Senior Women Leaders' Motivation and Success

In Higher Education Administration in the United States

By

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PREVIEW

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Dissertation Approval

As members of the dissertation committee for Marie Nakitende, and on behalf of the Doctoral Program at Cardinal Stritch University, we affirm that this report meets the expectations and academic requirements for the E.d.D/Ph.D. degree in Leadership for the Advancement of Learning and Service.

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As the Dean of the College of Education, and on behalf of the Doctoral Program at Cardinal Stritch University, I affirm that this report meets the expectations and academic requirements for the Ed.D/Ph.D. degree in Leadership for the Advancement of Learning and Service.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover and understand the experiences that influenced women to obtain and persevere in leadership roles in higher education administrative positions. The results enhanced understanding of what motivates women to pursue leadership positions and provided strategies for career advancement and leadership development. This study recognized challenges facing such women, as well as their tactics for overcoming them.

This qualitative phenomenological research study discovered and explored the phenomena as lived and experienced by the participants (Creswell, 1998). The purposely selective sample included 11 women in senior/executive positions in higher education administration. Utilizing a triangulation technique, the researcher collected multiple sources of data, including interviewing, observations, and document analysis.

Findings reveal that the participants were intrinsically moved by a great desire to make a positive difference, to help others, to achieve personal growth and development, and to create and support the organization's mission and vision. An array of extrinsic motivational factors such as academic training and qualifications, mentors, role models, affiliation, promotion, feedback, recognition, and family support were also identified.

To succeed in their careers, the participants identified self-knowledge, strong relationships, self-confidence, faith, mentors, networking, and humor as assets. When faced with complex challenges, they took time to meditate, reflect, consult, and pray before making decisions. These and other attributes explored proved vital for their career success. This study results supported motivational and leadership theories of Maslow's

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(1954) Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Burn's (1978) Transformational Leadership Theory, and Bandura's (1986) Self-Efficacy Theory.

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Although I dedicated this dissertation to my parents, my deepest gratitude go to my academic professors, fellow learners, special editors of my dissertation, my good Samaritans, friends and benefactors that I may never meet face-to-face , who have played a critical role to my success at Cardinal Stritch University. Thank you all. I have learned much more than I expected. However, without the generosity of 11 excellent senior female leaders, who generously shared their time, successful stories and wisdom with me, I'd not be able to complete this dissertation successfully. Thank you for empowering me. It is my prayer, that the information captured in this dissertation will

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inspire and pass on to the next generation of leaders and encourage them make positive difference in the world.

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Dedication

I never dreamed that one day I could successfully complete a research study of this nature! I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved parents, Maria Nalumansi and Remigio Musisi, who believed in me and supported me with their love and prayers from day one. I am also deeply thankful, to Rt. Rev. Matthias Ssekamanya, who encouraged my love of learning and believed that the power of learning can make positive change in the world. It is hard to find adequate words to thank you. Thank you for all you have done for me. I am deeply grateful for the prayers, encouragements, support, and wisdom I have received over the past years on my journey toward this Ph.D. at Cardinal Stritch University. Indeed, God has been with me! Isaiah: 43.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Throughout history, women have fought to improve their own lives and the lives of women who come after them. As educators, women challenged the comforts of familiarity to reach new understanding (Walton & McDade, 2001). Driven by the women's movement, affirmative action, feminism, and women's strong work ethic and abilities, women made great strides and have become more visible within the workforce, increased their numbers at colleges, and made some inroads to university presidencies (American Council on Education, 2008).

Traditionally, the administration of higher education has been a male-dominated field. However, starting with the first female president of the American Council on Education to the first female and Hispanic president of Texas A&M University, women have made some progress. A 2008 report from the American Council on Education showed that women earn 58 % of the bachelor degrees and 45 % of the doctoral degrees granted to students in higher education institutions in the United States. Currently, women hold 57 % of faculty and senior administrative staff, but research shows that women continue to be underrepresented in high level education administrative positions (American Council on Education, 2012).

In spite of that, the literature shows how women have strived and gained leadership ranks in government and business organizations. However, one place where women's contribution has not yet been fully recognized as a significant force in decision making is in education institution. Still several studies have clearly shown that women continue to be underrepresented in administrative positions in higher educational

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institutions (American Council on Education, 2012; Madsen, 2007; Valdata, Mendoza, Luma, & Hawkin, 2008). Based on that information, more research was needed to explore and detemine experiences that influenced success of executive women leaders in higher education administration.

Although women continue to be underrepresented in upper administrative positions, the statistics show that women earn more than half of all doctorate degrees granted to students in higher education. According to the American Association of University Professors (2008) report, women hold only 45 % of tenure-tract faculty. Women occupy comparatively few presidencies. A 2007 national survey by the American Council on Education found that women hold only 23 % of higher education institution presidencies. Female presidents are largely concentrated at community colleges and are least likely to head independent and/or research universities.

Though women have made some progress over the past decades, it remains clear that women, in particular ethic women leaders in administrative positions, are underrepresented at all levels of higher educational institutions (American Council on Education, 2008; Valdata, Mendoza, Luma, & Hawkin, 2008). In spite of challenges facing women, they are determined to improve their own lives and the lives of women who come after them. Their efforts can be recognized from the beginning of the first women's rights movement to vote, which was won in 1920. According to pprevious studies, White (2003) showed that significant efforts have been made through government regulations, affirmative actions, and education training to increase women's participation in the workforce, leadership, and management.

