



Leadership in the Management Institutes: An Exploration of the Experiences of Women Directors

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Abstract

As leadership is a key component in meeting the challenges of educational institutes, this study was designed to examine the challenges faced by the female leaders of the management institutes of Pune City, India. Data was collected using qualitative methods which included in-depth interviews with ten women directors. Analysis of the recorded data proceeded by means of a line by line microanalysis of the interviews, with the following five major themes emerging: (a) choosing teaching as a career, (b) shift towards leadership, (c) impact of internal and external pressures, (d) challenges from the male dominated society, and (e) balancing personal and professional life. The findings of this study point to the need for further research into the challenges with which female leaders are confronted in the educational industry, as well as for comparative studies with men in similar positions, and for the findings of such research to be utilised by educational policy makers to facilitate effective leadership by providing the necessary support structures.

Introduction

Effective leadership is widely accepted as being a key constituent of education centres' achievement of their aims. The evidence from the international literature demonstrates that effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the institute and on the achievement of students (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999). Whilst the quality of teaching strongly influences levels of pupil motivation and achievement, it has been argued that the quality of leadership influences the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching in the classroom (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001). An investigation of the leadership research literature relating to educational institutions reveals, however, that it is largely premised upon individual impetus rather than collective action and offers a singular view of leadership predominantly bound up with headship.

Past studies on women in management present a picture of women with leadership capability who can move organisations to business success because of their feminine leadership style. The reality, however, includes data that presents a picture of slow progress. Traditionally, male leaders have aimed to "use education to make women more capable of fulfilling their traditional roles as wives and mothers and not to make them more efficient and active units in the process of socio-economic or political development" (Chitnis, 1989, p. 137).

Early socialisation and childhood experiences contribute to the development of feminine leadership skills that are seen as successful in organisations today (Heim, 1993; Rosener, 1990). This leadership style has been identified as beneficial in corporations where productivity is dependent upon a foundation of solid working relationships and a flat organisational

structure (Alimo-Metcalf, 1994; Gray, 1994; O'Leary & Ryan, 1994). Although women have moved to entry-level management positions, they are still underrepresented at the senior level. One reason for this is that women experience a much higher turnover rate than their male counterparts (Gray, 1994; Marshall, 1994) due to conflict, lack of self-confidence and feeling isolated (Knight & Pritchard, 1994; O'Leary & Ryan, 1994; Tanton, 1994).

One of the barriers for women in management has been the institutional support of patriarchy. Historically, research on management has been based on the male experience, and there is an assumption that women experience learning in the same way as men. Writers such as Gilligan (1993) and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) have proposed that women, in fact, do experience learning differently, and that what is needed to help women develop the expression of their views are educational programmes geared to their experience.

As leadership is a key component in meeting the challenges of educational institutes, and given educators' concern about vacancies in administrative ranks, this research study was designed to examine the leadership challenges faced by the female leaders in the management institutes of Pune City, India.

Literature Review

An extensive literature review was undertaken regarding barriers to women's progression to leadership positions, it being important, in order to avoid reinventing the wheel, to acknowledge analyses that are already available.

According to Ginn (1989), men dominated the teaching profession from colonial times until the twentieth century. Women gained access to the profession by teaching the younger students in the summer session because these jobs were easy to obtain. However, the salary for all teachers was extremely low, and, when the terms lengthened and the standards for certification rose, men began to look elsewhere for work. As the demand grew for literate, moral teachers at low wages, women began to monopolise the teaching profession. Women were accepted as teachers because they were thought to work well with children. Even though both genders left the profession at equal rates, women were seen as transient or waiting for marriage. Therefore, women remained segregated in the lower rungs of the teaching professions, while men, who were perceived to be more reliable managers, moved into the supervisory positions. For male administrators, marriage did not conflict with their career.

Cunanan (1994, p. 1) noted that, since 1984, breaking through the glass ceiling has been difficult for women. Cunanan offered several explanations for the current lack of female representation in school leadership, including that in the past females have been inadequately prepared for administrative positions. Within the past system of educational administration, women were neither recruited nor offered the financial support necessary to allow them graduate experience, even though graduate school education had been found to be essential for those women who aspired to a principalship.

