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Strengths-Based Leadership: Seeking a Connection Between Strengths-Based Leadership Domains and Women Leaders in Higher Education

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STRENGTHS-BASED LEADERSHIP:
SEEKING A CONNECTION BETWEEN STRENGTHS-BASED LEADERSHIP DOMAINS
AND WOMEN LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Sarah Engel

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
Specialization:
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ABSTRACT

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This exploratory study examines the leadership styles of a small sample of high level women leaders in the profession of higher education. In this study, high-level is indicative of directors, assistant/associate deans, deans, assistant/associate vice presidents, vice presidents, provosts or presidents. Due to the disparity of women leaders attaining high level leadership roles within higher education professions, this sample study discusses the connections between strength-based leadership domains and high-level women leaders. Additional connections between other leadership competencies and leadership styles are also considered, including Northouse leadership styles, Level 5 leadership, resilient leadership, emotional intelligence and authentic leadership. Results are discussed to determine the possibility of future leadership development training that encourages the advancement of women beyond the “glass ceiling” of high level higher education leadership.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

An abundance of research papers and books have been written in the field of leadership, covering multiple competencies. Influenced by the positive correlation of personal satisfaction and longevity that is attributed to the utilization of strengths-based leadership in different organizations, and with a particular interest in women in leadership, particularly as it relates to higher education, this paper considers the effects, positive or negative, of strengths-based leadership to determine if there is a connection between certain leadership domains among women in higher education leadership. While women are significantly represented in higher education professions, there is a disproportionate representation of women in higher education leadership. Using both quantitative data collection as well as qualitative analysis to determine if strengths-based leadership facilitates a remarkable influence on the progression of women in higher education leadership roles, the research considers whether or not certain strength domains empower women to advance in the profession of higher education at a higher rate than others.

Thoughtful consideration of foundational leadership competencies in regard to gender bias and stereotype is essential. The distinction between women in leadership, as compared to male leadership, remains of particular relevance in today's contemporary society, and is especially of interest within the academic walls of higher education where women outnumber men in total population, but not in positions of leadership. The review of literature considers multiple leadership competencies contributing to commonalities between all areas of leadership, while also understanding the distinctive challenges of each as they relate to gender. Additionally, there is intentional focus on strengths-based leadership and the roles of women leaders in higher education.

Disparity of Leadership among Women in College Admissions

Regardless of gender, the most common traits of great leadership include trustworthiness, charisma, and strong self-awareness. This is true and essential for effective leaders in higher education. However, one example of disparity in higher education leadership is within college admissions. Dewars (2013) presented data from the National Association of College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) indicating an estimated sixty-five percent of members were women (Appendix A). Over sixty percent of national conference attendees for the organization were women, yet the majority of conference presenters were men at an estimated fifty-five percent (Appendix A). Additionally, Dewars (2013) presented NACAC report data indicating the majority of board leadership roles within collaborative organizations such as College Board, ACT, Kaplan, and Hobsons, and including the NACAC board, favor men (Appendix B).

NACAC Career Path Study Responders

In 2011 NACAC surveyed its members selecting admissions professionals from four-year institutions (Dewars, 2013). Nearly fifteen hundred members responded at a rate of thirty-one percent. Forty admission professionals were contacted by phone for follow up interviews. Correlating with the total number of female members in NACAC, sixty-one percent of survey responders were women, many of whom were serving as admission counselors and middle managers. At the most senior level of admission leadership, deans and vice presidents, female percentages decreased below forty percent, with male responders increasing to just over sixty percent (Appendix C).

Career change seekers

While the career path survey indicates similar percentages of men and women indicating interest in seeking new short-term career opportunities (Dewars, 2013), nearly double the

number of women indicated they would be seeking careers outside of admissions overall (Appendix D). The survey does not indicate reasons for seeking outside of current profession, but other evidence is suggestive that opportunities are either limited for professional advancement for women or women may be self-selecting out of the profession do to a perception/reality of the “glass ceiling.”

Salary inequity

At the admission counselor level, salary remains fairly equitable across gender. However, Dewars (2013) presentation of survey data considers the salary for admission middle managers and directors. The disparity in salary begins to suggest that the higher the salary reported - the higher percentage of men. In other words, for the same positions, women earn less salary overall than their male colleagues. For those women, while still the minority, who achieve higher level leadership as deans and vice presidents, salary equity seems to exist (Appendix E).

Skills for advancement

The Career Paths survey also asked responders to consider the most important skills for advancement in the admission profession (Dewars, 2013). With over seventy-five percent majority, the top consideration was previous admissions experience, followed by writing skills (74.1%), statistics/data analysis (69.4 %), and personnel and resource management (62.7 %). Other skills included marketing and public relations (nearly 60%), business management (50.5 %), higher education administration (40%). An advanced degree, master’s or doctorate, ranked nearly thirty-eight percent, followed by technology/web/social media, multicultural recruitment, transfer recruitment, international recruitment and non-traditional student recruitment (Appendix F). On average, women attributed slightly greater importance to writing skills,

personnel/resource management, business management, higher education administration, and all forms of recruitment as compared to men.

Professional resources

Survey respondents then ranked the importance of: on-the-job training, professional mentorship, knowledge and skills acquired in undergraduate or graduate level course work, resources and training provided by NACAC or NACAC affiliate organizations, resources and training provided by College Board and/or ACT, and resources provided by ACCRAO (Dewars, 2013). On average, the survey reports that women attributed slightly greater importance to on-the-job training and resources and training provided by NACAC or NACAC affiliate organizations as compared to men (Appendix G).

Leadership roles in higher education professions

Finally, NACAC reports indicate the disparity in professional leadership roles of higher education admission professionals (Dewars, 2013). Women make up the majority of entry level and mid-level manager professionals, while the males significantly represent the total population of chief enrollment officer, chief academic officer and university presidents (Appendix I). If a glass ceiling exists, it exists just above the middle-management level.

The Significance of the Research Question

Trends indicate that women will self-select out of the profession of higher education due to lack of opportunity caused by gender bias within the profession, but caused also by self-imposed gender bias against oneself. Women are more likely than men to consider line by line elements of a job description to disqualify oneself from a position, rather than to focus on the areas of a position she may excel. She may also determine a position to be out of reach given the necessity to be primary caregiver for children (or an aging parent), and to be the primary person

responsible for domestic roles in the home. Rather than focus on one's strengths and leadership domain, women leaders often identify the challenges or the obstacles that ultimately sabotage their own advancement opportunities.