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On the other hand, despite the increasing number of women earning doctorates, research shows that the number of women in full professorship or university presidencies does not reflect the increase of women in higher education. A 2006 report by the American Association of university Professors showed that women represent only 19.3 % of full professor tenured positions at doctoral degree-granting institutions, and only 28.3 % of women professors were at master's degree granting institutions. In addition, women (AAUP, 2006) hold only 46.9 % at associate's degree-granting institutions. The research shows the number of women faculty earning doctorates has increased over the past 30 years. However, previous researchers agreed that most of women in academia are appointed in part-time and non-tenure-track positions (e.g. Chronister, Gransneder, Harper, & Baldwin, 1997; Lomperis, 1990).

Traditionally, women come to the university presidency through the career path of an academic scholar of a faculty and move up to upper-level positions leading to a university president. A survey data of 2,297 university presidents conducted by Bimbaum and Umbach (2001) revealed that out of 2,297 female presidents surveyed, 63.3 % of college presidents came to their positions through the traditional career path of an academic scholar. However, if women are not advancing their careers in higher education, it might be very difficult for them to achieve high-level leadership positions leading to a university presidency.

This study sought to explore the life experiences of 11 successful executive women leaders in higher education. The researcher's interest was to discover experiences that influenced women to pursue leadership roles in higher education and understand what assisted and helped women persevere and succeed in high-level education

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administrative positions. Initially, a 2006 survey conducted by the American Council on Education found that in 1986, women held only 9.5 % of all universities presidents in the United States. As years past, the %ages of women in higher education administration increased. In 1998 the %ages of women had more than doubled; women held 19.3 % of university presidents in 1998. The research shows that if the growth rate of women has been persistent over the past 30 years, women would be almost half of all college and university presidents in the United States.

Despite their small %ages, this study acknowledges that women have made good progress in achieving senior and executive positions in higher education. The American Council on Education (2007) reported that in 2006 women held only 23 % of university presidencies. However, a recent 2012 report of the American Council on Education showed that the %ages of women rose from 23 % of presidents in 2006 to 26.4 % in 2011. Those results clearly show that the %age of women administrators has been growing slowly, but steadily over the past years. Hence, discovering the life experiences of successful executive women leaders was important to increase career aspirations of young leaders, especially women.

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A 2012 report by the American Council on Education showed that today, 60 % of university presidents are 61 years or older. That rate is significantly higher from 2006 (American Council on Education, 2012). Currently, there is an urgent need for qualified leaders in higher education to replace retiring senior administrators in American colleges and universities in the United States. Several studies have shown that women will increase in numbers at the highest level of high education over time (Lepkowski, 2009). This study sought to encourage those interested in academic leadership to give it a full

consideration. Since 1996, women have been earning over 40 % of doctorates, and today, women earn about 58 % of all bachelor degrees and 45 % of all doctorates granted to students in higher education institutions in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Achieving higher-level positions is more difficult for women than men. Cullen and Luna (1993) showed that women leaders deal with barriers that men do not even think exist. Exploring the life experiences of successful executive women leaders was important to understand what assisted university presidents to break through the glass ceiling and overcome barriers that oftentimes limit or prevent women from advancing their careers to upper-level positions. And for that reason, this research study was important. Bilen-Green, Froelich, and Jacobson (2008) suggested that hearing the voices of women who lead in higher education is important because leaders' perspectives and experiences become more visible by listening to stories as lived and experienced by other individuals.

Gapton and Slick (1996) stated, "We do not need to worry as much about motivating women to be administrators. What is needed is to build support systems for them to compensate for the obstacles they still face just because they are women" (p. 10). The challenges facing women aspiring to administrative roles can be so many that sometimes they prevent women's efforts to make it to the top level positions in education, government, profit and nonprofit business organizations. Women would quickly advance and develop their careers if the invisible barriers and obstacles are removed.

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The literature shows that women are determined and succeeding. According to Eckel, Cook, and King (2009) report, women represent 40 % of senior academic officers in higher education administration. However, at the university presidential level, the representation of women rose from 23 % of presidents in 2006 to 26.4 % in 2011. That rate shows significant progress women have made in achieving high-level education administrative positions in the United States. Whether this is seen as women's efforts to achieve their goals or increasing participation of women in education administration and organizational leadership, both are significantly important.

Harrow (1993) stated, "Leadership, when dominated by one segment of society, suffers from a narrow perspective, a lack of richness of ideas and ideals" (p. 146). So, with that in mind, this study sought to explore ways that could assist to increase women's aspirations and participation in leadership. That does not mean that men do not need to aspire and achieve leadership positions. However, as the American College President (2012) report revealed, the demographics of higher education leaders has changed very slowly during the past three decades. Hence, exploring the experiences of senior and/or executive women leaders in high-level education administrative positions was important to recognize their accomplishments, increase their visibility, and open doors for women and future leaders.

According to recent 2012 report of the American Council on Education, the data shows that on average 60 % of university presidents are 61 years or older (2012). That rate is significantly higher from 2006. As the previous report showed, the high population of aging and retiring presidents creates an opportunity for individuals, especially women who are interested in changing careers or moving up to upper-level

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