# LEADERSHIP STYLES OF EFFECTIVE FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this research was to identify the contextual, societal and cultural factors that influenced the styles of leadership of female executives in higher education. The study profiled the leadership styles of 183 female administrators at senior level positions, such as: president, chancellor, vice president, and dean, at accredited institutions of higher education in the United States, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. The research assessed the leadership styles with the purpose of identifying the factors that positively influenced the success of female administrators. A descriptive and qualitative approach was the research method for the study. This approach was used because it allowed the researcher to study, explore and understand the experiences of successful female administrators in higher education. The descriptive approach allowed the researcher to analyze attitudes, demographics, opinions and personal experiences of the participants and its relevance to the study. A self-report survey was developed with an inquiry content derived from the literature review. Demographic data included age, age at first administrative position, marital status, institution, rank, years in current position, number of years teaching prior to administration, number of administrative positions before achieving a higher administrative position, and highest academic degree obtained. The self-report survey consisted of five questions exploring the participants' beliefs with regard to barriers, leadership styles, personal characteristics, and factors affecting women in higher education administration as well as demographic and institutional information. Findings from the study revealed the factors that determined the success of female administrators in higher education administration.*

## *Introduction*

Institutions of higher education serve as a reflection of the changes society undergoes through the years. The success of these institutions is directly related to the leadership capabilities of its administrators, as well as their ability to be aware, adapt, welcome, initiate, and serve as catalysts of change. One of the aspects that reflect this change is the large number of female administrators accepting positions of relevance in higher education institutions during the last few decades. Still, women are underrepresented as a gender, considering that women are more than 70% of the profession of educators (Gupton & Slick, 1996). The American Council on Education (2007) reported that females held 23% of president positions at higher education institutions across the nation versus 77% held by males. Females held 26.6% of college president positions at public institutions and 18.7% of college president positions at private institutions (Catalyst Research, 2008); however, leadership potential for administration and the ideal of a leader still conforms to the image of a male administrator. Education is no longer an impediment for women to achieve positions of relevance in educational environments, although other conditions and barriers are the ones posing as barriers for these highly capable women to achieve.

Niddifer (2001) noted that "American culture, and therefore American higher education, is awash in images of what a leader should look like, act like, and be like" (p. 102). Positions of influence at higher education institutions are held by males who share equal educational backgrounds and career paths as female candidates aspiring to these leadership positions. The number of male administrators in the education field has been consistent with the number of male leaders in other occupational fields; however, the relationship of the percentage of female educators in the classroom at these institutions has been higher than those similar positions held by females in other service and industrial fields (Matthews, 1986). One could argue that the opportunity for promotion for females should be significantly higher in education with the availability of capable female candidates. However, as with corporate America, the percentage of women in academic positions dropped the higher they climbed and also reported less and lower percentages in regard to faculty (tenure) positions than men at institutions of higher education (Catalyst Research, 2008, pp.1-2).

Amey and Twombly (1992) stated that presidential search committees selected candidates and eliminated others based on strongly held beliefs about leadership and leaders. Traits such as strength, vision, courage, aggression are still considered trademarks of effective leadership and are intrinsically engrained in the American culture. This is also the case when considering the physical characteristics of the leader, which tend to be associated with and concur with the figure of the white, middle class male rather than with a woman. Several research studies have defined sex stereotyping as a major drawback for women, while others have studied the issues surrounding family life of married female educators and the inability to adapt to both a career and family responsibility (Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Smith, 1998). In general, the limited amount of studies available on female administrators implied that the leadership styles of female administrators, as opposed to males, suggested problems female administrators encountered when they attempted to become part of the group. Discrimination has also been addressed and considered to be a factor for the low number of female administrators (Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Smith 1998). These factors outlining the low number of female administrators are not new to the education field or to any other service or industrial entity. Barriers exist for female leaders, but are not the only elements to be considered when examining the lives and achievements of these women.