Furthermore, there seems to be disparity between genders in terms of the most important indicators for success in advanced leadership roles. The research for this study will either support the NACAC Career Paths survey result, or it may offer inconsistent results. It may support pattern, but may not be robust in terms of providing relevant data to consider a comparison.

However, if a connection exists between strengths-based leadership and the advancement of women within the profession of higher education, regardless of gender disparities, training opportunities may be developed to empower women professionals to seek opportunity at the appropriate times, and with confidence that defies the historical gender bias. Strengths-based leadership may encourage women to self-select into a position, rather than self-select out. And potentially, the future of leadership may become defined by strengths-based descriptions and assessments, in addition to current standards of measurement, to alleviate gender discrimination altogether.

In the case for work-life balance, it has been said that child-care opportunities, increased flexibility, mentorship and support are not just good for women, but are good for all. Arguments for strengths-based leadership include the higher likelihood for employee longevity, increased job satisfaction and personal happiness. When one is utilizing strengths in leadership, there is a higher likelihood for confidence and for seeking advancement opportunities.

Definition of Terms

This study focuses on Rath's (2008) strengths-based leadership which is defined as: talent x investment = strength. Talent is defined as a natural way of thinking, feeling or behaving. Investment is considered the time spent practicing, developing skills and building knowledge. Strength is defined as the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance.

The study considers Collin's (2001) Level 5 Leadership, which is defined as executive leadership that exists with ambition, humility, self-sacrifice and accountability for an organizations achievements as well as failures. Special consideration of Goleman's (2002) primal leadership discussions emphasizes the significance of emotional intelligence in various leadership styles.

The study considers Northouse (2013) definitions of leadership, considering whether leadership is genuine and interpersonal. Like that of transformational leadership; authentic leadership is "concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals" (p. 185), it includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. Both authentic and transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them" (Northouse, 2013, p. 185).

Additionally, George (2012) describes authentic leadership as mission-driven and global, focusing on long-term institutional health, values, and service. Authentic leadership is often described as the result of having a life story or circumstance that defines a leader's motives to serve community, not self. Further research introduces resilient leadership, which considers how one uses adaptive, coping traits to inform and hone positive character skills that attribute to one's ability to overcome adversity.

Leadership Competencies and Gender Bias

The review of literature considers these definitions and the various leadership competencies, including the analysis of gender, gender bias and gender stereotype. The literature provides context in terms of effective leadership attributes, as well as analysis of strengths-based leadership and strengths-based leadership domains, which serves as the primary assessment connecting remarkable trends for women in higher education leadership.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review focuses on the content of relevant books and research articles that discuss the use of talents, emotional intelligence and the contemporary leadership competencies: authentic, resilient, servant, strengths-based, and transformational leadership, particularly as it relates to higher education leadership and women in leadership.

Strength-Based Leadership

Research indicates that a majority of people do not feel like they are *doing what they do best* in their professions every day. Those who do feel they are *doing what they do best*, are those who are more likely to be engaged in their profession, have more loyalty, and enjoy a higher quality of life. While common practice is to focus on improving weaknesses, Rath (2007) encourages leaders to practice and perfect their strengths. Using the equation: talent (a natural way of thinking, feeling or behaving) *times* investment (time spent practicing, developing skills, and building knowledge) equals strength (the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance). Through research, thirty-four themes are cataloged. Via an assessment tool, one may identify his or her top five themes, and are then provided *ideas for action* for each theme.

Rath (2008) continues the discussion of *strengths* as a leadership competency further explaining that the development one's own ability to invest in one's leadership strengths, while maximizing the effectiveness of one's team using strengths, converts to a leadership domain. Rath (2008) introduces four leadership domains: *executing, influencing, relationship building, and strategic thinking*. An individual's leadership domain is determined by the combination of his/her top five themes (strengths).

Rath's theories of leadership are based on extensive research and data over numerous years and in numerous capacities. While the research and themes cannot inherently determine one's ability to be trustworthy or charismatic, it does allow for strong self-awareness. The assessments empower individuals to embrace one's top talents and lead confidently, and the leadership domains are not gender specific. Furthermore, the leadership domains close the gender gap by celebrating stereotypes in terms of natural leadership talents, regardless of gender characteristics. Diversity in strengths equates to diversity in leadership.

Good to great. Previously, Collins (2001) explored the concepts of effective *Level 5 Leadership*. A *Level 5 leader* demonstrates executive leadership that is ambitious for the company, but displays humility, self-sacrifice, diligence and accountability. These leaders are focused on having the right team members present, in the right roles, who will be self-motivated to achieve results. They are deliberate with structuring their team. Focus is placed on the brutal facts of the reality, and dialogue that allows for the open discussion of these facts. They value the *hedgehog concept*, which intersects passion, with being the best at a simple idea, with utilizing the single most impactful economic tactic. *Level 5 leadership* values disciplined people, disciplined thoughts and disciplined actions. Not only do they implement a purposeful *to-do* list, they will understand the importance of a *stop-doing* list. They will be thoughtful and strategic with technology and avoid impulsive decision-making without heavy consideration. Ultimately, *Level 5 leadership* will not seek publicity or celebrity; but will willingly accept responsibility for failure, and will focus on the success of company and team over individual benefit.

Of significant relevance, Collins (2001) introduced the idea of *having the right people on the right seats on the bus*. This principle foreshadowed Rath's strengths-based leadership,

identifying that the most successful organizations foster individual talents and promote team-building by incorporating strategic leadership and decision-making based on individuals assigned to positions fitting of their greatest strengths. Again, the theory of *Level 5 leadership* is gender neutral, but assumes that gender diversity is non-threatening and gender stereotypes are non-existent. The decisiveness of a *Level 5 leader* to be extremely disciplined and purposeful may be attributed to masculine traits, but the willingness to accept responsibility for failure and to share success would be indicative of feminine traits.

Academic leadership. Bolman & Gallos (2011) discuss the challenges and opportunities of leading within an academic institution of higher education, and they do so with gender equitable representation of academic leaders. Particular interest includes a section describing leaders as *compassionate politicians*. Additionally, a third of the text focuses on managing conflict, leading from the middle, leading difficult people, managing your boss, sustaining one's health and vitality and feeding the soul. Because the content is focused on the organizational structure of higher education, it offers compelling and accurate assessment of the challenges of leadership, on multiple levels, in a University setting.