A Historical View of Women in Educational Leadership

When it seemed that education could advance the goals of society – not the goals of women – then women were viewed as the “cheap labour force” to staff the public schools (Curcio, Morsink, & Bridges, 1989). From the time women entered the education workforce, they have been viewed as the extension of the mother, whose ideological role is one of nurturing, caring, help and support. The picture persistently portrayed has thus been that the men will run the schools and the women will nurture the learners (Shakeshaft, 1989). Discrimination prevailed in pay equity and even in the way females were categorised in teacher training schools.

By 1920 a true hierarchy began to emerge: teaching on one level and administration on the other. Administration tended to be populated by men in a structure based on scientific management and bureaucratisation. Women were not a part of administration unless they founded their own schools. Advocacy groups were starting to form to support women's entrance and advancement into school administration (Schmuck, 1994).

A conscious barrier for women in educational administration is that women are not being groomed within school districts for higher levels of administration, and the unconscious barrier is that it doesn't really seem to matter (Marshall, 1986).

A way to support women to gain access to executive levels is to shift thinking about power. It is proposed in some literature that adopting an androgynous (both male and female) management style might help women overcome the negative effects of sex-role stereotyping in the workplace (Korabik, 1990). Women who are androgynous have traditionally feminine qualities and masculine task-oriented ones (Korabik, 1990).

In their study, Gross and Trask (1976) concluded that

women principals have a greater knowledge of instructional supervision. Superiors and teachers preferred women over men. Students' academic performance and teachers' professional performance rated higher under women principals. Women were more effective administrators as defined by their staff and students. Supervisors and teachers preferred the decision-making and problem-solving behaviours of women. Women principals were more concerned with helping deviant pupils. Women principals placed more importance on technical skills and organisational responsibility as a criterion for evaluating teachers.

According to Banks, who led a 1984 University of Texas study involving fifty leaders in business and organisations, women do not need to suppress compassion, intuition, co-operation and empathy – they need to expand them in their leadership roles.

In terms of success, it was found that lack of self-confidence was one of the most significant roadblocks to success (*Women's Executive Bulletin*, 1985).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to understand the lived experiences of women holding a leadership position in an academic institute offering management courses.

Specifically, this study aimed to meet the following objectives:

1. To understand what motivates women to join the academic industry,
2. To explore the challenges faced by them as leaders, and
3. To investigate the measures adopted by leaders to balance their personal and professional lives.

Research Design

To understand the experience of women leaders in academic institutes more fully, I developed in-depth relationships with those working in such leadership positions for the purpose of uncovering descriptions of the experience and the meanings attributed to the experience by these women.

The underlying theoretical perspective used in the study was phenomenological (Patton, 1990). However, the study drew on other theoretical constructs such as a naturalistic theme of inquiry (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997) and an interpretive

research approach (Hones, 1998). Women's experiences of working as a director of a management institute were studied by means of a non-manipulative and non-controlling methodology with no preconceived constraints on what the outcomes of the research should be.

A setting that provided for the best expression of rich data was utilised for the study. Speziale and Carpenter (2003) reported that participants are more likely to provide the information sought when they are comfortable. Therefore, the initial face-to-face interviews were conducted at private locations mutually agreed upon by myself and informant. Primary locations for data collection included informants' private offices and their residences. Follow-up interviews were conducted by telephone with all of the informants, which allowed the informant to select a comfortable and private location. Informants participated in telephone interviews from locations such as a private office at their workplace or at their homes. To maintain confidentiality, I conducted the telephone interviews from a private office.

When considering sample size, phenomenologists often rely on small sample sizes consisting of ten or fewer informants (Polit & Beck, 2004). It is important to ensure that all informants have experienced the phenomenon being studied and are willing and able to articulate what the lived experience of it is like. This aids in establishing the credibility of the study. Therefore, the inclusion criteria for the sample targeted females working as directors in various management institutes of Pune City who were willing to share their experiences.

An initial sample pool of ten informants was selected for the study. In phenomenological research, the sample size is ultimately not determined by the number of participants available, but by data saturation, or when the repetition of salient points is achieved. This is the point when the data become redundant and no new information is gained from informants (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003).

Both purposive and snowball sampling techniques were utilised for the study. "Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which researchers select participants based on personal judgment about the ones that will be most representative or informative" (Polit & Beck, 2004, p. 729). Since informants meeting specific inclusion criteria were the focus of the study, a purposive sampling technique was appropriate. Snowball sampling allows for the selection of additional informants through referrals from those who

participated in or are familiar with the study (Polit & Beck, 2004). For this study, colleagues and informants were asked to refer me to persons who met the inclusion criteria and might potentially be interested in participating in the study.

