

Indian Streams Research Journal

Abstract:-

As long as the traditional values and belief systems about men's and women's places as well as roles in the society remain unchanged, men and women will continue to have gendered experiences in higher education and in the workplace. The present paper aims at studying the women leadership in higher education with reference to their success as leaders, barriers and strategies for overcoming these barriers.



Deepalee Ambalal Mahida

Assistant Professor, M.B. Patel
College of Education,
Sardar Patel University, Vallabh
Vidhyanagar, Gujarat, India



WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING



Keywords:

Organic And Inorganic Paddy , Southern Transition Zone , Farm Level Analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

As observed by Pearson, Shavlik, and Touchton (1988) on the issue of women in higher education:

The history of higher education for women is replete with challenges by women for access to institutions, to particular academic disciplines, to programs. Some of these challenges have been met with positive change, some with indifference, and some with rejection, claiming women cannot succeed.

With the increase of women in the academy within both the public and private sectors, women's higher learning suffered from unprecedented religious, intellectual, and social attacks. Male scholars from different disciplines argued against the idea of higher education for women based on various negative theories and views such as women's biological differences, their physical and intellectual limitations, their less developed brains, and their gender-prescribed social functions (Chliwniak, 1997; Nidiffer, 2001a, 2002;). Opponents of women's education implied that rigorous intellectual training would make women unsuitable for marriage, trigger women's infertility, unfeminize women, distract men in the academy, and produce domestic problems such as the threat of having a strong minded or an intelligent wife (Chliwniak, 1997; Nidiffer, 2002, 2003;

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, obstacles experienced by senior women leaders as they strive for career success in higher education institutions are identified. Second, strategies employed by selected women leaders to overcome various challenges or obstacles in their paths to success are explored. The focus is on female leaders' views on women in leadership positions and the subjective meanings attached to these lived experiences. The study aims at uncovering reasons behind women leaders' success, particularly their ways of handling difficult situations encountered in their professional and personal life, so that valuable lessons and advice can be learned from their success stories for the benefit of other current or aspiring leaders.

RATIONALE:

The rationale of the study is as under.

(1) Studies on leaders or leadership theories in higher education have traditionally been focused on male subjects (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Mark, 1981; Stokes, 1984). When compared with their male counterparts, women leaders in higher education have received much less attention in the literature. As outstanding as they can be, successful women leaders' stories are less documented, and their voices are less heard. Due to the continuous lack of knowledge about pioneering women leaders in higher education, scholars have called for more studies focusing on senior women leaders' practices and experiences so that not only new knowledge about women leaders can be gained but also aspiring leaders can benefit from their success stories (Allen, 1986; Bond, 2000; Etaugh, 1986; Mark, 1981; Moore, 1984; Munford & Rumball, 2000; Walton & McDade, 2001).

(2) After conducting a comprehensive literature review on women leaders in higher education, the researcher found that most previous works focused on demographic data or career paths of executive women leaders. Their findings, nonetheless, can not solve the puzzle of how and why these women managed to break through the "glass ceiling" in academia. While the findings focused on relevant issues with more depth and meaning, they were generally limited to certain geographical areas or to specific types of institutions. Thus, additional studies need to be conducted so that a more complete picture about what it takes for women to achieve and remain in senior leadership posts in higher education can be constructed.

(3) According to the literature, mentors and role models for women in academia are scarce. Reasons for the shortage of mentors included lack of women in top leadership positions, hesitation of male leaders to mentor women, the unwillingness of the "queen bee" to assist other women, and lack of time and energy for mentoring (Anderson & Ramey, 1990; Bower, 1993; Braun, 1990; Scanlong, 1997). Therefore, the task of preserving detailed success stories of current senior women leaders becomes not only necessary but also important so that current and aspiring women leaders can, at least, learn from these examples when they have no place to turn.

(4) The gender socialization process has encouraged females to play the supportive and nurturing roles instead of the competitive and aggressive roles. Therefore, the current study was needed so that more aspiring women leaders have an opportunity to understand the political nature of higher education and to learn practical lessons from those who have already mastered the art of leadership.

(5) The best way to eliminate irrelevant gender-based challenges is to acquaint current and aspiring women leaders with strategies learned from women who have already achieved success in top leadership positions within the academy (Bond, 2000; Chamberlain, 2001; Flanagan, 2002; Mark, 1981; Ronning, 2000). By examining both the problems and the solutions in depth, this researcher intends to identify both positive and negative factors that affect women leaders' experiences in higher education.