Often stifled within the confines of traditional academia, leaders in higher education must earn the trust of various constituents and work delicately to balance decision-making that is in the best interest of students, faculty, alumni and the University brand. Not all academic leaders are charismatic or self-aware, but all sense the weight of political divisiveness, regardless of gender. For the sake of argument, however, this paper will discuss specific research that does relate to academic leadership across gender.

Christman & McClellan (2012) conducted two research studies in the field of gender and resilient leadership among higher education administrators. Using a modified online Delphi

technique to gather data, researchers studied the responses of male and female academic administrators (department heads, chairs, deans, administrators, etc). Participants were selected initially from the University Council for Educational Administrators, where it was noted that while there was sufficient number of male administrators, additional recruitment of women outside of the resource was required. All participants shared equal or balanced qualifications and accomplishments, and each gender was equally represented. There was a mix of race/ethnicity (which was not a consideration of the research).

The study had four objectives: to explore and expose underlying assumptions, to elicit information, to correlate expert judgments, and to educate participants about the diverse and interconnected features of the topic. In this study, the topic was *resiliency*, and it was defined as the adaptive, coping traits used to form and hone positive character skills that attribute to one's ability to overcome adversity. Resiliency was described as transformative, and the study referenced the *Challenge Model* (Wolin and Wolin, 1993), which includes seven characteristics of resilient leadership: insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humor and morality. Responses to the survey questions required participants to describe intensive self-reflection, another attribute of resilient leadership. Researchers created a list of markers, determined by using participant response data, which was later ranked by the participants.

Masculine markers included terms like: authoritative, decisive, controlling, transactional, taking charge, assertive, powerful, ambitious, competitive, fact finding, unemotional, distant, competent, and rational. Feminine markers included terms like: empowerment, teaching, role modeling, openness, collaboration, working through people, listening, and emotional intimacy. Distinctive results of the study identified male descriptions of resiliency featured internal (I-focused) responses (what I did to lead) with competitive, ambitious tones. Female descriptions

of resiliency featured examples of community influenced responses (how others shaped my decisions). Men described taking teams into battle and winning that battle as leader. Women described earning the position of leadership and accepting the responsibility that comes with it, ever mindful of the gender bias ahead of them.

Men recognized the value of both the masculine and feminine markers, but credit their resilience to the masculine markers (and in fact fear the perception of weakness equated to female markers). Meanwhile, women felt challenged with the necessity to balance both masculine and feminine markers, while potentially sacrificing self-identity. The middle space is the balance, or overlap, between the two.

The research supports the idea that even in areas of gender neutrality, leaders (regardless of level 5 leadership or strengths-based leadership) will internally re-define themselves into gender categories, invoking gender stereotypes.

Litmanovitz (2011) further addresses the leadership gender gap in education by conducting interviews with female leaders in education and sharing explanations of the identified problem. The following sources were identified as obstacles in female leadership in education: lack of role models, leadership stereotypes (align with masculine traits), lack of pipeline, work-life balance, and different reasons for entering into education as a profession. The article discusses the importance of role models and mentors to influence, coach and encourage female leaders to succeed in education leadership. The article further suggests leadership training that empowers females, allowing them to overcome misperceptions of soft leadership skills. Benefits such as on-site daycare and flexible schedules are encouraged for work-life balance.

However, the final explanation for the gender gap describes the different reasons for entering the education profession. Women become educators because they enjoy working with

students and teaching. Administration includes management, which is not a fundamental reason attracting women into the educational profession. The article does not expand on this, and it would be an interesting area of research. Great educators do not necessarily make great administrators. Further distinction between administrative leadership and authentic leadership amongst female educators would be beneficial.

Most importantly, little is discussed with regard to reverse mentorship. In terms of women in leadership, the consistent message is for women to mentor women and for women to self-solve obstacles in terms of gender bias. Examples of obstacles include child caring, domestic responsibilities and balance. Until the challenges associated with women in leadership become identified as human challenges, not gender specific challenges, there can be no social change. The exhaustive cycle will continue, fostering burnout that could dangerously result in lack of women leadership.

Academic to corporate, not so different. Evans (2011) uses Catalyst research to discuss the imbalance of leadership within Fortune 500 companies. While research links increased representation of women in executive roles to increased financial results, and while most executives believe women at high levels drive performance, gender initiatives are still necessary in order to address the gender imbalance in positions of power.

Statistics indicate that women continue to be stereotyped and underestimated. Evans (2011) describes the challenges women face when attempting to incorporate masculine leadership traits, while balancing their innate female leadership traits. Evidence continues to indicate that men are biased against promoting women leaders and includes additional causes that influence the lack of women leaders: lack of workplace flexibility, exclusion from informal

networks, lack of role models and mentors, and lack of business strategy to develop women from within.

Evans (2011) sites examples of companies that have made great strides in promoting women, linking the success of women leaders with smart economics. Women are a key target audience of the consumer market, and therefore, women in leadership influence consumer decision making, from both ends of the economic spectrum (as the suppliers and as the consumers). Evans (2011) recognizes the management and leadership strengths that women can bring to the table, while discussing the issues of work-life balance that women require.

Once again, the responsibility to identify, to consider and to solve leadership obstacles related to work-life balance, child caring and domestic responsibilities become gender specific to women leaders. The gender bias is inequitable, and little is discussed that considers the most common traits of successful leadership: trust, charisma and self-awareness. What is considered is quite literally exhausting.

Leadership roots. Goleman (2002) continues to have significant presence in all discussions of effective leadership with the competency of emotional intelligence, relying on the connections fostered through relationships. A leader may execute a plan without flaw; however, without an emotional influence or connection, he or she will be less effective than the leader who inspires and promotes optimism. In other words, a leader must be “emotionally compelling.”

Goleman (2002) considers primal leadership, resonant leadership, the neuroanatomy of leadership, and emotional intelligence to effectively build an emotionally intelligent organization. Of particular influence are the leadership styles: *coaching*, *democratic*, *affiliative* and *visionary*. These styles effectively engage the now familiar principles of establishing trust,

being charismatic and exuding self-awareness. An effective leader identifies and anticipates the needs of his or her followers, regardless of gender or position.

Northouse (2013) reviews several categories of leadership, and features a new chapter on servant leadership. Beyond the historical development of leadership competencies described throughout the book, three contemporary competencies stand out: *transformational leadership*, *servant leadership*, *authentic leadership* and *women in leadership*.

