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MOVING UP OR MOVING ON: A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE ON MID-LEVEL UNIVERSITY LEADERS

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Leadership is often viewed through positional authority, with the most visible and highest level of leadership found in the president’s office. Despite a change in student and staff demographics, college and university presidents, as a group, do not representatively reflect their constituents. Amidst calls for increasing diversity at the top levels of leadership, the average president closely resembles the college president of 30 years ago (Cook 2012; Kim and Cook 2012, 2013).

While there have been rumors of an impending leadership “crisis” or turnover for several years, current reports indicate that a full 58 percent of current college presidents are 61 years of age or older, with (Kim and Cook 2013). Thus, leadership succession planning should be on the minds of boards of trustees and current university leaders. At doctoral granting institutions, the numbers aging out of positions are even higher, with 61 percent of current presidents over the age of 61 (American Council on Education (ACE) 2007). The traditional path to the university presidency involves upward movement beginning with a faculty position and progressing to chair, dean, and vice president (Cooper and Eddy 2007; Kim and Cook 2013). Tellingly, in the U.S., women faculty members with children do not advance at the same rate as their male counterparts (Mason and Goulden 2004). Over the past 10 years, the percentage of women faculty increased from 35 to 41 percent and women administrators shifted from 44 to 51 percent (NCES 2010). While the percentage of women presidents has increased to 26 percent, the percentage of presidents of color decreased to 13 percent (Cook 2012). Whereas the proportion of women leading doctorate-granting institutions is now 23 percent, women presidents “are more likely to rise slowly up the ranks of academic leadership” (Kim and Cook 2012, ¶15). There are obvious disparities regarding gender and ethnicity in the presidential ranks. Hence, better

understanding the pathways to top-level leadership is critical to pave the way for women and leaders of color, who continue to remain severely underrepresented in senior administrative positions.

The Chief Academic Officer (CAO) position remains the stepping-stone to the presidency, with 34 percent of presidents having served in that position prior to becoming president (Cook 2012) and 44 percent of new presidents having served as CAO (Kim and Cook 2013). The most recent study conducted by the American Council on Education showed that women hold 40 percent of CAO positions at 4-year institutions, which bodes well for future advancement of women to presidencies of these types of universities. However, only 7 percent of CAOs are leaders of color, indicating continued challenges for the placement of leaders of color within presidential slots. Overall, approximately 18 percent of executive administrative and managerial staff were racial or ethnic minorities in 2007 (Snyder and Dillow 2010), underscoring that more leaders of color are concentrated in the mid-level ranks. Although the position of CAO is opening up with respect to gender, caution is evident given the aging of leaders in these positions. A full 48 percent of CAOs at doctoral institutions (ACE 2007) and about one-third of CAOs at all four-year institutions in 2011 (Kim and Cook 2013) were 61 or older. Thus, just as the presidential ranks are nearing retirement, so too are those in the second-in-command slot. If most presidents follow a traditional pathway moving from faculty into progressive administrative positions, then clearly the middle level leadership ranks provide fertile ground for leadership preparation.

Beyond the typical movement up the career ladder, however, succession planning in higher education historically has been nil (Berke 2005; Bisbee and Miller 2006), with future leaders being tapped just prior to entering into office. Bisbee (2007) studied mid-level leaders at land-grant institutions and found that almost half of the survey participants planned on moving back to faculty, 22 percent planned on moving to another institution, 14 percent sought advancement at their home institution, and another 32 percent planned on retiring. According to Ebbers and colleagues (2010), community colleges are focusing on grow-your-own programs to develop leadership from within the organization, tapping the mid-level ranks for candidates. Particular attention centers on obtaining credentials and mentoring to ready mid-level leaders for advanced positions.

Wolverton and Gonzales (2000) reported that women and minorities are underrepresented in deanships. More telling was the finding that the deans in this study did not follow a set career trajectory nor view their position as a natural stepping stone to the provost position. Moreover, a recent study (Battles et al. 2012) reported that women currently comprise 40 percent of Council of College Arts and Sciences (CCAS) deans, which included the title of dean, associate dean, or assistant dean. Women in that study tended to hold the lowest titles of assistant and associate deans (63 percent), with only 31 percent of women in the study holding the title of dean; at doctorate-granting institutions women held 70 percent of assistant dean titles and only 30 percent at the dean level. However, the number of women serving in the dean position was most likely to be

higher at doctorate-granting Minority-Serving Institutions. The CCAS findings echo the findings of Kim and Cook (2012), who reported that minority presidents were more likely than White presidents to be women.