The findings of this study will not only add to the knowledge base about senior women leaders in universities but will also provide aspiring leaders with various practical alternatives for overcoming different obstacles in their career paths.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1.To identify various factors affecting the success of women leaders
- 2.To identify institutional family or personal challenges encountered by women leaders
- 3.To identify strategies or skills employed by women leaders to overcome various barriers to success
- 4.To analyse strategies or skills employed by women leaders to overcome various barriers to success
- 5.To arrive at insights or advice these women leaders have for other current or aspiring women leaders to help them succeed as top-level decision-makers in higher education

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The guiding question of this research study was as follows:

- 1.What factors have contributed to women leaders' success today?
- 2.What institutional, family, or personal challenges have they encountered as they strive for career success?
- 3.What strategies or skills have they employed to overcome various barriers to success?
- 4.As they reflect on their careers in higher education administration, do they perceive gender as a factor that has an impact on their lived experiences? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 5.What insights or advice do they have for other current or aspiring women leaders to help them succeed as top-level decision-makers in higher education?

RESEARCH METHOD :

Why and how have some women, despite the many implicit and explicit personal as well as professional barriers reported in the literature by researchers, practitioners, and scholars, managed to secure and remain in powerful leadership positions in the academy? What are their secrets of career success? What problems once troubled them, and how did they overcome various large and small obstacles in their careers? What are their insights about women in leadership, and what advice can they offer to future leaders? Given the open-ended, exploratory, inductive nature of the inquiry, the researcher decided to undertake a qualitative study.

Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell (1998), is: an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

PROCEDURES

Following the principle of triangulation for qualitative research studies (Creswell, 1998, 2002; Patton, 2002), the researcher collected and utilized multiple sources of data, such as personal curriculum vitae, demographic survey responses and transcripts from in-depth responses in the questionnaires..

DATA COLLECTION

The targeted participants in this study were executive women administrators who occupied "senior-level positions such as president of academic council, principals, president, former dean or their equivalent. Before the process of distributing the questionnaire, the researcher collected as much background information as possible about each individual and her institution through Internet searches and through reviewing a personal vita. For personal data that could neither be found in the personal vita nor on the web, a brief confidential demographic survey was used during the interviews to secure all essential personal and professional background information about the participants. The researcher reviewed all available, relevant data to gain more familiarity with each informant, as well as her institution, and to be able to add a more personal touch to the inquiry.

The open-ended questionnaires used in the study focused on barriers that senior women leaders experienced and strategies they employed to overcome the barriers while maintaining their leadership effectiveness. Since the targeted informants were women in positions of power and experts in the field, questionnaire was carefully designed for more frank responses so that it increases productivity and the quality of obtained data.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

To gain a holistic view of the width and depth of raw data, the researcher first read through all responses given in the questionnaire. To reduce the amount of raw data, the researcher then read the transcripts for a second time with the five key research questions in mind. Following Patton's (2002) advice, during the second review, the researcher used numbers, colors, and sticky notes to identify and categorize collected data for further analysis, while irrelevant data were put aside temporarily.

Consequently, the researcher began the data-sorting and analysis process with the individual interviews and profiles by reviewing the individual woman leader's background information and responses in the questionnaire to identify repetitious ideas as well as important points made.

For each questionnaire, a long list of relevant, recurring phrases or important points made by each informant was developed. Ideas or phrases most frequently mentioned or emphasized were incorporated into the title showing major themes. Through constant reading, comparing, connecting, grouping, and regrouping, the long list of relevant and important repeating ideas was then clustered and integrated into four categories: success factors, barriers and challenges, coping strategies, and views on women in leadership. The details of these four categories are given in the following table.

Emergent themes from the analysis of responses of women leaders

<i>Success factors</i>	<i>Barriers & Challenges</i>	<i>Coping strategies</i>	<i>Impact of gender</i>
<i>Multi-tasking</i> Decision-making and Negotiation skills. Engage in professional development programs Use multiple as well as strategic layers of support networks and assistance. <i>proving oneself to be the best</i> Working Twice as Hard Support from the family healthy achievement orientation..	<i>Being taken for granted</i> gender bias, exclusion, resistance, skepticism <i>very few real friends</i> <i>Conflicts between professional and gender expectations</i> <i>juggling for positions, and outright competition.</i>	<i>Constant striving to break the glass ceiling</i> <i>Self introspection/self management</i> <i>Setting goals and patting oneself on accomplishing them</i> <i>Risk –taking</i> <i>Investing in one's growth</i> Listen to criticism and make necessary adjustments. <i>interpersonal skills.</i>	<i>Empathy,</i> <i>Safe and secure workculture</i> <i>Recognition & appreciation from the society at large</i> <i>doing the right thing,</i> <i>develop and use their own personal way of leading</i> a plethora of finely honed skills in management as well as human relations,