Transformational leadership is a competency that involves the transformation of an individual; not a process, system or routine. “It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers’ motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them” (Northouse, 2013, p. 185). Being a transformational leader calls for intuitiveness and influence. Servant leadership is more follower-focused; offering empowerment, nurturance, inspirational motivation, and it involves selflessness. These competencies are of particular value as they address the essence of higher education leadership in the twenty first century.

Discussions of women in leadership include the balance of traditional gender roles, mentorship, gender stereotypes and perceptions of prejudice. It is interesting to note that leadership competency discussions that are not defined by gender focus on the traits and attributes of a leader and his or her ability to be effective (trustworthy, charismatic and self-assured). It is of interest and consequence that the discussion of women in leadership necessarily adopts a social science perspective that inevitably addresses social injustice or imbalance. Perhaps that in and of itself hinders the existence of authentic leadership regardless of gender.

Authentic leadership. George & McClean (2007) became interested in the idea that there were people in leadership positions with all of the right skills and traits to be effective leaders, yet they had an inability to arouse enthusiasm, receive support and be effective. In order to learn more about effective leadership, researchers studied a group of 125 *authentic* leaders. The leaders were chosen based on their success, effectiveness and reputation for integrity.

Through a series of interviews, researchers asked the questions: What propels leaders as they move from being individual contributors to effective, authentic leaders? What were the reasons the leaders became so successful? How did their leadership abilities develop? The answers were unexpected. The conclusion indicated that authentic leaders do not rely on specific traits or skill, styles or characteristics; rather, their *life stories and experiences* shaped their abilities to lead.

Authentic leaders all experienced some sort of significant event in their lives, a *crucible*, which reshaped their way of thinking about their success. The authors refer to this as a transformation from “I” to “we.” Leadership is no longer about being followed and achieving personal success. Leadership becomes about building a team, aligning goals and values, and empowering others to achieve. It is about serving.

Leaders shared stories of personal tragedy or moments of *having a mirror placed in front of their faces*. While non-authentic leaders may choose to be defensive in times of adversity, an authentic leader chooses to reinvent oneself with a focus on serving others. They experienced a significant transformation in their life, or they simply listened to constructive criticism openly and reacted in the positive. All shared a newfound sense of humility, and all reshaped their values, embracing a sense of compassion, empathy and commitment to others.

George (2012) refers to the 21st century leader. The article addresses the result of decade of business leadership that completely failed, introducing the U.S. to a significant economic recession. This particular decade of business leadership placed value in self-interests and short term profits/rewards, lacking long-term vision or concern for anyone below the leadership hierarchy. A consequence of this is the loss of trust, which is a crucial component to effective leadership.

George (2012) addresses the limitations to the hierarchal model of leadership (inability to motivate and inability to gain trust), and introduces the idea of 21st century *authentic* leadership. Authentic leadership is mission-driven and global, focuses on long-term institutional health, is values-based, service-oriented. George (2012) indicates that superior leadership performance includes: aligning people's mission and values; empowering people *and holding them accountable*; serving customers first; and collaborating with one another.

In the future, leadership cannot be limited to the few, but exuded by the many. How leaders are developed must evolve, and Goleman's theories involving emotional intelligence are re-introduced. George (2012) states that, "effective leadership, sustainable over long periods of time, must come from an authentic place within, which is the essential quality of leaders with high levels of EQ." The ability to gain self-awareness requires: experience, reflection, and group interaction. The article further indicates that what is missing from leadership development is that *safe place* for people to communicate and receive feedback. People need a platform to reflect on experiences; consider values, beliefs and motivations.

Shamir & Eilam (2005) sought to develop concepts of authentic leaders, authentic leadership and authentic leadership development. Authors clarified their chosen definition of authentic leadership: *self-knowledge, self-concept clarity, self-concordance and person-role*

merger – derived from a life-story. They argued that “authentic leadership rests heavily on the self-relevant meanings the leader attaches to his or her life experiences.” They describe the role of life-stories in the development of authentic leaders as follows.

- *Life-stories are a source of self-knowledge and self-concept clarity.*
- *Life-stories are self-justifications.*
- *Leadership development is a natural process.*
- *Leadership development comes out of struggle.*
- *Leadership development requires one to find a cause.*
- *Leadership development requires one to learn from experiences.*
- *Non-leaders lacked life-stories.*
- *Self-development requires the development of a life story.*
- *Life stories are the basis for leader authentication.*

Similar in conclusion to George’s theories, it is useful to consider Shamir and Eilem’s research as another means to study the *genuineness* that is marker for authentic leaders. In other words, to understand the value of trust, charisma and self-awareness that comes from a life story inclusive of adversity. Authentic leadership is not gender biased.

Gender neutral leadership. It doesn’t seem possible to consider gender neutral leadership, despite the compelling evidence that strengths-based leadership, level 5 leadership, transformational leadership and authentic leadership are rooted in neutrality. However, it seems evident that regardless of competency, gender bias will be considered, often in the form of criticism or judgment against women versus positively identifiable masculine traits of men. All leadership competencies consider trust, charisma and self-awareness as essential attributes, but earning these descriptive is biased dependent upon gender stereotyping. Inequitable

consideration towards balance, child care and domestic roles are variables within research of women leaders, and are absent from consideration for male leaders.

Masculine leadership traits are considered more positively, while female traits may be considered soft (weak), regardless of how affective a leader will be. However, research indicates that utilizations of talents and strengths position a leader to be impactful regardless of gender, as does the ability to be authentic and transformational. In time, social change may or may not be affected if the conversations remain bias or inequitable. True social change may occur if there is a willingness to reverse mentor across genders, so that the discussions of leadership, and the obstacles of effective leadership, are gender blind. What will always remain true of great leaders: trust, charisma and self-awareness have stood the test of time.

Chapter 3

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to examine the strengths of select women leaders in higher education professions, to determine whether or not there is a connection between strengths-based leadership domains and the progression of women into high level leadership in higher education. Higher level leadership may include: director, chair, dean, vice president, provost and president. Although the total number of women in higher education professions is high, the number of high level women leaders in higher education remains disproportionate, as compared to men. At the point of middle management in higher education, data suggests an invisible “glass ceiling” that either prevents women from progressing into higher level leadership, or it suggests that women self-select out of the profession of higher education for reasons that appear to only exist among women leaders.