With the anticipated turnover in upper leadership positions, institutions may wish to consider recruiting more women and people of color into mid-level positions, as these stations are most likely to lead to a presidency and cultivating current mid-level leaders for more senior positions. The experiences of leaders at this level in the higher education pipeline, however, remains largely unknown. What is evident is that a slowing of women and leaders of color entering top-level positions as presidents has occurred (ACE 2007; Cook 2012).

Why do some mid-level leaders choose not to advance to higher positional levels of leadership within colleges and universities? Are mid-level leaders opting out due to barriers or lack of support? The purpose of this study was to investigate career trajectories of mid-level leaders at a doctoral-level institution in order to better understand how and why people wind up in formal leadership positions and their intentions for moving up or moving on.

Literature and Theoretical Framework

Literature informing the theoretical framework for this research drew from Acker's (1990, 2006) research on gendered organizations and Williams' (2000) concept of the ideal worker. Despite the increasing number of women attending and working in colleges and universities, their movement into higher-level positions appears to have stagnated, a pattern seen outside of higher education as well (Acker 2006). The unwillingness or inability of women to move into higher-level positions may be the result of socially constructed barriers that are impacted by one's gender, class, and race (Kelly et al. 2010). The core of gendered organizations builds on how Acker (1990) uses the term disembodied worker to illustrate that the job position creates a space that emphasizes the position versus the person holding the position. Kelly and colleagues (2010) investigated the impact on ideal worker norms when gendered expectations and practices are challenged. They found that although the organization studied was able to create two legitimate visions of the ideal worker, the existing (masculinized) view of organizing life around work and newer practices that organized work around outside life, "the tenacity of the masculinized ideal worker norm and related practices at work, even in the face of a workplace initiative that confronts the organizational culture directly, underscores the embeddedness of gender at work and at home" (p. 299). This study found that even after initiatives to move away from the traditional notion of the ideal worker were put into place, conversations regarding gender were difficult to maintain and many reverted back to the old norms. Though practices were changed, embedded structures remained that enforced gendered norms.

Structuration theory (Giddens 1984) further ties together the interplay between structures and individual agency.

The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves *as* actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible (Giddens 1984, p. 2).

Thus, mid-level college leaders are reacting to the structures in place that are gendered, but they also reinforce these very structures by their actions. Acker (1990) first posited the notion of the gendered organization based on the concept of hierarchies that serve to reify faceless positions built solely on a male norm. Inherent in this norm is the distribution of power. Morgan (2006) identified 14 types of power, one of which is the power vested within position, whereas another deals with the power associated with gender. Assumed in this gender power lever is that males are automatically vested with power given their gender (Acker 1990). Acker (2006) later updated her theory of gendered organizations to include race and class. Essentially, Acker argues that inequality exists in organization, based on mutual production of ideals about gender, race, and class. For example, though the numbers of women working in colleges and universities have increased, the majority of women remain in clerical positions that offer lower wages and little opportunity for advancement (Iverson 2007; NCES 2010).

Colleges and universities, as organizations, are inherently structured upon gendered ideals that are no longer the norm for most men or women. For instance, the notion of acceptable work practices for employees in white-collar administrative positions is built upon the assumption that the worker's partner (spouse) then takes on sole responsibility in caring for the home and family-related duties (Acker 2000; Williams 2000). "Eight hours of continuous work away from the living space, arrival on time, total attention to the work, and long hours if requested are all expectations that incorporate the image of the unencumbered worker" (Acker 2006, p. 448). Those who do not conform to these ideals (i.e., women or men who interrupt work to pick up a child) are viewed as violating the norm and not being dedicated workers.

The most important duties for the administrator, then, are those related to paid work. As the definition of "family" has changed and with an increase in people taking on responsibility for both elder and child care within families, workers are no longer afforded the luxury of assuming someone is at home to provide this care. The fact that colleges have more men in the upper reaches of leadership relative to their classified staff (ACE 2007) underscores the gendered nature of the college system. The concept of the ideal worker creates a model to which leaders are judged. The negative results of the ideal worker framework as enacted in universities, particularly in relation to women moving up the ranks of leadership, may create automatic disincentives for women to pursue or seek upper level positions.

