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Abstract
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Keywords
women; leadership; reflection; higher education; challenges

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Gender and Leadership: Reflections of Women in Higher Education Administration

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Abstract

Scholarly work on leadership, both inside and outside the academy, has been male-centric, in that it most often has been conducted by men and focused on male leaders. As a result, male behaviors and characteristics in leadership roles have been the standard against which women leaders are assessed. Reflection research is employed in this article to examine the leadership experiences of three women higher education administrators in order to provide insight into women's behaviors as academic leaders. The insights gained will help us understand how women navigate the male-centric realm of higher education administration, and can provide guidance for women in academic leadership positions and to those who aspire to academic leadership.

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Until recently, most of the scholarly work on leadership, both inside and outside the academy, was conducted by men and focused on male leaders. As a result, male behaviors and characteristics in leadership roles have been the standard against which female leaders are assessed (Kruse & Prettyman, 2008; Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle 2009). Male-centric leadership models and norms have served to limit women's aspirations regarding leadership, as well as their access to leadership roles. The underrepresentation of women in academic administration suggests that masculine practices and leadership norms function to exclude women. In terms of senior administrative positions, only 22% of all four-year university presidents are women, 40% of all chief academic officers, and 43% of all other senior administrators (*The Almanac of Higher Education*, 2013). Even fewer women serve in senior administrative roles at the more research-intensive and prestigious institutions. Due to this underrepresentation of women and the recent significant increases in their numbers, far less is known about the characteristics and experiences of effective female leaders in higher education. This research probes the authors' experiences in long-term administrative careers as a small step toward redressing the limitations of scholarship focused on male academic leaders.

The underrepresentation of women in senior administrative positions in academe, particularly at research-intensive institutions, is problematic, in that it results in the waste of administrative talent at a time when higher education faces serious challenges that will be met only with strong, effective leadership. The challenges call for new ways of viewing the core mission, how higher education will be funded, how instruction will be delivered, and how findings from research will be disseminated and applied. Women possess great potential to be transformative leaders in the academy at a time when their talents are much needed. Because they have not been socialized in accordance with the male-centric leadership model, they are relative outsiders who must forge new ways of leading. Women have more freedom than their male counterparts to "role-make" as opposed to "role-take."

The authors embarked on this reflection research to identify generalizable information that would enable them to be more effective mentors to future female leaders on campus. Their experiences and lessons learned also could be valuable for others in similar institutional contexts, both women navigating administrative careers and those who wish to help them.

Reflection Research Methodology

"The most powerful influences on a woman's career pattern . . . come from her past experience" (Giele, 2008, p. 398). To understand their career trajectories and development as academic leaders, a systematic reflection exercise was structured to focus on strengths, weaknesses, and successes during the early, mid, and late stages of the authors' careers. The goal of this research was to elicit a contextualized story about key events and turning points in their careers, revealing distinctive themes identifiable in the present. According to Giele (2008, p. 399), "These themes reveal what is special about an individual's biography and can be used in a comparative way to suggest which precursors lead to which outcomes."

Reflection research is used in many professional settings to assist practitioners with self-development by focusing on the continual processes of learning from the past (Eraut, 1994; Moon, 2013). Moon (2013) argued that self-awareness is critical to professional development and that reflection is a valuable tool for enhancing self-awareness. Through reflection, researchers examine and investigate how thinking about past experiences and actions can inform and often improve future decisions. Reflective practice was reintroduced by Schon in his book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). Antecedents to his work can be traced to Dewey's 1933 writings, in which he explored reflection as a way of thinking and "coming to know," a way of making meaning for one's self. Lewin (1951), Piaget (1995, 2001), and Vygotsky (1962, 1978) also were early pioneers who used reflection to enhance human learning and development. Schoen extended their work through his investigations of reflection and practice by focusing on experiential learning and the learner's thinking about and learning from that process. While reflective practice has been used in many disciplines, it has been used more commonly in the fields of education, health, and leadership.

The reflective life story method utilized in this study entailed a commitment to record in a journal weekly reflections on strengths, weaknesses, and successes across three periods of the authors' academic leadership careers over the course of one academic semester (four and one-half months). Reflections were recorded on earliest memories of opportunities to lead and the development of leadership perspectives and styles; mid-career experiences and leadership assumptions; and, finally, more recent leadership experiences as senior, seasoned administrators. Each journal entry was based on memories of individual life courses and on key events that shaped career trajectories. Monthly meetings were held to collectively review and analyze the writings. Emergent themes were probed and discussed in these meetings, which took place over almost a year.