This chapter offers a description of the research method used for the study; explains the selection and sample of participants; describes the use of assessment, questionnaire and survey used to gather data; and, provides a description of how the data is being analyzed.

Research Method

The research for this study was exploratory in nature. It utilized quantitative data, but the resulting discussion is descriptive and qualitative. The following two assessments were used to gather primary data: Gallup’s strengths-based leadership assessment and the Northouse leadership style questionnaire. Additionally, the sample group was surveyed to determine if there are commonalities attributed to resilient leadership, authentic leadership, transformational leadership, emotionally intelligent leadership, and Level 5 leadership.

Sample

For this study, a small sample was identified. Use of this sample study may help to determine whether or not to pursue a larger study in the future. One institution has been represented. Twenty-five female leaders were identified with the following positions represented: director, assistant/associate dean, dean, assistant vice president, vice president, and provost. Race, ethnicity, and age were not considered for the sample.

Instrumentation

The assessments used to determine connections included: StrengthsFinders 2.0 (strengths-based leadership domain) (Appendix J) and the Northouse leadership style questionnaire (Appendix K). Additionally, participants were asked to complete a survey created by the researcher (Appendix L), which was designed to gather quantitative data to consider qualitative connections between Level 5 leadership and emotionally intelligent leadership, and to determine evidence of resilient, transformational and authentic leadership. The survey content was derived from content of literature, and representative of foundational leadership competencies.

Data Collection

The project proposal was submitted to and approved by the Institutional Review Board in the spring semester of 2014. All participants received an invitation to participate in the project in April, 2014. Consents were collected and stored in a secure file. Results of the strengths-based leadership assessments, Northouse questionnaires and the individual survey were also collected and stored in a secure file.

Analysis

All data was reviewed and organized to consider whether or not connections exist in strengths-based leadership domains, Northouse leadership style, Level 5 leadership traits, emotional intelligence, resiliency, and authentic leadership qualities for women in higher education leadership. For comparative purposes, demographic data and personal life circumstances of each participant were not considered; however, length of service in the profession of higher education and length of leadership role was collected.

Hypothesis

This project was exploratory in nature. The purpose of the small sample size was to provide an initial study to determine if a more significant research project should be considered.

The following hypotheses existed:

- Research will affirm connections of leadership competencies and strengths-based leadership domains for women leadership in advanced higher education professions. However, which competencies and domains are to be determined.
- Strengths-based leadership domains are influential in breaking through the “glass-ceiling” and these leadership domains may positively influence the ability for future women leaders to close the gap on salary inequity between genders.

Summary

The objective of this study was to determine whether or not certain strength-based leadership domains and leadership competencies contribute to the advancement of women in higher education leadership at a higher rate than others. The purpose for this was to consider the invisible “glass ceiling” which exists for women in higher education middle management

leadership, and to determine if that ceiling can be lifted with the influence of strengths-based leadership strategies.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Analysis of the sample data indicates connections between women leaders in higher education high level leadership in all areas considered: strength-based leadership domains, Northouse leadership styles and the leadership survey assessing: Level 5 leadership, resilient leadership, emotional intelligence, and authentic leadership. The results for each assessment are presented in this chapter.

Review of participants

Of the twenty-five invited participants, sixteen signed consents to participate (Table 1.0). Of the sixteen who consented, fourteen completed the strengths assessment. Of those fourteen, nine completed the strength assessment in April, 2014, specifically for this study, and five had completed the strengths assessment outside of this study, therefore submitting earlier results. Eleven completed the Northouse leadership styles questionnaire and ten completed the leadership survey.

Table 1.0 Invited participants

Invited participants	25
consents received	16
participants who completed strengths	14
participants who completed Northouse	11
participants who completed survey	10

Strength-based leadership domain results

All leadership domains were represented; however, the most common leadership domain amongst women leaders in high level higher education leadership was Strategic Thinking (Table 2.0). Strategic Thinking leadership domain includes the following strengths as defined by

StrengthsFinder®: analytical, context, futuristic, ideation, input, intellection, learner, strategic.

StrengthsFinder® indicates that: leaders with great Strategic Thinking strengths are the ones who keep all members of a team or organization focused on what could be. They are constantly absorbing and analyzing information and helping the team make better decisions. People with strength in this domain continually stretch our thinking for the future (Appendix J).

Table 2.0 Strengths-Based Leadership Domain Results

Strengths-Based Leadership Domain Results	
Executing Domain	2
Influencing Domain	1
Relationship Building	2
Strategic Thinking Domain	9

Results indicate that of the fourteen participants, five share two leadership domains, utilizing strengths across both domains (Table 2.1). Of the two leaders who lead with Executing domains, one shares the Influencing domain. The one who leads with Influencing domain, also shares the Relationship Building domain. Of the two leaders who lead with Relationship Building domains, one shares Strategic Thinking. Of the nine Strategic Thinking domains, one shares an Influencing domain and one shares a Relationship Building domain.

Table 2.1 Strengths-Based Leadership Shared Domain Results

Strengths-Based Leadership Shared Domain Results	
Executing Domain	2
shared Executing/Influencing	1
Influencing Domain	1
shared Influencing/Relationship Building	1
Relationship Building Domain	2
shared Relationship Building/Strategic Thinking	1
Strategic Thinking Domain	9
shared Strategic Thinking/Influencing	1
shared Strategic Thinking/Relationship Building	1

Northouse leadership styles

Of the eleven participants who completed the Northouse leadership styles questionnaire, all results indicate use of democratic leadership style (Table 3.0).

Table 3.0 Northouse Leadership Styles Results

Northouse Leadership Styles Results	
Authoritarian	0
Democratic	11
Laissez-Faire	0

The democratic leadership style is indicative of the following: employees will be part of the decision-making process; the leader will provide guidance without pressure, offer frequent and supportive communication, help subordinates accept responsibility for completing their work, help subordinates find their “passion;” and, the leader believes that people are basically competent and if given a task will do a good job (Appendix K).

Leadership survey

Ten participants completed the leadership survey. The results were tallied (Table 4.0), and qualitative connections were created, based on the review of literature. In the table, each question has been replaced with the associated leadership style as concluded by the researcher (Appendix L).