Institutions of higher education face challenges and new trends, making it imperative for leadership to evolve. The changes faced by these institutions require a new set of leadership skills, including knowledge and development of relationship-buildings skills, a competency in which women tend to excel. "It is time for new voices, new perspectives, new strategies, new ways of working with people; all qualified individuals capable of making significant contributions to the advancement of higher education must have the opportunity to serve" (Niddifer, 2001, p. 105). According to The White House Project Report: Benchmarking Women's Leadership (2009), the percentage of females in leadership positions across business sectors: politics, law, academia, sports, military, film, nonprofit, business, religion, and journalism, fluctuated between 10 and 20%; the exception being nonprofit organizations where females held almost 40% of leadership positions. Smith (1998) and Dunlap and Schmuck (1995) noted there is a need to conduct studies among female administrators in higher education. Their work drew from various sources that presented the conditions surrounding the potential leadership appointment of women in education. The work of Dunlap and Schmuck (1995) defined the path females must be willing to follow to successfully achieve leadership roles as progressive,and often, aggressive. One of the concepts presented in their research was the fact that women administrators create their own acceptance into a predominantly male environment and the idea of these same women becoming and shaping the vision of future leadership roles in education.

Literature suggests that women in education administration have demonstrated experience and overcome personal and professional barriers in the path of becoming successful administrators. At the same time, research indicated that the level of success achieved by these female administrators was at times controlled by a series of societal and cultural factors (Alvesson & Billing, 1982; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Sanchez Moreno & Lopez Yañez, 2008). The objective of the present study was to examine the factors that influenced the successful achievement of females in leadership positions at educational institutions throughout the United States, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico.

For the purposeful sample of successful female administrators in higher education, the following questions were asked:

1. What obstacles and barriers have successful female administrators overcame?
2. What tradeoffs and bargaining took place as female administrators move to top positions in higher education administration?
3. How did successful administrators define their leadership style?
4. What characteristics were shared among successful female administrators?
5. What factors do successful female administrators identified as significant in relation to the achievement of success and their present position?

## *Methodology*

The study utilized a descriptive research approach to analyze attitudes, demographic data, and beliefs of study participants. A self-report survey was selected as the method of research. The instrument was developed by the researcher with an inquiry content derived straight from the literature review. The self-report survey consisted of 18 questions exploring the participants' opinions and beliefs with regard to barriers, leadership styles, personal characteristics and factors affecting women in higher education administration as well as demographic and institutional information.

The researcher reported on the causes that characterized the success of female administrators in institutions of higher education. Additionally, demographic data including age, age at first administrative position, years in present position, total of years in higher administration, marital status, number of years teaching prior to administration, number of administrative positions held prior to current position, current position and highest academic degree obtained were collected with the survey. Several aspects of women in higher education were analyzed and responses to some of the statements were scored utilizing Likert Scale method. Other responses were examined by evaluating the participants' interpretation and identification of influential factors which served as ways and means for them to achieve success while pursuing their administrative goals; as well as to share their advice for other females who would like to pursue careers in higher education administration. Participants were encouraged to elaborate further on their responses to the leadership topic addressed in a particular question.

The research population was comprised of female administrators holding administrative positions at two and four-year higher education institutions at the level of assistant vice president, associate vice president, vice president, chancellor, dean, provost, and president at two- and four-year academic institutions across the United States, Hawaii and Puerto Rico. Snowball sampling, word-of-mouth referral, and direct personal inquiry were the methods utilized to obtain the names of female administrators at higher education institutions. Once all participants were identified, the necessary information for completing the study and instructions were provided via electronic mail to 861 female administrators. From that total, 209 responses were received (26 no responses; 25 partial responses; 183 completed responses) for a return rate of 21%. After the completed questionnaires were returned, they were divided according to the level of administrative responsibility of each participant (assistant vice president, associate vice president, vice president, chancellor, dean, provost, and president). Analysis of results included a descriptive analysis for identifying external, contextual, cultural and societal barriers as well as leadership style and personal attributes perceived as instrumental to participant's success.