The reflection journals provided data to be analyzed and critically interpreted in order to better understand the administrative careers and experiences. The content was thematically analyzed and coded to identify themes relevant to the gendered experiences as academic administrators. Common themes from each of the experiences were shared, and points of divergence were highlighted, seeking contextual explanations for the differences that emerged. At all times, the authors wove into the presentation of their own experiences the literature that informed and/or countered these realities. The contextual elements, such as time frame, nature of the position, and institutional/organizational factors, helped in interpreting the experiences in order to make constructive recommendations to female administrators who seek to promote and support women in educational administration and to those seeking such positions.

Successful Leadership

Definitions of successful leadership vary and are patterned by gender in two key ways: (1) women and men who are effective leaders are expected to demonstrate different behaviors and leadership styles, and (2) male and female leaders' assessments differ as to what it means to be successful in their roles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Loden, 1985). Within the institutional context of academe, administrators forge their identities to reflect their own personal traits and talents and in response to gendered expectations from constituents. These factors interact to shape administrators and the way in which they manifest leadership and define success, resulting in widely varying administrative styles and types of successful leaders. The journal data were analyzed in relation to the self-reported accomplishments in the authors' diverse administrative roles in order to identify implicit definitions of successful leadership and to understand better the factors to which they attribute their success. The resultant perceptions and attributions cohered around themes that are described below. This patterning is believed to be partially due to gender, both the gendered socialization of each author and the gendered expectations others have of them in their roles, acknowledging that gender interacts with ethnicity

and other statuses to pattern leadership styles and experiences. Given that the authors are white females, however, the findings in the narratives are likely to be less generalizable to women of color (Davis, 1994; Jarvey & Anderson, 2005; Turner, 2007; Wilson, 1989).

Other contextual variables that likely impact leadership styles and experiences relate to the organizations in which the authors work. Their institutional homes have been aspiring and extant Tier 1 Research-Intensive universities. One of the researchers has spent her entire academic career at the institution where they all are currently employed; the others have held administrative posts at one additional large, public, "Carnegie Very High Research Activity" institution. All three have academic disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. Many personal characteristics also shape their experiences, including that all are baby boomers and have partners, children, and/or pets.

The authors' accomplishments are numerous in the roles of center director, chair, associate dean, dean, vice provost, vice president, and provost, as is evidenced by the fact that all have been upwardly mobile in their careers. Specific achievements entail items worthy of inclusion on a curriculum vitae under major accomplishments, including building and launching new academic programs and units, increasing enrollment, hiring and nurturing successful faculty and staff, fostering increased research, fundraising, obtaining accreditation, and reputation enhancement for their respective units. Given these successes, it is understandable that the narratives included discussion of a passion for their positions, work ethic, and a strong desire to make a difference in their institutions.

The authors' paths to leadership were quite divergent. One is an intentional leader, and her dissertation research focused on higher education leadership, as she knew early on that she desired an administrative career. She carefully sought out each position, looking for a "good fit," with an eye toward building on prior experience. She attributes her career success, in part, to her early knowledge that she wanted to be an academic administrator and her deliberate preparation through the study of finance, law, personnel, and organizational psychology. The second, by contrast, bemoans the fact that she "lacked a road map" for her career and too often was merely responding to opportunities that presented themselves. She said, "I never had a formal plan, definite career goals. I simply fell into positions." Her lack of a career plan echoes several studies indicating that female leaders in higher education typically do not intentionally look for administrative positions (Madsen, 2007; Waring, 2003). What remains unclear is whether their failure to do so is the result of their having been discouraged or a lack of interest in the job description and work conditions.

The third author is a self-described "reluctant administrator," indicating that she did not intend to be a leader and was, in fact, quite skeptical about such roles and the people who sought them. She reflected that, "One of the reasons I was initially so skeptical about my interest in administration is that I feared it was not a realm where trust was the norm." She also described how "the absence of female role models resulted in my not having administrative aspirations." As was the case with two of the authors, Gmelch (2000) noted that many administrators in higher education came to their positions without any training, preparation or clear understanding of what is involved in administration. He pointed out that the "socialization of academic leaders appears most often to be left to chance" (p. 217). Despite the different ways in which the authors found themselves in leadership roles, their narratives revealed several common themes as they reflected upon their success.