Participants highly indicated agreement or strong agreement with the characteristics of Level 5 leadership (Appendix L, questions 1-8). Participants mostly agreed or strongly agreed with the female markers of resilient leadership; however, also associated with two male markers (Appendix L, questions 9-16). (The association of male markers may be a result of how the questions were worded or perceived, or could be a result of women leaders adapting to male markers as necessity.) All seemed to associate with all four emotional intelligent leadership

styles equally (Appendix L, questions 17-20). All indicated heavily that they agreed or strongly agreed with statements reflective of authentic leadership traits (Appendix L, questions 21-25).

Table 4.0 Leadership Survey

	Style	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
1	Level 5	0	0	1	6	3	10
2	Level 5	0	0	0	6	4	10
3	Level 5	0	0	0	2	8	10
4	Level 5	0	0	2	6	2	10
5	Level 5	0	1	2	5	2	10
6	Level 5	0	0	0	7	3	10
7	Level 5	0	2	3	4	1	10
8	Level 5	0	1	1	3	5	10
9	*Resilient male	0	0	1	8	1	10
10	Resilient female	0	1	0	8	1	10
11	*Resilient male	1	5	0	4	0	10
12	Resilient female	0	0	0	4	6	10
13	Resilient female	0	2	1	2	5	10
14	Resilient female	0	0	1	4	5	10
15	Resilient female	0	2	0	6	2	10
16	Resilient female	0	2	0	7	1	10
17	Emotional IQ	0	1	1	6	2	10
18	Emotional IQ	0	0	0	5	5	10
19	Emotional IQ	0	0	2	4	5	11
20	Emotional IQ	0	1	2	6	1	10
21	Authentic	0	0	1	5	4	10
22	Authentic	0	0	4	3	3	10
23	Authentic	0	0	0	7	3	10
24	Authentic	0	0	1	5	4	10
25	Authentic	0	1	0	4	5	10

**indicates some female participants have agreed with a trait that is typically associated with male markers.*

Summary

Connections existed in all leadership areas assessed: strengths-based leadership domains, Northouse leadership styles, and within the leadership survey. Nine out of fourteen participants lead with the Strategic Thinking leadership domain, but those with alternative domains utilize

one or more talents within Strategic Thinking. Not all participants submitted all three assessments; however, all participants who submitted the Northouse Leadership Styles questionnaire shared the same result: democratic leadership. Connections were made consistently with the results the leadership survey, indicating commonalities in Level 5 leadership, resilient leadership, emotional intelligence and authentic leadership.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the strengths of women leaders in higher education enrollment professions to determine whether or not there are connections between strengths-based leadership domains and the progression of women into high level leadership in higher education. This exploratory study evaluated a small sample of high level women leaders in positions of director, assistant/associate dean, and dean, where gender disparity exists. The results of this study indicate connections.

Based on this small sample, women leaders who are advancing into high level higher education leadership have common strengths-based leadership domains and Northouse leadership styles; and they share characteristics of Level 5 leadership, resilient leadership, emotional intelligent leadership, and authentic leadership. However, further research is recommended to include a larger sample with representation from additional higher education institutions.

If connections continue to be evident as indicated in this project, results could be used to develop mentor programs or leadership training workshops to encourage and prepare women professionals in middle management of higher education for future high level leadership positions. While shared leadership domains and multiple leadership competencies are useful in all levels of leadership, clear indicators may exist for women leaders who seek advancement beyond the “glass ceiling” of higher education, and these indicators could be used to foster Strategic Thinking leadership development. Most importantly, the strengths-based leadership domain research in this project seems to promote gender-neutral leadership associations;

however, without the comparison to male leaders not included in this study, one cannot come to this conclusion definitively.

Additionally, this study was specific to the women leaders in higher education, and may or may not have similar connections within other industries where women leaders are either underrepresented or have disproportionate representation in high level leadership roles. A similar study across industries could be conducted to seek these connections.

This study did not consider age, marital status, or level of education; nor did it consider whether the participants were mothers of small children or adult children, were caring for aging parents, or maintained the primary role for domestic responsibilities within the home, often associated with women leaders. The study did not include personal interviews or questions for participants, which may or may not have indicated trends related to level of education, concerns related to work-life balance, salary, the costs of personal sacrifice, or other discussion points often associated with women leaders (described earlier as the social science elements considered within female leadership, not often considered when studying male leaders).

Data was collected on length of service in the higher education profession, as well as the number of years in higher education leadership; however, no connections were made using this information. This data may be useful in a larger study to determine appropriate length of time and preparation anticipated for advancement into high level leadership.

Based on the current sample, future women leaders might place emphasis on the Strategic Thinking talents: analytical, context, futuristic, ideation, input, intellection, learner, and strategic and may wish to complete a strengths assessment to determine leadership domain and to better understand talents associated with high level leadership. Strengths-based leadership assessments

could also be used to leverage team strengths in manners that would be beneficial to the organization served.

Additionally, participants all shared the Northouse leadership style of democratic leadership which indicates a well-trained and intentional balance between the dominant Strategic Thinking domain characteristics and the importance of valuing human relationships and community. It may be wise for future women leaders to learn from this and practice a similar style of leadership as appropriate, one that values both analytical thinking and personal relationship building.

While the results indicate commonalities, they are not intended to discredit women leaders with alternative leadership domains; rather, they consider the possibility that the development of useful Strategic Thinking talents may be beneficial to high level leadership. The ability to lead with an Executing domain, Influencing domain or Relationship Building domain should not be underestimated. This study does suggest, however, the benefits of developing Strategic Thinking talents to enhance high level leadership capabilities.