Sample Recruitment

I began the process of recruiting informants by personally notifying colleagues about the study and asking for volunteers and referrals to potential informants.

Once a potential informant was identified, I made personal contact by telephone with her for the purpose of describing the study, assessing if she met the inclusion criteria, reviewing study protocols, and eliciting her expressed interest in participating in the study. During this contact, the initial interview was scheduled with individuals who expressed interest in being an informant for the study.

Instruments

Instruments for data collection included a researcher-designed demographic questionnaire and an interview guide. Field notes, as written by the researcher, were also utilised as a data source.

A demographic questionnaire which focused on personal demographics, employment status and professional experience was utilised for data collection. Items were evaluated for clarity by four women directors working in different management institutes. The anonymity of the participating director was protected by referring to each participant only as a *participant*. The informant completed the questionnaire prior to the start of the face-to-face interview. The questionnaire took nearly 5 minutes to complete.

An interview guide that consisted of five semi-structured open-ended questions was available for use during data collection. Items in the guide were selected for inclusion based on the guidelines derived from the literature and refined during a pilot study involving four informants. The questions were designed to elicit an in-depth description of the experience of working as a director in a management institute. Probes such as "Tell me more" and "Please share an example" were used to facilitate a richer discussion on a particular topic.

Field notes, in the form of a personal journal, were written by the researcher and served as a second data source for the study. The notes included information such as written descriptions of nonverbal behaviours

displayed by informants during the interview, characteristics of the environment during a face-to-face interview, my assumptions, thoughts and feelings about the interview, and my personal responses to the interview. According to the Munhall (2001), this type of documentation serves as a layer of data and positions the researcher in the life-world of the study. The journal also provided a listing of study events that served as an audit trail, which aids in reducing bias (Cohen et al., 2000).

Participants or Informants

The data for this study were collected from twelve women leaders, each working as a Director at a different management institute. The mean age was 48.4 years; the mean experience was 22.1 years, while the mean experience of working as a Director was 7.8 years with a range of 4 to 14 years' experience as a Director.

Procedures for Data Collection

When an individual who met the inclusion criteria expressed interest in participating in the study, the researcher communicated with the potential informant by telephone to arrange a date, time and location for the initial face-to-face interview, which the researcher conducted personally with each informant for the purpose of data collection. All the initial interviews were conducted over a four month period. Each initial interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. All the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. To allow for a rich in-depth discussion, no limits were imposed on the length of the interview. The researcher began the interview session by reviewing the consent form with the informant and addressing questions about the study protocol. Next, the informant completed the demographic questionnaire and then the researcher proceeded with the interview. The informant was notified when the tape recorder was in use.

A follow-up telephone interview was conducted with each informant, approximately three months after the initial interview. The purpose of the second interview was to seek clarification of the informant's initial responses, verify data analysis with the informant, gather additional information from the informant, and answer any questions posed by the informant. Each follow-up interview lasted approximately 15-45 minutes. To allow for a rich expression of the experience, no time limits were imposed on the length of the second interview. All follow-up interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and added to the data obtained from the initial interview.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data, a thematic approach was used to identify patterns in informants' experiences of working as a leader in the academic industry (Miles & Huberman, 1984). No preliminary hypotheses were offered and data was analysed continuously to identify common themes.

Manual line-by-line microanalysis of the interview data was conducted. Key words and preliminary common themes and groupings were noted next to each point in each transcript and these were then grouped according to emergent key themes. To facilitate this process, the data were organised into a checklist matrix to provide a visual display (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Trustworthiness

A variety of strategies were employed to enhance the validity of the study. Firstly, audiotapes of the interviews provided a concrete reference to the original source to verify any potential discrepancies. Interviews were transcribed word for word by the interviewer immediately after each interview. Moreover, some triangulation of data sources and triangulation of multiple analysts (Patton, 1990) occurred to strengthen findings. For example, data were obtained from two different sources with different researchers conducting the interviews in each location and emerging themes were followed up during the interview process to check the consistency of responses.

Interpretations were discussed among fellow researchers in order to gain a different perspective and to examine rival explanations. Narratives and detailed descriptions of the informants' experiences of working as a leader in the academic industry were included in the report to maximize accuracy and to minimize the possibility of distortion resulting from researcher bias in respect of the data. Sample limitations were considered to shed additional light on the validity of emerging themes and helped qualify the degree to which general themes could be established.