Characteristics of Successful Leaders

Wolverton et al. (2009) reviewed the literature and found several characteristics commonly associated with effective leaders. Passion and commitment, self-awareness, and self-confidence are among the characteristics listed, and each is evident in the three reflection narratives. Throughout their careers, each author described a "passion about higher education" and a "desire to make a difference" through their work. Each entered higher education leadership because of this passion and commitment to both the organization and its people. One summed up the perspective held by each, saying, "I had a passion about the higher education enterprise and the belief that if I did my job well, I could play a role in making an important difference in the lives of others." Another stated, "Probably my greatest strength as a new administrator was desire and passion to do the job." The third described how her commitment often resulted in working 24/7. She added that, "[she] didn't complain or think of her efforts as anything out of the ordinary or exceptional" due to her commitment.

In terms of self-confidence and self-awareness, each had insights, gained through reflection, into personal traits and abilities that serve well in an administrative role. Their discussion of self-knowledge revealed that

they are confident women. One talked directly about how she "had much to offer" as a leader at her institution. The second typified the understanding that self-confidence is essential when being contrasted with some of her female colleagues, stating, "I was astounded at how the very bright and capable women I encountered seemed to doubt their abilities and lack confidence that they could get the job done." Reflecting on her own strengths, the third author discussed the importance of "knowing how to be a professional" and how this knowledge was key to her success. She also focused on how her ability to be comfortable and understand others' work styles served her well.

Self-awareness also means understanding how one's behaviors and traits may cause difficulty in the position. One author recognized that her informal leadership style sometimes led others to take her less seriously. She said,

> My own personal leadership style is not a very formal one, nor is it directive or authoritative. I prefer to earn respect through actions, not to claim it through a reliance on titles, position-specific authority, and an authoritative demeanor. Unfortunately, my leadership style only served to reinforce the gendered stereotypes held by colleagues (e.g., women as weak leaders). In order to be taken seriously by these colleagues, I resorted to becoming more directive and authoritative.

These comments illustrate the importance of self-awareness for effective leaders, in that self-knowledge motivated change and improvement. Another example of when self-knowledge motivated behavioral change is seen in one of the narratives when the remark was made about learning to "moderate emotions, being calm and cool."

Successful Leaders = Selfless Leaders

The most striking commonality across the descriptions of success was the tendency to define success in terms of the *accomplishments of others*. Each explicitly described the ways in which success was defined as *facilitating* the accomplishments of others, whether through the removal of bureaucratic obstacles to work or service as teaching and research mentors. When reflecting on accomplishments as department chair, one author described her work to tailor the teaching load of her faculty to allow them the time needed to produce research in a high-pressure environment where earning tenure required considerable research accomplishment. When asked to describe her *own* accomplishments, she said, "I am working very hard to clear a path for my faculty to be tenured. . . . *They* are generally successful." She clearly interpreted their success as evidence of her own. She added, "Our job is to serve . . . To make the work of all — administrators, faculty and/or students — easier, better, faster, clearer. I wanted to be in a position to help, develop, grow, and make things better." Porat (1991) labeled this approach to leadership as *facilitative leadership* and argued that it is a style more common among women administrators in educational settings. One of the writers exemplified this approach to leadership when she stated, "I believed that being an administrator meant facilitating the work of others, especially faculty, and these bureaucratic procedures were sapping their time and resulting in low morale." Another directly addressed the downside of working to support others, noting, "I want to help faculty and students. I want to say yes to their requests for time, dollars, doing something differently. Saying yes takes time and working around the rules, creating new rules, doing things differently. It's important to do this, but the path is uphill." She referred to the desire to facilitate the work of others as the "service mentality," saying that it can be a weakness because it consumes so much time and energy. Stating that "I worked long hours," she reminded readers that, when you work to serve, it is important to not do the work that others could and should do.