Presentation of Data The participants were female administrators in institutions of higher education who served in positions of at the level of dean, vice president level or above. The following demographic data were collected: enrollment size of institution, age, number of years in present position, total years in higher administration, marital status, children, number of years teaching positions prior to administration post, number of administrative positions current position, current position, and highest degree obtained. Of 183 ($N$ = 183) responses, 5.6% ($n$ = 10) were from chancellors, .6% ($n$ = 1) was from a president, 8.9% ($n$ = 16) were from provosts, 13.4% ($n$ = 24) were from vice presidents, 7.3% ($n$ = 13) were from associate vice presidents, 4.5% ($n$ = 8) were from assistant vice presidents, and 59.8% ($n$ = 107) were from deans. Four ($n$ = 4) participants did not indicate their positions. On average the female leaders in the study were between 40 and 59 years of age, held a doctoral degree, and had been in higher education administration an average of five to 20 years. These findings support literature that indicates as higher education administrators have retired in recent years, women are beginning to fill those positions that lead to the college presidency (American Council on Education, 2007; Gateau, 2001; Joyce, 2004; Women in Higher Education, 2002). These findings also support recent research that stated in spite of making strides in the field, the percentage of women in academic positions drops as they climb higher (Catalyst Research, 2008).

**Obstacles and Barriers Overcome by Women**

The first items of the questionnaire asked that participants select from a set of factors identified as contextual, cultural, and social barriers that affect the number of women in top level administrative positions in higher education. One hundred fifty-seven participants (86.3%) strongly agreed or agreed that family life issues are barriers to top level positions for women. One hundred thirty-eight participants (75.8%) strongly agreed or agreed that sex stereotyping is a barrier, while 121 participants (66.1%) strongly agreed or agreed that the lack of role models is a barrier to top level administrative positions in higher education. The participants also identified discrimination (65%), less money than males (62.4%), and lack of support within the organization (62.4%) as barriers to upper level administrative positions. The participants did not view equal opportunity policies as barriers. Only 31.8% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed that these policies were barriers. Table 1 reports the frequencies and percentages associated with the contextual barriers affecting women in top administrative positions.

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution for Contextual Barriers Affecting the Number of Women in Top Administrative Positions (N = 183)**

| Contextual Barrier | *f* | % strongly agree/ agree |
|---|---|---|
| Family life issues | 157 | 86.3 |
| Sex stereotyping | 138 | 75.8 |
| Lack of role models | 121 | 66.1 |
| Discrimination | 117 | 65.0 |
| Less money at positions held by male counterparts | 113 | 62.4 |
| Lack of support from members within the organization | 113 | 62.4 |
| Equal opportunity policies that preserve the status quo for female administrators | 55 | 31.8 |

Sex (gender) stereotyping (75.8%), discrimination (65%), and family issues (86.3%) confirmed that even though "great strides have been made in the area of women's rights in the workplace, employers continue to use gender-based frameworks in the decision making process" (Czarny, 2010, para. 4). In the words of one female administrator, *"I checked discrimination but I want to note that it is not overt discrimination – it is more subtle than that. Men don't chat around the table to their female colleagues as readily as to their male colleagues. In an all male + 1 female meeting, the men can go into "pit bull" mode and really attack the female if she raises an issue that they view as challenging. This is especially true if the leader of the group does not hold them in check…it is crucial that the supervisors of female administrators give them authority and then back them up…if the supervisor undercuts the female, the female is not going to be effective.* This statement directly correlates with another barrier, lack of support from members within the organization (62.4%) and confirmed recent studies that, even if subtle, discrimination has its origin in gender stereotyping, particularly, when it is considered from the leadership perspective (Madson, 2009). Figure 1 below shows the distribution of percentages for contextual barriers.