Methods

This research used a hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen 1990) approach. Phenomenology allows for a focus on specific experiences and how individuals react to these situations; ultimately the essence of the lived event is garnered from the analysis of all participant data (Creswell 2006). For this study, the focus was on how mid-level leaders experienced leadership at their rank and what future plans they had for their leadership career. Hermeneutics provides an opportunity to interpret the data versus the typical descriptive nature of phenomenology (Van Manen 1990). Of particular interest for this research were how the leaders conceptualized leadership in the middle ranks at the university and how their experiences impacted their desires for future advancement.

This research was part of a larger study on career trajectories of mid-level academic leaders. The data for this research were culled from a large, rural, doctorate-granting university with approximately 20,000 students and 650 tenure track faculty. All mid-level leaders were invited to participate. For purposes of this study, mid-level leaders were defined as directors or deans of an academic unit and department chairs. Ten mid-level leaders participated: two deans (one male, one female), one associate dean (female), and seven department chairs (six males, one female). We conducted semi-structured interviews combining Ray's (1994) "clue and cue" process (p. 129) with Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) active interviewing approach. This less structural form of interviewing allowed for dialogue to occur rather than mere question and answer. Interview data were coded using NVivo to determine overall themes. Peer review of findings aided in confirmation of patterns evolving from the data.

Participants were asked to provide a copy of their curricula vitae to provide insight into their career paths. The vitae were reviewed by the researchers and used to assist in determining the steps taken in progression into mid-level leadership. A follow up was conducted in 2010 to determine if participants had moved up into more senior positions, remained in their current position, or moved out of formal leadership.

Our goal with this study was to present a portrait of these individuals' experiences and to describe their career paths and intended trajectories in an attempt to understand the intentions of mid-level academic leaders for moving up. Table 1 provides a portrait of the leaders involved in this study and includes their current position four years after the initial data were collected.

Findings

Several themes emerged from this research. The first finding was that planned future career trajectories for deans and associate deans differed from those of department chairs. Due to the culture of the institution, the chair position was viewed as an administrative rather than a leadership role because chairs also had teaching responsibilities. Acting chairs felt as though they followed faculty wishes rather than leading them in a specific direction. Second, many participants indicated that their pathways were unintentional and usually were spurred on by others. The third theme was that gender was viewed by male participants as

something that was possessed by women, but for women gender was something that impacted their ability to function within a leadership position. Finally, there were no formal structures in place to assist in cultivating leadership skills, preparing mid- or lower-level leaders to move up, or formal mentoring.

Table 1. Participant Position and Current Status

| Participant * | Gender | Position in 2005 | Seeking Advancement | Current Position in 2010 |
|----------------|--------|--|---------------------|---|
| Marcus Pape | M | Dean of Business | No | Dean at another institution |
| Laura Lindsay | F | Dean - Health Professions | No | Dean at another institution |
| Kristie Kotter | F | Associate Dean College of Graduate Studies | Yes | Dean at another institution |
| Francis Harvey | M | Chair, Economics | No | Chair, Economics |
| Joseph Pike | M | Chair - Recreation, Parks, and Leisure | No | Interim Dean, College of Graduate Studies |
| Dianna Diramio | F | Chair, Journalism | Unsure | Dean at another institution |
| Zachary Keene | M | Chair, History | No | Chair, History |
| Andrew Oliveri | M | Chair, Broadcast and Cinematic Arts | No | Retired |
| Geoff Lang | M | Chair, Communication | No | Professor |
| Michael Straub | M | Chair, Marketing | No | Chair, Marketing |

Duality of Career Trajectories.

The majority of department chairs in this study had no desire to move upward into other administrative positions. Several participants felt that it was “merely my turn” to sit in the position. Others saw the chair position as the highest position they wanted to achieve. One participant who had been in his position for 10 years and had no desire to move up noted that he preferred to be chair because he wasn’t a “career academic.” Only one department chair indicated that he wanted to move up but never received an interview when he applied for a deanship, so he intended to finish out his career as chair. Yet others were long-serving in their chair positions indicating a pull that faculty work still held for them versus a desire to become strictly an administrative leader. As one chair commented, “*The fear I had is that once you become a full-time administrator you forget [your field].*” Chairs had the dual responsibilities of faculty roles and the attendant research expectations, as well as administrative oversight.