Credibility and Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified criteria for establishing trustworthiness including credibility and confirmability. Credibility refers to the truth of the data and subsequent interpretation, whereas confirmability refers to the objectivity of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Techniques used to establish the credibility of the current study included data

triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Data triangulation included the use of multiple data sources to reach conclusions (Polit & Beck, 2004). In addition to data collected during the personal interviews, the field notes written by the researcher served as another layer of data for the study. Discussion with colleagues in the research field acted as a major source in this regard. As mentioned previously, the text from three transcribed interviews was reviewed by and discussed with an experienced phenomenologist. The interview techniques used were also reviewed by the phenomenologist. While these practices are consistent with opening up the inquiry (Cohen et al., 2000), they are also referred to as peer debriefing, a process whereby peers review aspects of the inquiry (Polit & Beck, 2004).

Additional approaches to establishing credibility included selecting only informants that met the inclusion criteria in order to ensure that they had experiences that were of interest to the study, collecting data through personal in-depth interviews, and using non-leading questions during the interviews to facilitate the expression of rich data by the informant. Audiotaping the interviews, using one interviewer to collect the data and one trained transcriptionist for transcribing the audiotapes, and comparing the transcribed data with the audiotapes to ensure accuracy, also aided in establishing credibility.

Lastly, objectivity was established through several techniques. Bracketing, maintaining a reflective journal, and establishing an audit trail were utilised to establish confirmability and were discussed in conjunction with critical reflection and opening the inquiry.

Findings

Analysis of the interviews led to the emergence of varied experiences which the informants had while working as a director of a management institute. Some of the institutes with which these directors were associated were already established and had a good name in the education industry, while others were small and middle sized and were going through their expansion phase. Each of the informants confirmed that she had, in the initial phase of her career, been a teacher and then moved towards leadership.

Analysis of the informants' responses reflected mixed views and reasons for choosing teaching as a career. Hence, "**Choosing teaching as a career**" emerged as my first theme. While working as a teacher, it was understood that the informants had varied experiences which they found not only to be interesting but to challenge their hidden potential. This made them take

the decision to “**Shift towards leadership**”, which emerged as my next theme. More in-depth thematic analysis of the data collected allowed me to understand the pressures that they had to face from internal and external forces and led to the development of my next theme, “**Challenges from internal and external forces**”. On further probing, the challenges that they had to face from the male dominated society were also revealed, leading to the development of my next theme, “**Challenges from the male dominated society**”.

Finally, in the process of handling all such challenges, I also tried to understand the ways that they had adopted to balance their personal and professional lives. This led to the emergence of our last theme, “**Balancing the wheel**”.

To help the readers to understand the various themes in a better way, direct quotations from the interviews are used for illustration.

Theme 1

Choosing teaching as a profession

Discussion with the participants helped me to understand various reasons why women leaders chose initially chose to enter the teaching profession. Most of them (80%) explained that they had actually never thought of making the teaching profession a career; it was accidental that they joined this industry. One of the respondents stated her views as follows:

“I was working as a manager in a private company before joining this industry. After I got married, I had to shift to Pune where my husband was working. Here, at that time, I was looking for a job which was more flexible by nature so that I could take care of my family as well as work simultaneously. Hence, teaching was the best available option left for me...”

It was understood that, since the participants had, as their major responsibility, the taking care of their family and in-laws, they had, initially, taken the teaching option to keep themselves engaged during their idle time. Since the nature of the profession involves flexibility, without much stress or work pressure, the respondents, in the initial phase, found this profession, where they not only could take care of their family responsibility but could also earn a decent salary, to be ideal.

However, 20% of the respondents had a different reason for having chosen teaching as a career. One of them had chosen teaching as it was her childhood dream, and hence, immediately after completing her

education, she joined this profession.

“I had always wanted to become a teacher since childhood. My 10th standard physics teacher is my role model. I have always admired my teacher and have wanted to be like him. Also it’s my hobby During my college days, I used to teach my juniors as well as class mates ...”

Another participant’s response was:

“My whole family is into teaching. Since this institute is ours ... from the very beginning I knew that, after my father, I had to run the show, as a successor ... hence, in the initial phase, I chose to become a teacher to feel the experience of being a teacher and conducting classes ...”