A clear line can be seen between claiming the accomplishments of others as one's own and exhibiting selflessness in leadership. The former entails taking credit for the work of others; the latter recognizes one's influence on others' success and takes pride in that contribution, but does not claim credit in a way that detracts from others' accomplishments. The authors' reflections indicated that, while they derive internal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment from facilitating the success of others, they do not publicize their role in those accomplishments. In fact, they often downplay their contributions. One described how new programs and degree creation require "that the credit for those and other efforts must go to others. *Leaders should not be stars; rather, they should be star makers*." Another speculated that this distinction between claiming credit for oneself and granting it to others is a gendered pattern, stating, "I was also struck by how male officers in the organization seemed to be very willing to take credit for the work they delegated to others." While

each perceived the relative selflessness as appropriate and something that enabled success in a career, even as the very mark of success, it's quite possible this focus on others' accomplishments has a downside. If credit and recognition is always awarded to others, they receive all the credit and the administrator is unable to develop a reputation for being effective. Even if the authors find it unnecessary to take credit for their own internal sense of worth, those who are responsible for promoting them and rationing rewards for good work need to understand their contributions. Consistent with literature on women in leadership, the authors posit that women are disproportionately likely to be selfless leaders and that this approach to leadership is partially responsible for their failure to be upwardly mobile in administrative ranks (Growe & Montgomery, 2000). Perhaps the best evidence of their tendency to give credit to others is the fact that each remarked in the reflection narratives that it was most difficult to write about successes. It appeared to be far less difficult to articulate challenges; even when writing about strengths, each noted that those strengths were "two-sided," with an accompanying downside.

Successful Leaders Build Networks

The narratives revealed that success is viewed as a team effort. One such observation that, "as a leader (dean) I couldn't be successful without the help of others" is typical of the accounts of success. When describing the many accomplishments over her lengthy career as dean, she noted, "When people ask me how I made it work, I tell them that it was a team effort." This theme is a constant throughout each career. In her first administrative role as a center director, she felt she "mostly succeeded, however, because I had so many colleagues both internally within the university and externally at other academic institutions who were willing to help me get my work done." She also discussed the importance of support staff in the success of administrators, stating, "they can make you or break you." The importance of building networks was emphasized in facilitating one's success as a leader, describing how one of the authors "networked with as many staff/administrators in similar jobs across campus as I (she) could." She continued by discussing how relationship building is the most critical task at hand when one transitions to a new institution. When describing accomplishments, one referred to her "personal networking ability" and the creation of partnerships. Another focused on the importance of administrative networks beyond her campus and on the importance of earning the trust of others in order to effectively build networks. She described restoring a sense of trust between faculty and administration as one of the most important accomplishments of her administrative career. This emphasis on collaboration is consistent with findings from a qualitative study of 20 female higher education leaders at four-year institutions. Steward (2009) found that the women in her study emphasized collaborative accomplishments and used information sharing to establish trust and inspire a shared vision.

Descriptions of leadership as a team effort are consistent with the leadership style commonly referred to in the literature as "expressive," "communal," and/or "participative" (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Such models are at odds with current norms that emphasize male, transactional and hierarchical models of leadership (Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009). It is unclear to the authors as to whether their tendency to emphasize working with others is a result of gendered socialization and conformity to stereotypical expectations, or a response to a challenging work environment where success requires a focus on others, pulling them into their networks and winning them over. Significant studies suggest that women administrators in the academy often are excluded from male networks, making their work more challenging (Dominici et al., 2009). The writers hypothesized that their emphasis on building networks is a means of addressing this exclusion. Another question raised from the emphasis on building teams/networks is whether the time and effort required to develop and nurture such relationships is an efficient investment of these scarce commodities. For example, would a comparable male administrator, acting in a more independent fashion, achieve goals more quickly? Would these accomplishments be as lasting without the support of others?

Some leadership scholars argue that, in the new highly competitive and rapidly changing global economy, institutions must be nimble, innovative, entrepreneurial, and flexible (Bornstein, 2007; Lipman-Blumen, 1992). It is believed that these characteristics are especially important for higher education institutions today as they confront a rapidly changing environment. This suggests that the leadership traits evidenced by the more communal or collaborative leadership styles described in the reflection narratives may be serving them well in a new era. In a study of female higher education administrators, Steward (2009) found that the women leaders she interviewed effectively used collaboration

and communication to build relationships, establish trust, and inspire a shared vision. Summarizing the successes over her career, one of the authors indicated she "acted as a change agent. I believe my hallmark as a dean . . . has been my ability to invigorate change in a dynamic learning environment." Clearly, her collaborative leadership style enabled her to create a shared vision and acceptance of change.