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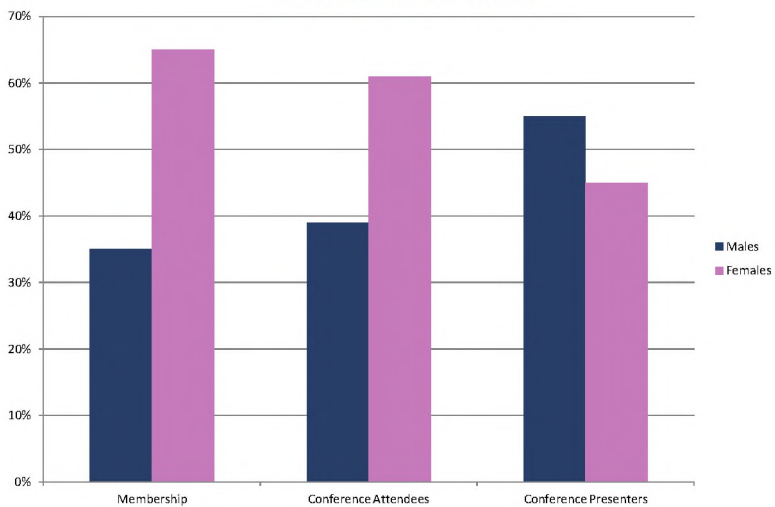
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APPENDIX A



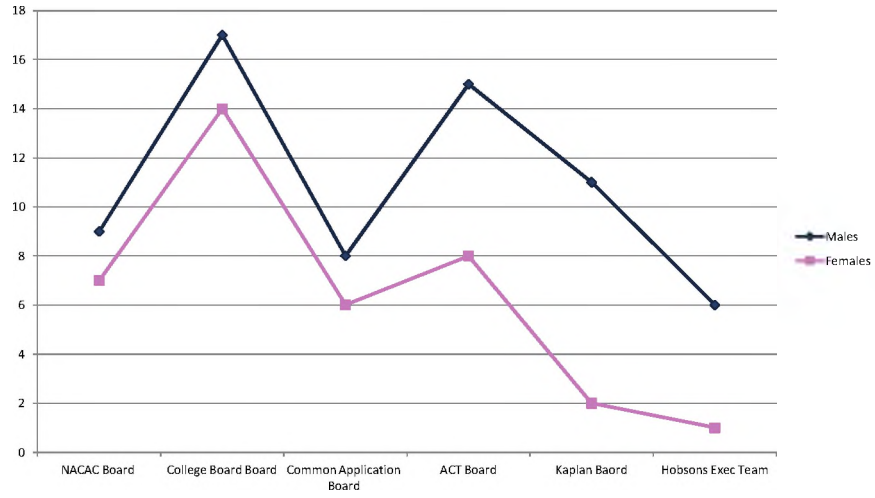
Gender & NACAC



APPENDIX B



Beyond NACAC



APPENDIX C



NACAC Career Path Study

- Online survey of NACAC four-year college members (Oct. – Nov. 2011)
- Total of 1,492 survey responses (31 percent response rate)
- Follow-up phone interviews with 40 admission professionals
- Commissioned essays by 10 NACAC members that offer observations, experiences and advice to others in the admission profession
- Forthcoming report, *Career Paths for Admission Officers*, will be released later this year

APPENDIX D



Survey Respondent Gender by Current Position

Survey Respondents, by Position Level					
	All Admission Professionals	Position Level			
		Admission Counselor	Assistant/ Associate Director of Admission	Director of Admission	VP/Dean of Admission/ Enrollment Management
Male	39.3%	32.1%	30.3%	46.7%	60.2%
Female	60.7	67.9	69.7	53.3	39.8

Source: *Career Paths for Admissions Officers*, NACAC, to be released in late 2013.

APPENDIX E



Salary by Gender

Admission Counselor Salaries		
	\$35,000 or less	More than \$35,000
All	48.0%	52.0%
Male	49.1	50.9
Female	47.1	52.9

Director Salaries				
	\$55,000 or less	\$55,001-75,000	\$75,001-95,000	More than \$95,000
All	18.5%	30.8%	30.1%	20.7%
Male	14.5	28.2	28.2	29.0
Female	21.9	33.1	31.8	13.2

Assistant/Associate Director Salaries				
	\$35,000 or less	\$35,001 - 55,000	\$55,001-75,000	More than \$75,000
All	10.2%	53.5%	28.7%	7.6%
Male	9.5	48.2	31.0	11.3
Female	10.6	55.8	27.6	6.0

VP/Dean Salaries			
	\$95,000 or less	\$95,001-\$135,000	More than \$135,000
All	21.7%	32.8%	45.5%
Male	21.3	34.4	44.3
Female	21.6	31.1	47.3

- Differences between the salary range of male and female respondents were statistically significant at the director level only (smaller differences within these ranges would not be detected in this survey).

Source: *Career Paths for Admissions Officers*, NACAC, to be released in late 2013.

APPENDIX F



Skills for Advancement

Importance of Various Professional Skills for Advancing to Mid- and Senior-Level Positions				
	Very Important	Moderately Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Previous admission experience	77.3%	17.7%	4.5%	0.4%
Writing skills	74.1	23.5	2.3	0.1
Statistics/Data analysis	69.4	26.8	3.6	0.3
Personnel/Resource management	62.7	27.2	8.9	1.2
Marketing/Public relations	56.9	37.0	5.8	0.3
Business management	50.5	37.4	10.7	1.3
Higher education administration	40.0	42.2	14.4	3.4
Advanced degree (Master's or Doctorate)	37.8	37.6	17.0	7.6
Technology/Web design/Social media	26.4	55.8	16.5	1.3
Multicultural recruitment	22.3	48.3	26.0	3.4
Transfer recruitment	16.7	44.2	34.0	5.2
International recruitment	13.6	41.9	37.8	6.6
Non-traditional student recruitment	11.9	35.5	40.2	12.4

Source: *Career Paths for Admissions Officers*, NACAC, to be released in late 2013.

APPENDIX G



Skills for Advancement

On average, female respondents attributed slightly greater importance to the following skills compared to male respondents:

- **Writing skills**
- **Personnel/Resource management**
- **Business management**
- **Higher education administration**
- **Multicultural recruitment**
- **Transfer recruitment**
- **International recruitment**
- **Non-traditional student recruitment**

Source: *Career Paths for Admissions Officers*, NACAC, to be released in late 2013.