Theme 2

The shift towards leadership

“Shift towards leadership” refers to the point when the women leaders decided to make the move from teaching to aiming at the leadership position in their institute. From the interviews, it emerged that most of the respondents had a dream of taking charge of the institute and running it in their way. They accepted that they had the leadership syndrome which had begun after they joined the education industry. One of the respondents noted:

“When I joined the education industry, as a faculty, within a small span of time, I realised that, here, things were not happening in an organised way. Since the existing director at that time was very old and was of passive nature, the entire institute was functioning in a similar way. Working in the corporate world had trained me to work in proper systems and processes. Hence, with the director’s permission, I slowly started putting systems and processes in place for carrying out different activities. This way, slowly and slowly, I started taking up the administrative functions and excelled in them ...”

For a few, it was understood that, as the entire family was employed in the education industry, it was pre-decided that the respondent would, eventually, take up the leadership position. Such an experience has been stated as:

“Since this is my own institute, I was well aware of the fact from the beginning.

Initially, I joined as a faculty to understand the nature of the profession and the problems that are faced by teaching as well as non-teaching staff. As you know that it is very important for the leader to understand their employees' issues and concerns, that's why I had chosen to be a faculty member first for a few years before becoming the leader. Later, as my father's health did not allow him to exert himself much, I slowly started taking up his responsibilities ..."

However, it was also revealed that, at times, due to the academic credentials that one might have, a leadership position could be thrust upon one. Such an experience has been stated as follows:

"Well ... frankly speaking, I had never thought of occupying the leadership position and become the director. Being a faculty, I was pretty satisfied. During that time, due to some issues with the top management, our director resigned. For quite some period of time, the position of the director remained vacant. Though there were capable people ... but as you know ... as per the norms, one has to have a doctorate with a certain amount of experience, to become a director ... other than me, no one was fulfilling that criterion. Hence, the management requested me to take up the position So you see ... it was purely accidental ... I had just to occupy the seat ..."

Theme 3

Handling internal and external challenges

On further analysis of the data, it was understood that the female leaders of the management institutes had to face various types of internal and external challenges. Internal challenges came in the form of reducing faculty attrition, behavioural and team issues of teaching as well as non-teaching staff, handling student issues relating to the recovery of fees, arrangement of seminars and conferences, campus placements, and so forth.

One of the respondents said:

"I have always been very careful about handling the post graduate students ... they are not only grown up but also understand everything. If you give them freedom ... they take undue advantage of it If you put extra pressure on them, they may get frustrated and retaliate ... Hence, you have

to keep a balance between the both. It's like walking on a tight rope. I always advise my staff to be polite and caring towards them but, at the same time, maintain some distance. They should be strict on disciplinary matters. ... the teaching and non teaching staff has always been supportive in executing my decisions"

However, another respondent offered a different view of the type of challenges that she had to handle:

"For me ... students have never been a problem. I have always treated them like my own children. My biggest concern is relating to the shortage of teaching staff. There is always a scarcity of them and, at the beginning of every term, I have to literally hunt for good faculties to take up the subjects and complete the syllabus Since we design the syllabus as per the industry needs, we are in a constant need of high calibre industry professionals who can share their experience with our students. This, at times, becomes very difficult for me to handle ..."

The external challenges mentioned referred to meeting the norms of the governing bodies like AICTE¹, DTE² and NAAC³, who are considered to be

¹ **AICTE:** The statutory body (All India Council for Technical Education), established for proper planning and coordinated development of technical education system throughout India. The purview of AICTE (the council) covers programmes of technical education including training and research in engineering, technology, management etc. at different levels. (see <http://www.aicte.ernet.in/>)

² **DTE:** Directorate of Technical Education (DTE) is responsible for post graduate, graduate and diploma level institutions in engineering and technology, architecture, pharmacy and management. The role of the directorate of technical education is to maintain and enhance the standard quality of technical education by laying the policies, establishing Government institutions, guiding and supervising the aided private institutions, interacting with industry and national level institutions, coordinating with other departments of state government and Government of India Statutory Organisations, and to contribute to the development of industry and society at large. (see <http://www.dte.org.in/dteinfo/about.asp>)

³ **NAAC:** The national assessment and accreditation council (NAAC) is an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India to assess and accredit institutions of higher education in the country. It is an outcome of the recommendations of the National Policy in Education (1986) that laid special emphasis on upholding the quality of higher education in India. (see <http://naacindia.org/aboutus.asp>)

keeping an eye on the educational institutes to ensure that they follow the necessary guidelines to maintain quality norms for running an educational institute. Analysis of the data revealed that the directors had to face a very tough time in meeting the quality norms of educational standards set by these governing bodies. One of the respondents said:

“The rules of these bodies have become very stringent these days ... though we understand that they have been made to improve the quality of education, fulfilling all of their norms, in the present situation, is really very difficult ... at times, it gives me nightmares ...”