Recognition of the invaluable role of mentors in preparation of becoming effective administrators resonates throughout the narratives and provides another example of the assessment that leadership is not a solo undertaking. One author stated, "I have continually been mentored and counseled by outstanding professors, administrators, and colleagues." She continued by describing how the provost at her institution launched her administrative career by encouraging her to become a center director, promising that he would teach her everything he knew about university fundraising. He was true to his promise, and she noted that "he taught me most of what I know today about development work." Mentors were often those to whom the writers reported. One acknowledged how her president mentored her when she served as vice provost, maintaining a good balance between support and encouragement and gently pointing out areas for needed change. Another described how fortunate she was as a department chair to have a dean "who wanted me to be successful and supported me wholeheartedly." The narratives make clear that, as they moved up the administrative ladder in the organizations, the gender imbalance in leadership positions meant that, most often, their mentors were men. The lack of role models and mentors for women in higher-level administrative positions in higher education has been widely recognized in the literature (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Eakle, 1995; Hensel, 1991; Ryder, 1994; Swoboda & Millar, 1986; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). One narrative described differences between male and female mentors, stating, "While my male administrative mentors did not focus on gender-specific issues as my female faculty mentors sometimes did, they were still invaluable in orienting me to my new roles and they exercised great patience and were generous with their time and support." She went on to report that a key contribution of her mentors to her success was their encouragement that served to build confidence in her ability to be successful.

The narratives revealed that, because they believed mentoring played an important role in enabling them to succeed in their administrative careers, they defined an effective mentor to others as an indicator of their own success. When writing about her accomplishments, one described her mentoring activity as provost, stating:

> As a mentor I was able to convey information, but I also was able to dispel some of the grandiose notions about what it meant to be an administrator. I tried to foster in mentees a sense of service and enjoyment in facilitating the work of others. . . . Today I can look upon the administrative accomplishments of a small set of women I mentored and see that they are making very important contributions.

Successful Leadership and Task-Orientation

While the literature on gender and leadership often suggests that women's interpersonal orientation is at the expense of a focus on tasks and a more male-oriented leadership style (Chliwniak, 1997; Desjardins, 1989; Forsyth, Schlenker, Leary, & McCown, 1985; Kearney & White, 1994), the reflections do not support this. Eagly and Johnson (1990) suggested a task-orientation is a key criteria used by organizations in selecting managers and administrators. As task orientation often is considered a prerequisite for entry into administrative careers (Bunyi & Andrews, 1985), it is not surprising that the authors' experiences revealed a melding of both task orientation and a focus on the maintenance of inter-personal relationships. One discussed how her definition of an administrator centered on being self-directed and task-oriented. Another described how her earliest successes in administration centered on delivering what was asked of her and doing so on time or ahead of schedule. She said, "I simply dove in headfirst and worked at it until it was done. . . . I found early on that if I did good work and delivered that I had to spend far less time impression managing and showing others that I was capable and ambitious. All I had to do was do the work." She described how her president acknowledged this task orientation by referring to her as "get it done Dunn." She reflected on gender differences in task orientation when describing her work in a professional organization by stating, "Women provosts in this organization were much more hands-on and got things done; men were more likely to procrastinate and delegate so much work that there was nothing left for them to do."

The narratives suggested that effective and frequent communication was required in order to blend a focus on others with an emphasis on task completion. One of the authors referred to her "strong communication skills

(speaking, listening, and writing)" as key to her success. Another noted, "People need to know expectations and need to understand the reasons for doing things." The third discussed how open communication is necessary in order to accomplish goals. When comparing her own success to that of a male colleague, she said, "But he did not communicate the reasons for his actions and played everything very close to the vest. If there is anything I learned as a sociologist who focuses on workplace dynamics, it's that workers will accept most any change or action in the workplace, even ones that affect them negatively on a personal level, so long as they are given a reasonable explanation." She suspects that women are likely to explain, communicate, and reason with others in the workplace because they are *less comfortable dictating* and perhaps were even concerned that, if they did those things, the employees would be less likely to follow their mandates due to their gender. Prior research found that women who were task-oriented were at greater risk than men of being considered pushy or aggressive (Gale, 1988; Reinarz, 2002). The writers speculated that their heavy reliance on communication is an attempt to avoid these labels and ensure they do what was referred to as "bringing others along with us." Their emphasis on communication to accomplish tasks is consistent with Helgeson's (1990) findings in a narrative study revealing that female managers in her sample placed such an emphasis on sharing information, that they routinely scheduled time to communicate. In an extensive study of gender differences in leadership styles, Kabacoff (1998) found that women in leadership roles were much more likely than men to state clear expectations for others, clearly express thoughts and ideas, and maintain a flow of communication.