Those in associate dean or dean’s roles, however, desired a commitment to administration from a more macro level. Despite their focus on administrative work versus faculty work, only one participant at the

* Pseudonyms were used to protect participants’ identities.

associate dean/dean level voiced a desire to seek higher level administrative positions. Consequently, even though our participants expressed a desire to lead in the middle, they did not voice a similar desire to seek higher level positions of vice-president or president. The fact that the department chairs also had teaching responsibilities meant that mid-level leaders were able to keep a foot in the classroom, which was an element of the position that several were not willing to give up.

Both men and women participants at the associate dean and dean levels spoke of the provost position as “the worst job on campus” and expressed no desire to move in that direction. One dean was clear that he had no desire to seek a higher level position. He stated, *“The provost job is the toughest monkey on campus I think. And it’s such a balancing act. I don’t want it. I don’t have any desire to be a provost.”* Since the time of initial interviewing, this dean took a lateral career move to a deanship at another university. This same dean brought up the issue of age, *“I felt like I was reaching the point where age might be an issue for a first-time dean. It’s not an issue if you’re a dean—once your ticket has been punched, it is not an issue.”* This person felt that, structurally, once you are in the position of power age was not as much of an issue at the dean level. However, with the late start of some faculty careers and advancement within the leadership ranks, individuals may run out of time if the traditional pathway to the top-level positions is followed, in particular for women (King and Gomez 2008).

The pathway to leadership positions for the woman dean in our study followed a similar late start as the male dean. She entered academics in her 40s after a 20 year career in the health professions. One of the first actions she undertook was to obtain her doctorate. She added, *“If I was going to be at the table and have a voice, I had to have it.”* This credential is a critical element of the structure of the leadership hierarchy. She noted her first 12 years in academe were spent as a department chair and the role she liked best was being able to provide a vision to for the unit. She was surprised when she was promoted to Associate Dean that even though the position provided a more global view of the university, she in fact had less power and was carrying out the vision of someone else, versus her own vision. Thus, when she was nominated for the dean position at another college, she left her home state, her professional network, and moved cross country in order to take advantage of the promotion.

Department chairs were often tapped for their positions because they were the best prepared to take over these functions. Others sought out the positions in a desire to seek new challenges. Several noted a concern over finding a successor for their positions. Indeed, one department chair was the longest serving chair on campus, leading his department for over 20 years. Yet, these chair roles are somewhat dubious. One chair candidly stated, *“I’ve got a job where I have very little formal authority over the department, the main people in the department that I supervise are other faculty.”* The lack of supervisory authority translated to the chairs not viewing their roles as leaders, but rather as administrative overseers. One chair noted that the administrative burden of the chair position was not nearly as intense as at other institutions, *“Because of the union agreement, we don’t have to make a lot of tough decisions that other people have to.”* Hence, the

perception of the department chair at this institution was shaped by the structure and culture of the university.

For some, an unsuccessful attempt at looking for a promotion, either inside the college or at another institution, meant the end of their aspirations for upper level leadership positions. One chair noted how headhunters had contacted him for dean positions, but that he did not receive offers from his first choice institutions. Ultimately, dual career concerns resulted in his no longer seeking other positions. Thus, timing plays a critical role in movement along the career path.

Inadvertent Leaders

Mid-level leaders at the university noted how they initially got involved in administrative functions through committee service, ultimately being recognized for their leadership and being encouraged to seek further career advancement. In addition to being tapped by senior leaders, participants in this study noted that peers and colleagues also tapped them for leadership and encourage them to apply or moving to leadership positions. This “tapping” was the encouragement needed by most of the participants to pursue their next positions. Few sought or intended to be an upper level leader on their own. Rather, they wound up in these positions by accident. One chair noted, *“I don’t think I’ve ever set out thinking I’ve got a certain goal in mind because I think that for me and my career, whatever I’ve done in life is more or less evolutionary.”* This leader had been a reporter, in public relations, and worked to set up a women’s university in the Middle East before landing in her current position. Another chair quipped, *“You don’t walk out of high school knowing that this sort of thing exists!”* Yet, this person has been the longest serving chair at the university.

A current dean commented, “I thought I was too old to seek advancement.” Timing of advancement in the career pathway also had an impact. Another associate dean added, “My career path is whatever happens to be convenient at the time....I had never thought about whether or not I would want to be an administrator.” There was often a push and a pull involved in taking the first leadership position. One leader noted how moving to administration allowed her to leave a toxic departmental culture that favored male seniority, whereas others found the allure of setting vision for the area enticing.