Another respondent expressed her views as follows:

“Last year, when these officials came, they gave us a “B” grade rating. Though we have adequate infrastructure and provide 100% placement to our students ... still according to them, we lacked in various other fronts like shortage of staff et cetera Nowadays, they are focusing much on faculty’s active involvement in research and publication Motivating the staff to do research and publication is the biggest challenge that I have to face now ...”

From the discussion, it was understood that, even though the leaders were facing a number of challenges from internal as well as external forces, they were, finally, able to manage and run the organisation.

Theme 4

Challenges from the male dominated society

The next theme that emerged from the data collection related to the challenges that the women directors faced from the male dominated society. In the course of discussions with the participants, a variety of opinions were expressed relating to the challenges that they had to face as a consequence of being a woman leader in a male dominated society. Most of the respondents (60%) agreed that they, quite often, had to face the male egoists. However, it was also understood that this was not specifically because they were women but because their position was such that it was subject to being challenged by certain personality types. An example is quoted below:

“Yes ... we do have to face, at times, male egoists ... but I think this is not because I am a woman but because I am a director. No matter whoever becomes a director, has to face such issues Even our previous

director, who was a male, had to face such problems. Since the majority of the people in this profession are dominated by males with different behavioural attributes However, it’s also considered to be the quality of a leader ... i.e. to take every member of the team along with and walk ahead ...”

However, there were other participants who had faced different experiences while working with their male counterparts. They had not only faced constant challenges from the male dominated society, but also had to, quite often, prove their ability. One of the respondents said:

“Being women, we always have to prove that we are capable for this post. Had I been a man, I had to prove my capability, maybe once ... but being a woman, I have to prove it every time. Society till now does not easily accept a woman leader. Every time any problem comes ... and we are expected to outperform ...”

Theme 5

Balancing the wheel

Finally, the last theme that emerged from the data analysis related to the need for women leaders to maintain a balance between work and family life. Being a woman, it was understood to be very difficult to maintain a balance between professional and family demands. Further, being a leader ... the situation was understood to be even more critical. Discussion with the women leaders revealed different aspects relating to maintaining a balance.

One of the respondents stated:

“I don’t think it’s possible so easily ...I have always tried to do it ...but you know ... it’s really very difficult. Our nature of work starts dominating us and, at the end of the day, the family has to suffer. I don’t remember the last family function I attended. My children always complain about missing me ...”

Another respondent said:

“I think ... being a woman leader, it’s really a tough task. I shall accept that I have not been successfully able to balance it. Since my husband is very supporting, I have been somehow able to manage ...but you know ... it’s really very difficult ...”

Interestingly, during the discussion, it also emerged that 60% of the women directors were either unmarried or were staying alone, and hence it was not a major issue for them. One of the respondents stated:

“Well ... that’s not an issue ... I stay alone and hence, there is no problem ...”

Discussion

The exploration of the experiences and views expressed by the women directors of the management institutes reveals that not more than 20% of the women leaders had thought of making a career in the education industry. The joining of 80% of the female leaders was purely accidental. These and other findings suggest that generating greater insight into the “dark” sides of women leadership in the education industry is important both for the development of knowledge regarding women leadership and for conceptualising contemporary academic industry life.

A key contribution of this study is the provision of insights into women’s leadership in the education industry with specific reference to the management institutes in the Indian setting. While a number of existing studies have highlighted the research conducted in respect of various aspects of leadership and the need for more research in this area (e.g. Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Ross & Chung, 2003; Papa, Lankford & Wyckoff, 2002; Roza, Celio, Harvey & Wishon, 2003), the present study supplies insights that explicitly and exclusively focus on the experiences of women leaders while working as directors in management institutes. A number of scholars in the area of women leadership issues have noted the effect of women being a leader (e.g. Currie, Thiele & Harris, 2002; Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 2002; Pierce & Newstrom, 2003; Powell, Butterfield & Parent, 2002). This research develops and broadens the perspective on women leadership to a wider view that recognizes and integrates the management institutes in the education industry.