- ☒ After extensive and intensive analysis, it was found that first and most commonly used strategy for career success was proving oneself to be the best possible candidate for a leadership position. In other words, the informants gained their visibility, reputation, and leading roles by achieving results that nobody could ignore or deny.
- ☒ The second major theme, tests and trials, depicted common challenges and struggles reported by the informants. The second issue was the subtle skepticism of their competence and resistance to their leadership or authority.
- ☒ The major strategies for overcoming barriers and challenges as the informants strive for success in the profession are (1) when faced with overt discriminative behaviors, challenges, or conflicts; the most popular strategy was “going one-on-one.” Most of the informants said they were never afraid to engage in direct, open confrontations to deal with problematic issues or individuals.
- ☒ The juggling act was achieved through the utilization of all possible skills, support and resources, such as multi-tasking, time management, help from spouses and, employing university facilities and activities, protecting personal relationships and health, and use of internal drive and motivation to sustain oneself..
- ☒ When the number of men and women on the executive teams are equally weighted, gender evaporates as an issue for women.
- ☒ The need to overachieve and outperform constantly is a built-in strategy used by senior-level women executives to prove their competence.
- ☒ Effective senior women executives emphasize the need to know and be themselves, to do the right thing, and to develop and use their own personal way of leading.
- ☒ Effective senior women executives have acquired a unique blend of personal attributes, including a heavy dose of independence, a risk-taking mentality, a plethora of finely honed skills in management as well as human relations, and a healthy achievement orientation..
- ☒ Among the many strategies on which they relied, either to secure their leadership effectiveness or to combat difficult situations in their professional and personal lives, the most essential and indispensable are forging strategic and multiple layers of support through connections, collaboration, networking, sponsorship, and advocacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND FURTHER STUDY

Whether from the historical, socio-cultural, structural perspectives, or from research findings drawn from previous works as well as from the current study, the battle toward deconstructing the traditional preconceived patriarchal contexts for women is not over yet. To build a better future and a more diversified, equitable system of leading, learning, and teaching for all constituents, higher education leaders need to continue to invest their efforts and energy in re-examining, re-defining, and re-structuring the traditional, taken-for-granted systems of higher learning. Consequently, the researcher recommends that the following leadership actions be taken:

Make sure that when leading an imbalanced work group or leadership team, the voices of the few receive equal attention, recognition, and respect. Encourage avoidance, whenever possible, of gender stereotypes or special scrutiny toward the disadvantaged group.

Promote inclusiveness and diversity at all levels by inviting a diversified pool of participants for ideas, discussion, talents, and decision-making.

Guard against an inhospitable work climate, bias toward women, and ignorance to the needs as well as interests of the major clientele of the academy.

Provide professional development and mentoring opportunities, particularly for those with greater needs, like women and minorities, who tend to be disproportionately underrepresented in senior professorial and administrative posts.

Create a family-friendly working environment by providing programs, facilities, and services that respond to the needs of people with children and elderly family members. Revise university policies to make the balancing act between work and life easier for both men and women.

Encourage research on women's issues and equitable treatment for women. For instance, conduct campus-wide salary equity studies, and if disparities are found, initiate necessary actions to ensure equality for all.

Based on the research findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the researcher recommends the following strands of inquiry for further investigation:

Conducting a similar qualitative study with male senior leaders to compare and contrast men and women leaders' experiences in the higher education workplace.

Compare and contrast successful men and women leaders' experiences in male-dominated professions and posts, such as vice presidents for finance and vice presidents for research. Identify factors that cause the scarcity of women in those positions as well as ways to assist more women in assuming such powerful, influential positions.

Compare and contrast differences between women's perceptions about gender bias and their gender identities, particularly between those who come from male-dominated fields and those from female-dominated disciplines

CONCLUSION

Results from the current study yield both good and bad news. The good news is that the glass ceiling at some institutions has been totally shattered. At those institutions, women as equal members of the community are well represented even at the center of the power structure; their voices are heard, and their rights are well protected. The bad news is that the glass ceiling at some institutions is still firmly in place. The window over the ceiling may open for a while, but then it closes again.

REFERENCES;

1. Alvesson, M., & Billing, Y. D. (1997). Understanding gender and organizations. London: Sage.
2. Anderson, R. T., & Ramey, P. (1990). Women in higher education: Development through administrative mentoring. In L. B. Welch (Ed.), Women in higher education: Changes and challenges (pp. 183-190). New York: Praeger.
3. Bass, B. M. (1990). Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership. New York, NY: Free Press.
4. Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1992). Leading and managing: Effects of context, culture, and gender. Educational Administration Quarterly, 28(3), 314-329.
5. Cantor, D. W., & Bernay, T. (1992). Women in power. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.
6. Dickson, A. (2000). Women at work: Strategies for survival and success. Dover, NH: Kogan Page.
7. Mark, S. F. (1981). Leadership in higher education: A critical review of sex differences. Journal of Educational Equity and Leadership, 1, 180-200.
8. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (2001). Statement on gender equity in academic science and engineering. Retrieved October 9, 2004, from <http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2001/print/genderstatement-print.html>
9. National Organization for Research at the University of Chicago. (2001). Doctorate recipients from United States universities: Summary report 2001 [Electronic version]. Retrieved January 23, 2004, from <http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/issues/sed-2001.pdf>