Structurally, the women in the study came to leadership positions later in their careers. One dean noted, “I was 40 years old coming into academe. Who would have thought I’d ever be dean of a college? I didn’t even have a doctorate at that time.” Needing to obtain tenure or full professorship before contemplating leadership positions limited the pool of women able to assume leadership roles. One current chair commented that this chain of impact would continue into the future because current faculty members were not predisposed to seek administrative leadership positions.

Strong ties to the classroom or to individual research contributed to several chairs’ rationale for not seeking more senior positions. One chair set up his schedule to have every Thursday out of the office and devoted to research. Another stated, *“What I enjoy about being chair is that I get to teach, I get to do*

research, and I get to administrate. I like the variety that offers and that's one reason I'm not looking to go any further because I don't want to get out of the classroom." Satisfaction in current positions provided little motivation to seek other leadership opportunities. One chair commented on how he loved the faculty ranks, but the tipping point for him in applying for the chair position was a belief in what he could bring to the table regarding vision. On the other hand, another chair planned on returning to the faculty because his chair duties were taking too much time away from his research.

The Influence of Gender

Gender was viewed by participants as something that mainly impacted women. All participants were asked the question, "What influence has gender had on your career?" The term "gender" was interpreted as something that applied only to women. Women participants spoke of their own experiences as women working within male-dominated cultures. Yet, all of the male participants responded to the question by talking about women in their departments or their fields, and only two male participants indicated that their gender may have had an impact on their careers. For example, a male department chair stated: "*Because I'm male I probably don't see that as much. I'd like to say the department is gender blind...The fact was that when my turn [for department chair] came, there wasn't any woman in the department that had sufficient seniority to take on the chair's position.*" Another participant acknowledged that being male had positively impacted his career and allowed him to make moves that perhaps women could not. However, he also indicated that he did not know how to deal with women as colleagues: "*Economics is still a very male-dominated profession. Being male helps.*" This chair also noted that "*I think I hit the glass ceiling. This is as far as I want to go.*" The language of glass ceiling is typically associated with women seeking advancement and its use by a male participant highlights that barriers to advancement are not singularly impacting women. Most men indicated that there was a dearth of women in their fields, which contributed to the lack of women in leadership. The longest serving department chair indicated that he was intentionally attempting to mentor three women who that he thought had the potential to chair.

One dean noted, "I am personally aware of the need to have a diverse faculty and administration....we're in the process of hiring 10 tenure track positions now and we will select the finalists based on their quality and then, if it comes down to it and one hire will improve the balance of our faculty, then that's going to be my recommendation." Other mid-level leaders were in units in which it was difficult to attract candidates given the career options in industry. One chair added, "We needed to start what we call a Grow Your Own Program. It is a very difficult field in which to attract female faculty." This program involved hiring women as instructors and allowing them time to complete their PhD while on staff. When full-time lines became open, these women were then more competitive because of their experience at the college and their degree credential. Two women faculty were recently hired using this process in this unit at the college.

All three of the female participants, on the other hand, noted that their gender had tremendous impact on their career. “There is definitely a gender bias. It’s not that there aren’t lots of women deans, but it’s easier I believe for a man to be put in that position instead of a woman to be put in that position. And I have to be a lot more careful about a lot of things.” Women participants were conscious of how their gender impacted their advancement and the perceptions of their leadership potential. One woman commented, “I don’t know if it’s gender, but as a small person, a small soft-spoken woman, I think all my life people have underestimated me.” This leader had a clear sense that she had to prove herself over and over in her work situations. She realized she had arrived when other deans on campus began to ask her for advice. But, she added that her perception is that women do not have as long of a professional life as men. Older men were seen as distinguished, but her perception was that an older woman would be seen as “getting up in years.”

A male participant noted that he writes from a feminist perspective and that this framework impacts how he sees the world. Yet, this perspective did not lead him to identify how his own gender may have contributed to his own advancement or to question why a woman was not in a leadership position in his department. He provided another example as he discussed the work-life balance question. He reflected to a time when his children were young and how his home office had a glass door: *“I would close the door and our children could be in the family room, watching TV, playing, laughing, having friends over and I wouldn’t hear them. But I was visually connected, and I was there. And any number of moments, a few times an hour, I could go in there, talk to them, be with them.”* Even though this participant felt this example highlighted how he was connected to his family, he neglected to reflect that he was able to physically distance himself and engage with his children on his terms versus really having supervisory responsibility for them.