Further, the research contributes insights regarding various leadership challenges confronting women directors. While a great deal of research has been carried out in the field of female leadership, the exploration of the factors that led to taking up a leadership position provides a distinct contemporary contribution. Indeed, the research has identified a novel range of experiences (as shared by the women leaders) that have not been discussed explicitly in the literature on issues of female leadership.

These findings may well be a manifestation of the research focus adopted. Unlike previous studies that

identify many reasons why women are not in top level administrative and superintendent positions (e.g., Berman, 1999; Björk, 2000; Brunner, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Glass, 2000; Grogan, 2000; Keller, 1999b; McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998; Tallerico, 2000), this study provides evidence of the internal and external challenges faced by the women directors of the management institutes in the Indian setting. Previous studies have focused on the styles of women leaders (e.g. Clinch, 1996; Dunne, 2000; Eakle, 1995; Pavan, 1996; Skrla, 1999), issues related to becoming a superintendent (e.g. Glass, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Young & Skrla, 2003), issues relating to a narrowly defined leader image, gender stereotypes, double standards, exclusion from informal networks, negative attitudes and “chilly climate”, and lack of work-related assistance or mentoring (Bond, 2000; Carli, 1998; Chliwniak, 1997; Collins, 1998; Curry, 2000; Dietz, 1997; English, 2000; Guteck, 2001; Jablonski, 1996; McGuire, 2002) – and have overlooked the aspects that motivate women in the academic institutes to take up leadership position. The present study, however, has unearthed some of the grounded aspects affecting women leaders associated with the management institutes that emphasise that the leadership challenges which are being faced by the women directors of the management institutes are fundamental to a more complete understanding of the complexities of women leadership in the education industry.

This study contributes insights regarding the reasons which inspire women to join the academic industry. It was found that most of the women, initially, joined the academic industry in order to utilise their spare time. Since they wanted to keep themselves busy and earn some money, without taking on an excessive work load and pressure, joining the education industry was found to be the best option for them. A very small percentage of the sample was found to be really interested and had decided from the outset to make a career in the education industry. Further, it was understood that the shift towards leadership for some happened due to the opportunities available to them which challenged their hidden potential. For others, it was a matter either of succession to the position (in the case of family business, from one generation to the next) or was simply thrust upon the one who fulfilled the minimum desired qualification of a doctorate.

This study contributes insights into the internal and external challenges that confront the female leaders. The internal challenges identified relate to handling the students as well as staff issues, whereas the external challenges relate to meeting the norms of

various governing bodies.

During the discussion, even though it emerged that most of the leaders had to deal with male egoists, it was nevertheless also understood that this was not specifically because of being a woman but because of being a director. Yet, in some cases, it was accepted that the women directors had continuously to prove their capability.

Lastly, the research also highlighted that, although those women leaders with families had a difficult time in balancing their personal and professional lives, for others it was not an issue.

The current study supplies evidence for the view that the women leaders in educational institutes have to face a whole range of issues and challenges which need to be successfully overcome in order to run the institutes smoothly. The findings of this study help to explain how and why women enter the education industry and what motivates them to make a move towards leadership roles, how they enact the role once they are in the position, their challenges and concerns and the impact on family life. This experience of leadership takes place within the context of being an academic woman within the Indian management institutes at a time when education institutes are under increasing pressure resulting from globalisation and national agendas for making quality reforms.

The directors in this study were unique women who pioneered in positions generally held by males. What became evident was that these women were talented in areas common to all leaders. They were able to articulate to others the skills they could offer when given the opportunity to compete for available positions. They entered this competition with a set of working assumptions including the concept that they had to prove themselves more competent than expected and certainly able to perform in traditional ways.

For a number of the women, there continue to be ongoing challenges with respect to negotiating the expectations of others and themselves in relation to being a woman and being a woman in a leadership role within an academic institution.

Some of the women have made deliberate choices to undertake certain roles because of the type of work involved and the difference they can make, challenging their potential, rather than deciding whether or not a particular position or role would be a good career move. Many of the same elements may also hold true for men entering and undertaking leadership roles in management institutes.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Further Research

This study has a number of limitations that should be highlighted. In particular, two restrictions deserve individual attention. Firstly, the research design was purposefully explanatory and descriptive in nature. While this approach has allowed us to illuminate and more clearly highlight the concepts and constructs involved in women leadership in the education industry, the nature of the study precludes causal claims. In this regard, the views and experiences shared by the women directors should be viewed as individualised experiences and views and not as necessarily generalisable to the education industry on the whole.

