effective communicators, superb negotiators, valued others as individuals, created strong reciprocal relationships, listened carefully to all points of view, and worked with others to develop and share a common vision. Astin and Leland (1991) also discussed the notion of influence versus power for women university presidents. The presidents preferred the term influence to power and believed that it more clearly represented their style and philosophy. Finally, Anderson and Shafer (2005) argued for a broader definition of power which they termed authentic power. They stated, "Power rises out of our being, and our willingness to embrace it gives us the capacity to transform reality" (p. 56). "At its core, deeper power is anchored in the commitment to gain self-knowledge and grow through a continuing journey toward self-acceptance" (p. 63).

**Androgyny Leadership Theory**

Androgyny leadership theory appears to have similar characteristics to the emergent leadership theory. It predicts that the most effective leader will be someone who is highly instrumental (a stereotypical male quality) and expressive (a stereotypical female quality) (Korabik, 1990). Individuals who utilize this style typically have greater flexibility and a broader repertoire of behaviors than individuals who use only those skills and techniques traditionally aligned with a particular gender (feminine or masculine). Hence, women and men who are androgynous have access to "both transitionally feminine qualities and also masculine task-oriented ones" (p. 288). In fact, Park (1997) stated that "androgynous leadership style can be the most appropriate for achieving high performance in many organizations" (p. 166). Park outlined three premises...
for androgynous leaders: 1) they will have wider range of possible reactions for any situation; 2) they will have the "capacity to access a situation and to determine the most appropriate response" (p. 168); and 3) they will have "greater success in their encounters with the world than other leaders" (p. 168). Of course this would depend on the subordinate's willingness to accept a leader who combines the qualities of the traditionally task-oriented and relations-oriented gender divisions.

The literature already discussed also addresses many elements of an androgynous leader. Leonard (1981) studied the communication styles of university administrators and discovered there was little difference between men and women administrators. She stated, "The results suggested that the university climate may in fact encourage more androgynous managers" (p. RL). Both men and women discussed the importance of both task and people orientation for effective administration. Waring (2003) interviewed African-American women presidents, and most said they use the androgynous leadership style (both task dimensions and relationship dimensions); however, the vast majority spoke of the relationship aspect being most important for effective leadership. These presidents had adopted a variety of androgynous attributes or skills: relationship-orientation, people-orientation, skill-based, decisiveness, willingness to take responsibility for action, quickness of decision-making, engendering trust, communication, delegation of authority, responsibility, and reflective qualities. With regard to reflective qualities, Wingard (2005) noted that leadership theories "abound with the notion of self-reflection as a fundamental requirement for effective leadership" (p. 170). In her literature review, Wells (1998) discussed the findings of a study by Roueche, Baker, and Rose (1989) that focused on the leadership behaviors of community college presidents. The high-achieving women and men in this study exhibited strong characteristics and scores in all leadership dimensions (vision, influence, people, values, and motivation). However, women demonstrated "stronger behaviors in vision (taking appropriate risks to bring about change), in influence (able to cause followers to solve problems to work together), in people (demonstrating respect and care for individual differences), and in values (building openness and trust through personal and professional behavior" (Wells, 1998, p. 35). These are clearly androgynous characteristics since some focus on traditional "masculine" traits and others on traditional "feminine" traits.

Both androgyny and emergent leadership theory speak of flexibility and adaptability, changing leadership style based on different situations. This is highly emphasized in situational leadership theory. Ahn, Adamson, and Dornbusch (2004) stated that leadership is "a network of relationships, a polyvalent phenomenon that can only be defined in the context of the leader's relationship with his specific constituency" (p. 123). A variety of studies (e.g., those cited in Coughlin, Wingard, & Hollihan, 2005; Wilson, 2004) have found that this responsiveness to context is a key to successful leadership. Farkas and Wetlauffer (1996) (as cited in Ahn, et al., 2004) studied 160 CEOs around the world to "determine the attitudes, activities, and behaviors that shaped their respective leadership approaches" (p. 114). CEOs in successful companies, rather than employing a single leadership approach, adapted to specific strategic situations. "It was their responsiveness to company culture and their ability to refine and adapt it to new strategic needs that was one of the critical elements of their success" (Ahn, et al., 2004, p. 114).