Participants commented on other barriers that affected the number of women achieving top level administrative positions in higher education. Participants' responses support literature and recent studies on gender and leadership as they further elaborated on other external conditions affecting the advancement of women into higher level positions:

- gender/gender schemas with regard to women "stopping out" to bear and rear children; this time away from the profession has a negative impact on career progression;
- self-doubt/self-efficacy deriving from the fear of failure and female enculturation (developed during childhood) to think they are not good enough, inferior, not worthy, and/or not capable of being administrators;
- women are "tracked" into positions that are not seen as the necessary stepping stones to leadership positions;
- other women as a strong contextual barrier. This contextual barrier is not related to the *lack of female models* barrier but rather can be contributed to a lack of mentors, as it conveys the message that some women in power discriminate and compete against other women instead of supporting them –*"some women are not willing to help other women climb the career ladder," "I had to suffer to get to this level, so why shouldn't you," "women become aggressive and put down other women so they can't get ahead."* This problem is identified in the responses as "Queen Bee Syndrome." Women are not able to advance because the women who had made it did not want anyone else to achieve what they have achieved; to which one administrator added, *"we compete with each other rather than support each other like men do."*

In addition, organizational culture, history, structure, and climate favoring male dominated thinking and positionality were also identified as factors affecting the successful achievement of female leaders within institutions of higher education. Within this scope, a few administrators (3.3%) further expressed their beliefs with regard to the lack of accessible professional development opportunities and culture within the organization (especially at public universities) for those already in the pipeline.

**Cultural and Social Barriers**

Respondents to rate each factor indicating if they *"strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree"* if the identified factor represented a cultural or societal barrier. One hundred and eighty-three participants (*N* = 183) responded to question 3, while 16 (8.8%) did not respond to the question, and 74 (41.6%) made additional comments regarding cultural or social barriers affecting women in top level administrative positions. Results for cultural or social barriers are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Cultural or Social barriers Affecting the Number of Women in Top Administrative Positions in Higher Education (N = 183)**

| Cultural or Social Barrier | *f* | % strongly agree/ agree |
|---|---|---|
| **Cultural traditions** | 146 | 80.2 |
| **Lack of network** | 140 | 76.9 |
| **Society's and institution's view and values toward women** | 134 | 73.2 |
| **Predetermined expectations about intellectual capacity and efficiency** | 85 | 47.2 |
| **Fear of failure (to explain why fewer women hold executive positions)** | 58 | 32.4 |
| **Preference of women to teach rather than to work on research** | 49 | 27.26 |
| **Due to equal opportunity policies, all disparities have disappeared and only the best candidates hold those positions** | 17 | 9.3 |

Of seven presented cultural and societal barriers, 80.2% (*f* = 146) of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that *cultural traditions* were barriers to advancement. One hundred forty (76.9%) also strongly agreed or agreed that lack of network was a barrier, and 73.2% (*f* = 134) indicated *society's and institution's view and value toward women* as barriers that affected the movement of women into top level administrative positions. Only 27.26% (*n* = 49) strongly agreed or agreed that *preference of women to teach rather to work on research* was a cultural and societal barrier, while 32.4% (n= 58) *indicated fear of failure*, and only 9.3% (*n* = 17) indicated *equal opportunity policies* as cultural or social barriers.

Some comments from the participants were, "*it is only in the last 10-15 years that women have entered into leadership roles and it is just now that these women are rising into higher levels of administrative leadership*;" "*the historical pattern of submissive female role to man*;" "*women are socialized (encultured), not to be assertive, hence, are not comfortable promoting themselves and their accomplishments."* These observations agree with the following research findings that "women tend to be more modest than men about their achievements and less apt to see themselves as qualified for top positions even when their credentials are equal or superior" (Madsen, 2008, p. 149).