The evidence from the interviews strongly indicates that women leaders in management institutes not only face different kinds of challenges due directly to their being in the position of director, but also have concerns in respect of maintaining a balance between work and family life. Thus, although my research precludes definitive casual claims, the presented evidence and existing theory is sufficient to enable us tentatively to suggest the existence of such associations.

The study is also limited to the extent that we had to rely on informants' experiences, recall abilities and self-reporting. As with all studies that rely on informants, it is not possible conclusively to exclude the possibility that informants (intentionally or otherwise) supplied inaccurate or misleading responses (either for reasons of social desirability bias or simply to conceal other acts). Although I designed this research to limit such bias, the possibilities of such issues must be acknowledged.

Secondly, the focus of this study has primarily been on understanding the experience of being a women leader in a management institute and not on the availability of support for women administrators in various forms like family, mentorship and network support (Berman, 1999; Glass, 2000; Keller, 1999a; McCabe & Dobbertein, 1998; Polleys, 1999) or issues relating to women's credentials (Anderson, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Polleys, 1999), as conventionally discussed in the literature. Although I feel that such an approach has generated deep and interesting insights into the experiences and issues faced by women leaders in the management institutes, this focus limits the extent to which I am able to comment on the full range of issues relating to women in leadership positions in the management institutes. Similarly, I am unable to comment validly on the antecedents of the female

leadership issues with specific reference to the academic industry. Such issues require future research, which, given the likely time lags involved, is unlikely to be forthcoming for a number of years.

The limitations and contributions of the study lead to a number of potentially fertile opportunities for further research. While this study has revealed many interesting experiences and issues faced by women leaders, the methodological approach adopted may also have constrained the findings, insofar as it uncovered and focused on five aspects of women directors in the management institutes, using qualitative methods. Thus, further studies wishing to extend the present research findings may benefit from the adoption of quantitative methods of data collection. Further, I believe that it would be advantageous to adopt a different approach in future studies by further exploring these phenomena over a longer period, with data collection occurring at numerous points in time. Such an approach should not only yield valuable insights into the changing opinions and views of the subjects, but would also monitor the perceived attitudinal changes of the egoists over a period of time.

Future researchers could also focus on conducting a similar qualitative study with male leaders in the education industry to compare and contrast men and women leaders' experiences in the management institutes. Do men also experience the pressure to

prove continuously that they are competent enough for their positions? Do they face the pressure to be better than everyone else to succeed and remain in their leadership posts?

Research could also investigate whether the increase in the proportion of women in leadership positions in the management institutes created negative effects or discomfort for men. When men become the directors, do they experience the same issues and challenges or extra pressure to perform, or do they retain their status as equal members with their voices well attended to? Some research could also be done to compare the challenges and issues faced by men and women directors and the comparative strategies adopted by them to overcome the situation. What other difficulties or problems have women experienced in the administration of management education? What other skills and strategies have been employed to help women succeed more easily? Without further study, such issues will remain speculative, so I strongly urge my colleagues to pursue this topic.

It is hoped that the present results not only offer valuable insights into various aspects and challenges of women's experience of leadership in educational institutes, but also provide a tentative starting point for greater understanding of the complex and clandestine facets of organisational life that form the dark side of organisational behaviour.

About the Author



Rajib Lochan Dhar completed his MBA in HR in 2003. While working with a research company, he obtained his M Phil in Management from Pune University in 2005 and was awarded a gold medal. While continuing with his work, he completed his Doctorate in Management through Birla Institute of Technology. The focus of his doctoral dissertation was on establishing ideal recruitment processes for a placement consultancy. To date, Dr Dhar has had fifteen research papers published in refereed international journals. He has also authored a book, recently published by Excel Books under the title *Strategic Human Resource Management* (2008). Presently he is working as a Senior Research Analyst with Pure Information Technology Pty. Ltd. He is also a visiting lecturer at the Symbiosis Institute of International Business, Symbiosis International University, Pune, India. His area of expertise lies in qualitative research methodology, cross-cultural conflicts, organisational behaviour and international human resource management (HRM). His research interest lies in the field of Education, Social Sciences, Organisational Behaviour and HRM. He has also served as a reviewer of journal submissions in these areas.

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