Research Methods

According to Wells (1998), the literature supports the premise that qualitative research methodologies are the most appropriate way to explore women's issues and concerns. She explained that quantitative methods that consider individuals as detached "research objects" are not as useful for women's studies as are "qualitative methods, which do not break living connections" (Wells, 1998, p. 36). The research presented here considers only the voices of women leaders. Aldoory (1998) claimed that "this method of feminist scholarship allows women's experiences to speak for themselves" (p. 74). This study consisted of the qualitative methods of interviewing and was designed using the phenomenological research approach (Wolcott, 2001). Van Manen (2001), one of the main phenomenological methodology authors, stated that "phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday
experiences" (p. 9). He reflected, "The insight into the essence of an incident involves a progress of reflection, deconstructing assumptions and conceptualizations, of clarifying, interpreting, and of finally making meaning of the lived experiences" (p. 24). This approach was found to be very applicable with regard to exploring the experiences and perceptions of women university presidents in understanding their leadership styles and philosophies. As Gergen (2005) stated, "Leadership is a journey that starts from within" (p. xx). Phenomenology draws upon individual leadership journeys and internal perceptions which are particularly applicable in this exploratory project.

Phenomenologists recommend a sample size of up to ten individuals for the in-depth interviews (Creswell, 1998). With regard to the sample size, in 1998 Merriam (as cited in Nah, 2003) explained that in research "the crucial factor is not the number of respondents but rather the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon" (p. 77). To obtain agreement to participate from 10 current (or recently retired in one case) university presidents, 25 women were contacted via email messages, given details of the research study, and invited to be participants. They were asked for a two-hour block of time to meet with me in their university offices. Twelve accepted the invitation, and interviews were scheduled with the 10 who were available during the spring of 2005. Eight of the ten served as presidents or chancellors of strong, well-known research institutions or university systems, while two were presidents of well-known teaching-focused comprehensive institutions with strong scholarship expectations. Nine of the ten served in public institutions with only one being from a private one. Eight were Caucasian and two were African-American women. Four of these women were in their fifties and six in their sixties.

Interview items were open-ended probing questions based on the research methodology described, an extensive review of the literature, and the review of other instruments measuring similar constructs for different populations. Questions were reviewed prior to the interviews by two experienced leadership researchers. Slight adjustments to the instrument were made based on their feedback. Items were designed to extract all types of related information, and some follow-up questions were asked encouraging the presidents to search for deeper answers and richer descriptions.

The audiotaped interviews, held in the president's office in most cases, lasted approximately two to three hours each. Each interview was transcribed and emailed to the president for review. Next, a textual analysis of the responses to each item was performed. According to Aldoory (1998), inductive research, such as this, derives key issues from the findings that, in turn, might lead to a deeper and broader perspective and understanding of the experience or issue at hand. "Although the findings cannot be generalized, the level of detail obtained from descriptive, personal experiences" is invaluable and, in the case of the current study, should help fill gaps in the area of high-level female leadership in institutions of higher education (p. 79). The analysis focused on understanding various perspectives as well as exploring similarities and differences between the presidents. The analysis followed the protocol of various phenomenological studies in utilizing theme generation, categorization, rereading and reviewing, identification of key ideas and phrases, and grouping techniques. The presidents were also asked via email or phone to review the themes, analysis, and results and provide any additional perspective and insight. Because of the large amount of data collected, only three of these themes (leadership styles, skills and abilities, and philosophy) are discussed in this paper.

Research Findings and Analysis

With regard to leadership style, skills and abilities, and philosophy, the women university presidents were asked the following four questions:

- If I were to ask your university administrators and staff to describe your leadership style, what would they say?

- What is your personal leadership style?
Leadership Style and Skills

After reading and re-reading the presidents' responses to the first two style-related questions, descriptive words were extracted and compiled into Table 1. The results showed that these women demonstrated emergent and androgynous styles of leadership as described in the previous theoretical framework/literature review section of this paper. This was to be expected as Korabik (1990), Leonard (1981), Waring (2003), and others have reported that successful women leaders in male-dominated organizations/arenas (and it remains true that leadership in higher education remains male-dominated) tend to use a combination of female and male-dominated leadership traits. One president provided a good example of this type of leadership in a description about her own leadership style:

I have a deep understanding of the issues; I can engage an individual in any position and come away knowing whether he or she is trying to do the right things or if they are not. They would say that I have a fine detailed knowledge and that it can be a little "off putting" at times, but it's typically coupled with this soft style, lots of delegation and communication. I do more of this at 30,000 feet rather than at ground zero, but I can go to ground zero whenever I need to.

The descriptive words display this combination of task-oriented and relationship-oriented attributes.

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