APPENDIX H



Professional Resources

Importance of Various Resources in Admission Career				
	Very Important	Moderately Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
On-the-job training provided by employer institution(s)	67.1%	23.3%	7.6%	2.0%
Professional mentor	54.7	27.8	12.0	5.5
Knowledge/skills acquired in undergraduate or graduate courses	23.2	41.5	27.1	8.2
Resources/training provided by NACAC and/or its Affiliates	17.2	39.1	32.8	10.9
Resources/training provided by College Board and/or ACT	7.7	24.8	37.9	29.7
Resources/training provided by AACRAO	4.9	17.1	28.5	49.4

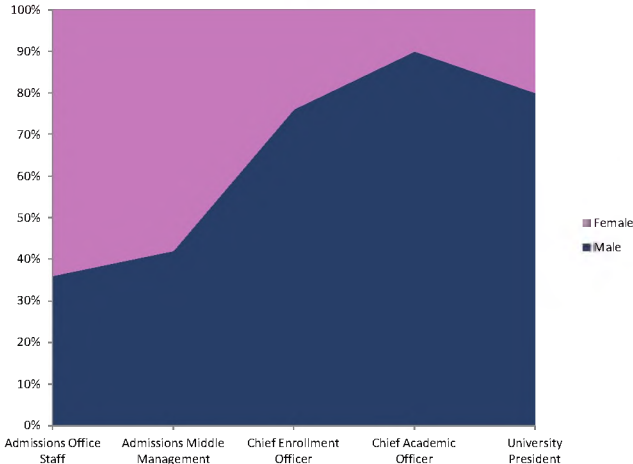
- **On average, female respondents attributed slightly greater importance to “On-the-job training” and “Resources/training provided by NACAC and/or its affiliates” compared to male respondents.**

Source: *Career Paths for Admissions Officers*, NACAC, to be released in late 2013.

APPENDIX I



The Big Picture



Appendix J

The Four Domains of Leadership Strength

StrengthsFinder®

Executing	Influencing	Relationship Building	Strategic Thinking
Achiever	Activator	Adaptability	Analytical
Arranger	Command	Connectedness	Context
Belief	Communication	Developer	Futuristic
Consistency	Competition	Empathy	Ideation
Deliberative	Maximizer	Harmony	Input
Discipline	Self-Assurance	Includer	Intellection
Focus	Significance	Individualization	Learner
Responsibility	Woo	Positivity	Strategic
Restorative		Relator	

Executing

Team members who have a dominant strength in the Executing domain are those whom you turn to time and again to implement a solution. These are the people who will work tirelessly to get something done. People who are strong in the Executing domain have an ability to take an idea and transform it into reality within the organization they lead.

Influencing

People who are innately good at influencing are always selling the team's ideas inside and outside the organization. When you need someone to take charge, speak up, and make sure your group is heard, look to someone with the strength to influence.

Relationship Building

Relationship builders are the glue that holds a team together. Strengths associated with bringing people together -- whether it is by keeping distractions at bay or keeping the collective energy high -- transform a group of individuals into a team capable of carrying out complex projects and goals.

Strategic Thinking

Those who are able to keep people focused on "what they could" be are constantly pulling a team and its members into the future. They continually absorb and analyze information and help the team make better decisions.

Appendix K

3.1 Leadership Styles Questionnaire



Visit www.sagepub.com/northouseintro2e for downloadable versions of these questionnaires

Purpose

1. To identify your style of leadership
2. To examine how your leadership style relates to other styles of leadership

Directions

1. For each of the statements below, circle the number that indicates the degree to which you agree or disagree.
2. Give your immediate impressions. There are no right or wrong answers.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Employees need to be supervised closely, or they are not likely to do their work.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Employees want to be a part of the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
3. In complex situations, leaders should let subordinates work problems out on their own.	1	2	3	4	5
4. It is fair to say that most employees in the general population are lazy.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Providing guidance without pressure is the key to being a good leader.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Leadership requires staying out of the way of subordinates as they do their work.	1	2	3	4	5
7. As a rule, employees must be given rewards or punishments in order to motivate them to achieve organizational objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Most workers want frequent and supportive communication from their leaders.	1	2	3	4	5
9. As a rule, leaders should allow subordinates to appraise their own work.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Most employees feel insecure about their work and need direction.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Leaders need to help subordinates accept responsibility for completing their work.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Leaders should give subordinates complete freedom to solve problems on their own.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The leader is the chief judge of the achievements of the members of the group.	1	2	3	4	5

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
14. It is the leader's job to help subordinates find their "passion."	1	2	3	4	5
15. In most situations, workers prefer little input from the leader.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Effective leaders give orders and clarify procedures.	1	2	3	4	5
17. People are basically competent and if given a task will do a good job.	1	2	3	4	5
18. In general, it is best to leave subordinates alone.	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring

1. Sum the responses on items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 16 (authoritarian leadership).
2. Sum the responses on items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, and 17 (democratic leadership).
3. Sum the responses on items 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18 (laissez-faire leadership).

Total Scores

Authoritarian Leadership _____

Democratic Leadership _____

Laissez-Faire Leadership _____

Scoring Interpretation

This questionnaire is designed to measure three common styles of leadership: authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire. By comparing your scores, you can determine which styles are most dominant and least dominant in your own style of leadership.

If your score is 26–30, you are in the very high range.

If your score is 21–25, you are in the high range.

If your score is 16–20, you are in the moderate range.

If your score is 11–15, you are in the low range.

If your score is 6–10, you are in the very low range.

Appendix L

Leadership Survey

1. I am an ambitious leader for my organization.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

2. I am deliberate when assigning the right team members into the right roles.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

3. I place value in the self-motivation, self-discipline of my team members.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

4. I am focused on facts (I seek root cause; I utilize SWOT analysis).

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

5. I lead with passion, simplistic ideas and the most impactful economic tactics.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

6. I implement a purposeful *to-do* list, but I equally value a *stop-doing* list.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

7. I am strategic with technology.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

8. I willingly accept responsibility for failure.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

9. I lead individually.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

10. I lead through community.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

11. I got to where I am by “fighting a good fight.”

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

12. I earned my position and feel a responsibility to my superiors and to my subordinates.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

13. I have experienced and overcome adversity (personal or professional), which has shaped my role as a leader.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

14. I have valued role models and/or mentors.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

15. I have benefited from workplace flexibility.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

16. I feel comfortable with work/life balance.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

17. I am a coaching leader.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

18. I am a democratic leader.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

19. I am an affiliative leader.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

20. I am a visionary leader.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

21. I wish to develop my team members for long-term goals.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

22. I wish to transform my organization ethically and responsibly.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

23. I have experienced failure.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

24. I am reflective.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

25. I have at times been insecure in my ability to be fully capable in a leadership role, but I have accepted the responsibility and I have succeeded.

Strongly Disagree... Disagree... Neutral... Agree... Strongly Agree

I have been in the profession of higher education:

- Less than ten years
- Ten to fifteen years
- Fifteen to twenty years
- Twenty to twenty-five years
- More than twenty-five years

I have been in higher education leadership (Director, Dean or higher):

- Less than ten years
- Ten to fifteen years
- Fifteen to twenty years
- Twenty to twenty-five years
- More than twenty-five years