Successful Leadership and a Focus on Funding

Another commonality in the descriptions of successes was a focus on revenue generation and the pragmatic and efficient allocation of resources. The position of Associate Dean of Outreach required the generation of revenue through developing and offering new programs to new audiences, often international. She succinctly described her success, stating, "I positioned the unit to make a lot of money." One defined her role as dean as focusing on "outreach opportunities . . . to raise significant development dollars to support initiatives." The networking skills described earlier are thought by both to be key in their ability to generate new revenue for their academic units. Another stated, "if they had a way of . . . generating dollars, I was all about learning what they knew." The third focused more on her success as provost in equitable and transparent resource allocation. She said, "I managed to systematize the academic budget allocation process when previously it was rather ad hoc." She also discussed removing obstacles to others' ability to generate revenue as she discussed restructuring the institutional review board process, which had become a bottleneck for those seeking external funding for their research. Each described traits and abilities that helped to focus on resource generation and allocation, including being "data-driven" and "good with numbers."

To contextualize the focus on funding, it is important to note that, while they all built their careers at public (state) institutions, much of their time in administration coincided with steady decreases in state support for higher education. The challenges associated with declining state support were noted: "The governor was not supportive of providing the resources necessary to carry out our mission with integrity . . . raising tuition was seen as an indication that we were not good stewards of resources." While gender stereotypes suggest that women are less likely than men to be focused on the monetary dimension of leadership, in the context of declining state support, it would not have been possible to succeed without making revenue generation a top priority.

Success in the Face of Resistance and Challenge

As accomplishments were outlined, each writer acknowledged periods when success, much less survival, was difficult. The challenges varied greatly and were issued through a range of different sources, including peers, direct-reports, and supervisors, as well as from circumstances in their personal lives. One described a colleague who was envious of her success and worked consciously to inhibit her progress and stall her promotion. Research suggests such occurrences are common. A survey of 2,850 academic administrators in Canada found that both women and men reported the greatest obstacle in reaching their current post was jealously and infighting from peers (Berkowicz, 1996). Also mentioned was how the transition to a center director role in a new institution involved stepping into a very troubled unit: "It was not a peaceable kingdom, . . . the faculty was split on almost everything . . . The senior

faculty didn't want a new director." Difficulties were recounted in working with staff who were not performing and, thus, inhibiting progress, and the difficulty in terminating their employment due to elaborate Human Resources policies and procedures. One writer was almost overlooked for a well-deserved promotion by a new interim president who was "older and old school." She said, "I began to suspect that he was not comfortable with a woman in the role . . . he began to call me 'kid.'. . . I began to realize that he was uncomfortable not only with my gender, but also my age."

Personal lives presented challenges to the administrative success of the authors, primarily through "competition" for their time. A self-described "workaholic," one noted her main focus was on her job and not her physical, social, or emotional well being. She wrote, "I didn't realize it until later when I looked at my journal that I wasn't doing much of anything except working. I had stopped exercising; I had stopped going regularly to the movies; I didn't read so much for pleasure, but I did read the *Chronicle* from cover to cover each week." She also recalled how living in a bicoastal relationship during the early years of her administrative career meant she could see her spouse at best every other weekend. Another discussed that she felt inept because she couldn't balance (she actually said "juggle") work and her personal life more effectively. She described her work as "all consuming" and noted, "I sometimes felt a failure as I knew many men in similarly demanding roles who seemed to be able to make it all work. Careful observation, however, told me there was typically a supportive spouse behind the scenes who managed many details in the personal sphere, providing the support that enabled them to focus on work."

Leadership Lessons Learned

The descriptions on how obstacles were overcome centered around a theme of "lessons learned." As situations were recounted where others stood in the way of their progress as leaders, the authors described themselves as "naïve," "having misconceptions," and "being green" because of a failure to anticipate these difficulties. The narratives emphasized that they worked to learn from their challenges to avoid similar problems in the future. Explaining what she learned from interacting with a difficult supervisor, one writer stated, "It is best to find out where your new supervisor is coming from. I made assumptions and should not have. . . . You need to ask questions and think about the ways in which your perspectives mesh with those of your boss. It didn't really occur to me (to do that). How naïve." Another recalled a time when difficult colleagues were circumventing her supervisor and said, "I did not have enough administrative experience to know what to do to help the situation. I did learn never to do end runs around anyone." Almost being passed over for a promotion taught one to be aware of other's prejudices, but also to recognize that "negative stereotypes can, over time, be eroded through positive interaction." The narratives suggested that learning from difficulties became a survival skill that aided in being successful at later stages of their careers.