One of the women leaders expanded, *“I think men are allowed to be themselves more than women are in hiring....A woman has to have much more attention to dress—if you wore a suit with a short skirt, or you wore pants, some may see this negatively. Men don’t have to make those kinds of decisions.”* It was noted that men could be very direct—bordering on rude and that would not impact their ability to move up, whereas women needed to be more attentive to social skills and acting within gender norms. A male chair supported this view. He said, *“I’ve heard from the former chair [a woman] that there were certain things that I could get away with doing that she couldn’t because not only was I male, but I am a big, large male. I was unlikely to be challenged.”* Here, gender and size mattered in how leaders were perceived.

Gender played a role in family responsibilities as well. One of the women quit her job to stay home with her mother who had Alzheimer’s disease and when her mother was ultimately placed in a facility, made several trips a year to visit and tend to family members. She reflected. *“It was fine when I was at home taking care of her, but you know I had no life. I had no income.”* At the time of the interview, this leader was still full of guilt about the fact that she could not tend to her mother.

Framework for Leadership Development

Corresponding to the accidental nature of their ascension to their current positions of leadership, participants noted a lack of formal development opportunities. Instead, they noted how mentoring and on-the-job experiences served as the training ground for leadership. As one chair reflected, *"I think you just hit the ground running."* The university did not have a formal development program for new chairs beyond a one-day workshop that reviewed the assigned job responsibilities outlined on "the green sheet." These leadership functions were literally printed on green paper and reviewed the job responsibilities for chairs including a focus on managerial tasks of scheduling, advising, and budgeting. Only one participant at the chair level noted that his dean had sent him to an external conference to help prepare him for his new position.

For the most part, mid-level leaders discussed the informal development they received via observation of other leaders or participation in disciplinary state and national meetings. One person noted, *"I tell people that in leadership, when doors open, you must go through them."* She added that she did not have anyone overtly helping her move up the ladder, stating rather, *"You know you come to a point where you have a level of confidence and you know when you're ready to go further."* How leadership is modeled begins to set the stage for the culture of the organization and therefore how gender is viewed or perceived within the hierarchies. A male dean described his first five weeks on the job. His self-description of his own leadership was as participatory versus dictatorial, but he also noted that his nature is fairly aggressive in the workplace to look for opportunities for his college. He added that as a new dean he threw himself into the work, but knowingly stated, *"A challenge that I have is just letting work overtake my life."* Despite this realization, this dean had 101 30-minute meetings with individual faculty in his college during the first five weeks on the job to allow him to gain a sense of the faculty issues and the college culture. He sought to model teamwork and solidarity within his faculty.

With little preparation for leadership roles, new leaders often question their ability to do the job. One associate dean noted, *"Often associate deans are really in transition. You're either going to decide—I hate this and I'm going back to faculty, or you're going to decide to continue going on in an administrative direction and then that direction has choices."* This person commented that she felt she had one more eight-year chunk of time left in her career. She has since left the college and assumed a dean position at another university. For this leader, having outside administrative experience proved to be the best training. Others avoided training seminars in a desire to *"be more genuine."* A desire for authentic leadership that was true to identity may have been more of an option for men in the study.

In contemplating his career pathway, one chair commented *"I wasn't a career academic, I've been out in the business and continue to consult, so I've got that orientation....but if you are totally a career academic, there's some things that you don't pick up that you do pick up in industry."* Academics without formal professional development experiences either learned on the job or faced frustrations when becoming a leader

among peers. Given this pattern, one of the current chairs intentionally sought to groom a replacement. Pointedly, all the individuals he was coaching were women.

Seeking out leadership opportunities was a tactic used by some mid-level leaders to expand their development of key skills. These chances came about through working on internal university committees, having leadership roles in state and national associations, and by taking part in some workshops or seminars to develop specific skills. The difficulty noted was that there was little opportunity for mobility within the university system. Additionally, the culture at the university was shaped by a long-serving employee base that had no other university-based experience. Only one of the chairs interviewed came to the university as an external chair, all others were promoted from within.