Addressing female faculty issues on campus, five respondents commented that faculty women will not admit the need for network of other women and try to make it on their own. The limited social network is often a barrier females faced even in situations where women are well-represented in higher education. One respondent stated, "*support from other women is lacking across campus and there are few invitations to social and cultural events. Male administrators are able to spend significant time out of work in social and recreational activities with their male counterparts, golf is huge for this group and decisions are made there."* Another administrator acknowledged that "*females on campus lack that informal loop and the opportunity to embrace, develop, nurture and sustain the corps of current and future women executives."*

One administrator added that "*lack of insight into the political structure of the institution represents a barrier for women*." The same administrator acknowledged "*female faculty who have the power and the street creed, are not always well schooled in the strategy, diplomacy, lack vision, and the organizational skills needed to bring projects to fruition*."

Two administrators reflected on the fact that some disciplines do not lend themselves to assist women in the acquisition and development of leadership skills, i.e. science, technology, mathematics and engineering disciplines. The responses support question 1 where administrators identified the *conservative manly manners and management structure* as a contextual barrier for women at higher education institutions. One administrator indicated that women tend to integrate *business and life,* whereas, men tend to operate from a *business is business* approach. Therefore, the administrator continued, women are viewed as *unfocused, lacking strategy, less assertive,* and *emotional.* Another administrator commented that women still undervalue themselves in this capacity and are judged harshly if they assert themselves and are discouraged and criticized for being too aggressive, tough, and not appearing feminine.

A third administrator stated that this pattern is reflected in institutions of higher education across the nation, which is still largely European-American male oriented in their operation and culture. Another respondent declared female leadership skills tend to be softer and more collaborative and "*despite our rhetoric about shared governance, there seems to be a belief that the president should exhibit a more masculine set of attributes."* This pattern, according to two participants, seems to be more prevalent in certain regions of the nation, i.e. Southern traditions, where strong-held cultural beliefs about gender, especially among alumni and governing boards limit access to the highest-level positions.

**Leadership styles**

Participants identified their leadership style from a list of seven approaches. If participants identified with more than one approach, they were asked to rank these in order of influence from most influential (1) to least influential (3). The list of approaches included: a) *Trait approach*—natural qualities set leaders apart from followers, b) *Skills approach* – "leader-centered" leadership focusing on knowledge and abilities, c) *Style (behavioral) approach* – how leaders act, what they do, and how their actions affect others; d) *Situational approach* – every situation is different, as is the leadership approach; the effective leader knows how to adapt accordingly; e) *Path-goal theory approach* general recommendations based on characteristics of others, suggesting how leaders should act in various situations; f) *Leader-member exchange approach* – focuses on interactions between leaders and followers' emphasizes the dyadic relationship; and g) *Transformational leadership* – development of individuals with the purpose of accomplishing change and organizational growth; a transformational leader causes and creates transformation; values include ultimate ones such as liberty, justice and equality. Table 3 summarizes data results for participants' leadership style.

**Table 3: Leadership Styles of Females in Higher Education Administration (N = 183)**

| Leadership Style (Approach) | *f* | % |
|---|---|---|
| **Trait** | 10 | 5.5 |
| **Path-goal theory** | 16 | 8.7 |
| **Style (behavioral)** | 30 | 16.4 |
| **Situational** | 41 | 22.4 |
| **Leader-member exchange** | 41 | 22.4 |
| **Transformational** | 84 | 45.9 |

One hundred eighty three (*N* = 183) participants responded to the question and 30 (16.6%) did not respond. Sixty-one percent identified transformational leadership as their style of leadership; 22.4% associated style with situational leadership and leader-member exchange, and 16.4% with style (behavioral) approach. Participants identified these as most influential approaches in regard to their leadership style. Female administrators believed in the power and value of relationships as a working tool for achieving the goals of the organization. The administrators have developed and applied skills such as: "empowerment, communication, collaboration and healing" (Madsen, 2008, p. 246), which are directly related with transformational leadership with the purpose of establishing a relationship of trust and confidence with their subordinates.