Determination and perseverance also are themes that pervaded the narrative descriptions of the challenges faced at various stages of their careers. Rather than turn away from the challenges, they confronted them, though sometimes with great difficulty. Rereading the narratives, they seemed unwilling to consider the possibility that the challenges could derail their administrative careers. The difficult transition to the new position as center director was discussed relative to the demanding expectation that the Center and its programs be transformed (which she ultimately did), in addition to widespread faculty resistance. This was the "loneliest period of her life," while the writer put forth the "determination to keep going when things got difficult, even when it made the job unpleasant for extended periods of time." She said, "As far as I could see at the time, I had no choice but to make things work."

One author's "knowledge of leadership issues and realities" provided her with the much needed strength to move forward during difficult times. She recalled how she felt during a period of conflict with her dean, noting, "My idea of how to do the best job possible was at odds with that of the dean." She described her feelings at the time, saying, "I had not thought this would ever happen. I had spent my entire career establishing myself as an authority, capable and self-directed and now it seemed that I might need to work VERY differently." While not easy, she accomplished what was necessary to survive in her role and make progress. A review of the challenging periods described by each suggested they were most likely to occur in times of transition, either to new institutions or new supervisors, and/or when expectation gaps existed regarding their roles and those to whom they reported.

With respect to addressing the challenge of work-life balance, less success was found in their roles as leaders. The narratives revealed the personal life often took

a backseat to the professional and, in many instances, the personal lives suffered as a result. On occasion, circumstances pushed the personal to the forefront, and the work lives suffered. The decision to step down from the provost's position was made because of the difficulty of combining work and family life at a time when called into an intensive caretaker role. While she felt this was the right decision, she laments leaving a position she loved. Reflecting upon this time she said, "I consider this (the inability to achieve work-life balance) a great failure on my part, as I loved the work, and if I had been able to more effectively achieve balance, then I would likely have remained in the position for many years to come." The immense popularity of the recent national best-selling book by Sandberg and Scovell (2013), *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead,* makes clear the difficult choices that female leaders confront regarding work and family balance have no easy answers. If there are lessons to be learned from the experiences on this issue, they are ones that were not realized in time from which to benefit. Not surprisingly, the authors' mentoring advice to women entering administration always will include words about diligently pursuing balance. However, they question whether academic administration today is structured in such a way as to afford a real chance at striking that balance for most. Their optimistic natures compelled them to believe the redefinition of senior academic leadership roles one day will be accomplished to the benefit of both female and male leaders. This will occur as a result of the persistent and insistent voices of new leaders employing lessons learned from their mentors to negotiate roles that allow such balance.

Concluding Thoughts

The reflection research for this project represented a change in method for each author. They were trained in disciplines with more structured, strictly detailed research procedures designed to ensure reliable and valid results. The study of oneself was not considered sufficiently "scientific" or objective due to concerns about sample bias, biased perceptions, and the limited generalizability of findings. Clearly, more scientific approaches are important and much needed in the study of academic leadership that employs larger, carefully selected, representative samples. However, the authors believed that careful, systematic self-reflection and analysis also yields insights valuable for understanding one's own career and guiding and mentoring others. Those in similar roles and contexts also may find themes that emerge from reflection research, which is a useful guide for their own professional development. The writers were struck by the many common themes that emerged from the independent reflections, suggesting much commonality in their experiences.

Not only have their experiences been similar and the take-aways much the same, a common understanding has been developed through leadership in many types of higher education administrative roles — program director, department chair, dean, associate vice provost, vice provost, and provost — at different types of institutions: land grant, aspiring, Research 1, urban Hispanic-serving, and research-intensive. The results suggest that gender may be a more important patterning variable in careers than organizational context. Future research is needed that is designed to systematically compare the experiences of female leaders in various types of academic institutions in order to inform how gender impacts leadership experiences and outcomes in different institutional contexts. The conclusion of this project brought more self-awareness and confidence in the ability to serve as effective mentors for future female administrators in a range of roles and contexts.

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