Discussion and Conclusion

The interplay among structure, agency, and the ideal worker norms were evident in our research findings. The female dean in the study noted that when she started her position, *"My first two years I worked 16-hour days a week here. I didn't have a day off, but I had no family with me and it was overwhelming being a new person in a new college moving into a new building."* She added, *"I'm a guide in the world of the workaholic and I've always said, I'm not smarter than anyone else, but I'm high energy and I work longer and harder than most people."* For her, agency was built around hard work to prove herself in her position and the structure and demands of the job served to reinforce this behavior. As a young widow, she learned early on that she was the family breadwinner—a construct built on male norms. Yet, despite this experience, she commented in reference to younger women in her college, *"I do see that [having children] as a deterrent with women who work with me here. It's constant, almost every day, 'I have to pick up my child, I have to do this today.' It's a hard role to be a mother and to be a leader or work also."* This dean's position serves to reinforce that the ideal work norm is present in academe today and both men and women reinforce this ideal. Although this dean struggled with work and motherhood demands, she felt that women in the workforce today still needed to work as though they did not have outside responsibilities.

One male chair stated, *"I'm not a workaholic by any means. I'm working more 9 to 5. I've found since I've been chair in some ways I'm more efficient with my time, I rarely do work at home now."* Setting of boundaries was often a lesson learned over time. Another chair added how he used to work 75-80 hours a week, but that he began to set limits to block out time for a more balanced life. The norm of long-hours was prevalent and how individuals reacted and used strategies to integrate their lives was based on their own sense of agency.

The fact that leadership positions were longer than an eight-hour day was an accepted norm. As one leader noted, *"I don't have children or family, so work can be my life....My deal is to make sure that work doesn't become my life."* She added, *"Whatever your role is, you have to be real, you have to be true to yourself."* All participants in the study talked about longer than average hours worked per day, many of them

working seven days a week, and the notion of finding a balance that allowed them to live their lives in a healthy manner. As one participant stated frankly, *"It's a job that doesn't go away."* One male chair noted that his wife was a stay-at-home mother and that this fact allowed him to focus more on work, reinforcing the ideal of the unencumbered worker (Acker 2006).

Even though individuals recognized that ideal worker norms were in place, few challenged this construct. Some of the participants did state that they were trying to set boundaries on the amount of time spent at work, but they made these decisions individually and did not work to change the actual structures in place that often required these long hours. Indeed, many of the mid-level leaders expected that others in their unit should be working long hours to contribute to the goals of the college because this was necessary for operations.

In reviewing the curricula vitae of the participants and the descriptions of their career paths, a significant finding was how varied the trajectory to current mid-level positions was. One chair started college without a high school degree, obtaining a Graduate Equivalent Degree (GED) prior to enrolling at a religious college. Another chair started out as a funeral director, whereas another was a newspaper reporter. Industry time in radio provided the roots for yet another mid-level leader. The two deans both held business positions before entering academics. These findings are significant as they challenge the traditional academic pathway of graduate school and then time in progressing up the faculty ranks prior to entering leadership. King and Gomez (2008) noted that institutions of higher education need to think differently about leadership succession and plans for the future, and the findings from our study indicate that the future is already here.

Individual agency and the construct of leadership at mid-level all contributed to how the participants viewed their positions. One chair reflected, *"I guess I am sort of an administrator, but I don't think of myself that way."* This view of the role meant that chair positions in particular were not viewed as locations of leadership, rather as filling in for administrative functions. Another participant expanded, *"Much of the time is engaged in acts that require you do administrative work in addition to teaching and writing. The time you can spend in leadership activities is relatively small."* The mid-level leadership role of chair was not constructed as a *real* leadership position given the multitude of job responsibilities ranging from teaching to research to administration and the short term nature of the chair terms. Thus, as we think of the pathway to upper level leadership, attention needs to be given to the construction of the chair position and the development potential that these positions actually provide for future leadership opportunities.

One participant commented that it was viewed suspiciously *"if a person wanted to be chair too badly."* This perspective raises the issue of when individuals can voice their desires for advancement and how this desire is received by peers and leaders. The move "to the dark side" is often raised in jest, but may create a barrier for individuals as they consider advancement opportunities. The construction of a leadership identity evolves over time as individuals make the decision to move up or stay put. Mid-level leaders did not often

have a chance to attend trainings or become versed in how to be a good leader. Instead, they learned on the job or transferred skills in from other arenas, such as leadership roles in church or the community.