**Characteristics of Successful Female Leaders**

Participants compared themselves to other women (MORE, SAME, LESS or N/A) with regard to a set of attributes identified as characteristic of successful female leaders: aggressive, competitive, verbally oriented, spatially oriented, cooperative, motivated by power, concerned about personal relationships, career oriented, family oriented and androgynous. Results are summarized in Table 4.

Overall, respondents indicated that cooperative (97.8%), career oriented (94%), and verbally oriented (91.2%) are attributes they possessed at MORE or SAME level when compared to other women. Results also revealed that the female leaders also saw themselves at more or the same level with other females with regard to concern about relationships (84.6%), competitive (84.5%), and family oriented (81.3%).

**Table 4: Personal Attributes Related to Successful Women (N = 183)**

| Attribute | *f* | % more or the same as other females |
|---|---|---|
| **Cooperative** | 178 | 97.8 |
| **Career oriented** | 171 | 94 |
| **Verbally oriented** | 165 | 91.2 |
| **Concerned about personal Relationships** | 154 | 84.6 |
| **Competitive** | 153 | 84.5 |
| **Family oriented** | 148 | 81.3 |
| **Spatially oriented** | 144 | 80 |
| **Aggressive** | 134 | 73.3 |
| **Motivated by power** | 98 | 53.8 |
| **Androgynous** | 87 | 47.5 |

In contrast, participants indicated that, when compared to others in relation to aggression, 73.3%, motivated by power, 53.8% and androgynous, 47.5%, of the participants stated they had MORE or SAME than other females. Fifteen administrators further commented on their personal attributes when compared to other women. Examples of their comments were:

- …servant leader who commits to leadership roles to help move the organization forward…firm in leadership and decision making but aware of and sensitive to the organizational needs
- I am more patient and more confident than other women I compare myself to; while I have good social skills, I am also less social and more task-oriented.
- Typical Type A personality – I want to do it all and do it well. Administration provides constant challenges that are energizing.
- I am more transcendent than other women—very Zen in my leadership style.

Participants' responses brought special attention to the relationship between gender and perceived leadership and showed that gender was an important factor influencing leadership style preferences of the participants. Participants ranked, on a six-point scale (where 1 meant extremely relevant and 6 meant not relevant), factors they posses to be successful in their positions with regard to "work skills" and "personal attributes."

**Table 5: Work Skills Related to Successful Women (N = 183)**

| Work Skill | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|
| Business knower | 11 | 6.1 |
| Problem solver | 70 | 38.3 |
| Leader | 78 | 42.6 |
| Decision maker | 62 | 34.3 |
| Stress manager | 3 | 1.6 |
| Influencer | 49 | 26.8 |

Descriptive analysis for frequencies yielded the following results in order of ranking from extremely relevant to not relevant: 42.6% of the respondents identified leader, 42.6% problem solver, 34.3% decision maker, 34.3% and 26.8% as the most relevant factors with regard to "work skills" for women in top administrative positions. Based on the same analysis, participants did not consider relevant working skills of business knower, 6.1% and stress manager, 1.6% as relevant working skills associated to success. These two factors have been identified by researchers Northouse (2007) quoting Katz as important for effective administration. Prospective leaders can develop and be trained on these skills over time.

**Table 6: Personal Attributes Related to Successful Women (N = 183)**

| Personal Attribute | *f* | % |
|---|---|---|
| Self confidence | 60 | 33.1 |
| Tolerance | 4 | 2.2 |
| Persistence | 31 | 17.1 |
| Honesty | 37 | 20.4 |
| Intelligence | 56 | 30.9 |
| Social skills | 38 | 21.0 |

**Personal Attributes**

Participants identified by ranking from extremely relevant to not relevant, the personal attributes women need to be successful in top administrative positions. Respondents considered self confidence, 33.1% and intelligence, 30.9% represented extremely relevant factors (or attributes) for female leaders to achieve success in administrative positions. Social skills, 21.0%, honesty, 20.4% and persistence, 17.1% were identified as relevant as well. Participants did not believe tolerance, 2.2% represented an attribute necessary for success in their positions. The researcher found this was an interesting fact, worth of further study, since participants had previously expressed how stereotype and discrimination were contextual barriers affecting women in top level administrative positions. Participants' responses are contradictory to research findings about team work and collaboration for women leaders. (Aldoory, 1998; Astin & Leland, 1991; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Fennel, 2005; Haring-Hidore et al., 1990; Madsen, 2008; Matz, 2002; Waring, 2003; Wells, 1998). In addition, responses also represented a contrast to Lively's statement (2000), which indicated that "most female provosts expressed concerned about equity issues" (p. A33).

***DISCUSSION***

For the female leaders in the study, the tradeoff and bargaining that takes place as they moved into positions of leadership appears to be intrinsically associated with personal choice and family issues. Most participants reported being married with children –in agreement with research findings, participants' responses confirmed that female leaders often balance multiple roles and that their commitment to succeed not only represented a challenge but brought additional stress as they tried to balance the roles of leader, mother, spouse, caretaker, community activist, etc. Specifically, gender schemas with regard to the commitment and motivation associated with the attainment of leadership positions as well as to stepping out to bear and take care of children or elderly parents because women are more likely to quit for family-related reasons (Keith & McWilliams, 1999). Discrimination and gender stereotyping are controversial subjects among female administrators which led to the general consensus that expectations for leaders are still dominated by male-centric traits.

Lack of network opportunities, lack of knowledge of organization and institutional culture, lack of professional development opportunities, and lack of understanding of the "political game" of higher education institutions, were identified also as barriers for those interested in moving up. On average respondents held faculty positions for at least six years prior to becoming an administrator—this concurs with research studies regarding to career planning as "respondents seemed to had no clear or delineated career development plans that would focus on becoming a higher education administrator" (Madsen, 2008). These results support research literature acknowledging that "in some industries (including education), women typically have had linear career paths as they rose through the ranks and become leaders" (Madsen, 2008, p. 140; Walton and McDade, 2001; White, 2003).

In regard to personal attributes and styles of leadership, the study showed that female administrators placed a high value on relationships as "key to successful leadership," acknowledged the importance of being capable to adapt and adjust to different circumstances "is more effective than employing a single leadership approach" (Madsen, 2008, p. 249), hence, adaptability and diversity of style is viewed as a positive in the study. The results indicated the female leaders combine more than one approach and fit into a number of models of leadership style. Due to the variety of constituents and the current challenges in higher education, a leader "must be able to use a variety of leadership techniques or styles dependent upon the need and appropriateness of the context" (Madsen, 2008, p. 249).

## *Conclusions*

Family issues and personal choices are considered tradeoffs among female administrators and represent a strong factor when contemplating and making the decision of pursuing a career in administration. On the other hand, for female administrators this commitment to family serves as a channel for these women to assert themselves and pursue their personal goals. Female administrators in positions of relevance in higher education engage in and are capable of balancing multiple roles understand and demonstrate successful in managing the challenges and stress associated with the various responsibilities; and agree that the social expectation for women is to have several roles and to manage multiple commitments. Discrimination and gender stereotyping are controversial subjects among female administrators which led to the general consensus that expectations for leaders are still dominated by male-centric traits.

Lack of network opportunities, lack of knowledge of organization and institutional culture, lack of professional development opportunities, and lack of understanding of the "political game" of higher education institutions constitute barriers for women aspiring to positions of relevance in higher education. Lack of role models and other women—queen bee syndrome, regarded as women-on-women discrimination, represent a barrier rather than a support system for female administrators. Female leaders believe that, since every situation is different as such it should be their ability to be flexible and that combining more than one approach of leadership style is the key to successful leadership (Madsen, 2008). The female leaders operate and lead from the perspective of serving as catalysts of change and empowerment for the institutions, subordinates and constituents they serve.

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