A remaining challenge is how to get individuals to think of constructs of leadership differently than the established ideal norms. One can argue that those in powerless positions are not in a position to impact change, but Huckaby (2007) found that resistance to established practice provided individuals a greater sense of agency and that collectively with enough resistance, change could occur. Our research, like that of Kelly and colleagues (2010), found that despite the expressions of disapproval of long work hours, that participants did critique the underlying gendered organizational structure based on outdated masculine norms. Hence, the construct of the ideal worker remains the norm for mid-level leaders.

If individuals have advanced in the current system that rewards the ideal worker norms, it may be difficult to recognize the issues or the assumptions inherent in how leaders must spend time and effort at work. Acker (2006) underscores the ubiquitous nature of gendered organizations, "All organizations have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations" (p. 443). The reliance on organizational hierarchy reinforces power differentials, in particular as this relates to decision-making power. Thus, the organizational chart of most colleges and universities reproduces inequalities. Without conscious critique of these accepted norms, change will not occur.

Significance and Implications

Several points of significance emerged from this research. First, the lack of formal plans for succession planning meant that most of the leaders in this study "just happened" to become administrators at the university. The college did not have a formal structure for advancement, which may have repercussions on the next step of advancement to higher level leadership, including the presidency. Typical of most institutions of higher education, no succession plans existed (Berke 2005; Bisbee and Miller 2006). The fact that chairs did not envision themselves as leaders also represented a missed opportunity for leadership throughout the university. Contemporary notions of collaborative leadership (Hickman 2009) provide one mechanism to help campus administrations address the complexity of running today's college. Second, the continued use of male norms for mid-level leadership meant that the acceptance ideal worker values (Williams 2000) was still in practice. On the other hand, the abundance of comments regarding the lack of appeal regarding advancement may indicate a rejection of the desire to meet the norms established for top-level leadership positions. This rejection of demands on top-level leaders, however, presents a bind because mid-level leaders are not motivated to seek advancement and institutions lose out on a wider range of diverse leaders to take over these critical positions.

The institution of leadership development programs and mentoring programs may be a means to begin to break down established misconceptions of administrative work and may ultimately work to change definitions

of the position to make it more attractive to a wider potential leadership pool. Finally, the fact that participants reacted to questions on gender by only speaking of the “women’s” issues underscores and reifies the biased gendered nature of the university setting. Women in the study were quite conscious of the ways in which their gender impacted ascension to the administrative ranks and how they were perceived by others. Men, on the other hand, did not view themselves as gendered, rather they used gender as a sex code for women, underscoring the invisibility of the impact of their own gender on their experiences. This lack of awareness creates a blind-spot for them in dealing with female colleagues, but it also does men a disservice as well when they are unaware of the role gender played in their own advancement. Ignorance of the role that gender plays in the workplace also implies that biased structures and expectations will remain in place as they are not viewed as a problem.

A point of interest from a gender perspective was that male participants in this study viewed women as being deficient and needing assistance to move up into administrative and tenured faculty positions within the organization rather than acknowledging a need to change the existing organizational norms to make the environment more inclusive to those who did not fit the existing structure or expectations. The ideal worker norm was solidly in place, as evidenced by participants’ assumption that men are more likely to hold administrative positions and that these positions require employees to work long hours (full- and over-time), the idea that work is most important, and that people in these positions work nearly all the time (Acker 1990, 2006; Williams 2000). There was also an assumption that in order to progress to the next rank in the hierarchy, even more time spent on work would be required. Additionally, women perceived further expectations on their behavior, dress, and approach to leadership both in their current positions and if they intended to move up. The descriptions provided implied that women had to present themselves in ways that may be at odds with their own personalities and preferences in order to conform to expectations, be accepted as a leader, and move ahead.

A significant aspect of looking at leadership in the middle ranks is the creation of leadership identity and roles. One chair stated, *“I think you’ve got to have a sense of ownership in whatever you’re leading. You’ve got to have that because it will get you over some of the difficult times. You’ve got to like what you’re doing, enjoy what you’re doing, and you’ve got to understand that administration is the art of the possible.”* For some, this strong sense of self identity may mean they are satisfied with their current roles and influence, thereby providing less motivation to seek advancement (Sawyer 2008).

In summary, higher education is at a crossroads in which change for greater gender equity in leadership can occur. However, this research points to traditional conceptions of male leadership as the norm, a lack of succession planning and leadership development, and missed opportunities for expansion of collective leadership in the university setting. As the leadership void becomes more pressing at the top, institutions need to begin rethinking what it means to be a senior level administrator, as well as redefining roles for mid-level leaders.

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