LEADERSHIP STYLES PRACTISED BY FEMALES IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the coping strategies of female leaders in tertiary education administration particularly in the University of Cape Coast. A qualitative perspective was adopted in conducting the study. Out of the various approaches to qualitative studies, I chose to adopt the case study approach for this research. Case study, as argued by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), aims at studying a single instance in action. It provides a unique example of real people in real situations in order for people to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles. I adopted this particular approach for my study in order to have an in-depth knowledge about females in leadership. I examined factors such as the leadership styles of females, gender stereotyping in Ghanaian culture, gender-based leadership, females in leadership positions, challenges facing women in leadership position, and leadership strategies used by women leaders. This approach allowed me to obtain in-depth information concerning the current status of women leadership in University of Cape Coast. Ten female leaders participated in the study and in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants at separate times at the participants’ convenient times. An introductory letter was obtained from the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) which encouraged the participants to grant me interviews. One month was used to collect the data, and another one and half months for data transcribing, analysis and report writing. The participants revealed that they employed opened-door leadership strategies more than autocratic style of leading their colleagues and subordinates. It is recommended that the University Management should initiate an educative programme that will help females in leadership positions to cope with challenges relating to the combination of family duties with their leadership responsibilities.

Key Words: female, leadership, mentorship and management

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Having shifted more of their time from domestic to paid labour, women have had to assume the personal characteristics required to succeed in their role as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The mental attributes and the associated behaviour of women have changed as they are entering into formerly male-dominated roles. This is evident in women continuing to aspire to and making great strides in leadership positions in all spheres of life, both in the public and private sectors, and in the face of different forms of challenges. According to Fels (2004) and Manning (2002), there are innumerable studies debating whether women lack the abilities and personality traits required of leaders. Ohene (2010) postulated that one explanation for women’s under-representation in Ghanaian universities is that the sector has a shorter history than that of high-income characteristics. Women are seen stereotypically as possessing caretaking skills such as supporting and rewarding while men on the other hand are seen to possess conventionally masculine taking charge skills, such as influencing superiors and delegating responsibility.

In Ghana, social-gender roles are clearly differentiated with men expected to be assertive and tough while women are supposed to be tender (Oduro, 2005). In view of this, women leaders find it difficult to make significant impact in their various organisations due to the prejudices that are prevailing in their societies. This stereotyping of leadership poses a major obstacle to women who are qualified to excel as leaders. Women find themselves doubly disadvantaged in the sense that they have to prove to the society that they are capable of leading and also to work harder than their male counterparts. In most cases they work in the environment that does not fully support them. Cultural construction of leadership in itself instigates the difference between men and women but this is now being transformed as women are gaining access to leadership positions. African women are beginning to challenge some of these deep-rooted entrenched socio-cultural beliefs. Of late, quite a number of women in Ghana and on the African continent are ascending to
leadership positions previously dominated by men. For example, African women can now boast of a female president (H. E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf) in Liberia and in Ghana the first female Vice-Chancellor took office in October, 2008 at the University of Cape Coast.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There have been several studies that have examined the factors that impede the advancement of women in leadership; others too have looked at the under-representation of women in management position; female access to tertiary education in Ghana has also been researched. For instance, according to Ohene (2010), the management and academic staff of the University of Cape Coast have seen expansion and change in personnel. However, the growth in female academic, administrators and managers has not been significant in terms of numbers and influence. Ohene said in 1980, women constituted 12% of the academic staff and by 2006 this had grown by only 3%. In 2008, the percentage remained unchanged. Women in senior administrative positions constituted less than 25% at the end of the 2010/2011 academic year (Student Record and Management Information Section, 2011).

Although literature on female leaders in tertiary education abound, example, ‘Women in Management in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana: A Case Study of Ho Polytechnic’ by Janet Atawa Kuma Owusu Adjah and ‘Gender and the Career Aspirations, Professional Assets, and Personal Variables of Higher Education Administrators’ by Christine C. Lepkowski, a conspicuous missing link in research is the strategies female leaders adopt to cope with challenges they face in the discharge of their mandates. I, therefore, found it prudent to assess the leadership styles practised by females in leadership positions in the University of Cape Coast.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership styles practised by females in leadership positions in the University of Cape Coast.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

“What leadership styles are practised by most female leaders in the University of Cape Coast?”

2.1 TRANSACTIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

Transactional leadership emphasises the importance of the relationship between leader and followers, focusing on the mutual benefits derived from a form of contract through which the leader delivers such things as rewards or recognition in return for the commitment or loyalty of the followers. Transactional leadership means obtaining cooperation by establishing exchanges with subordinates and then monitoring the exchange relationship. A transactional leader provides rewards for satisfactory performance, attends to employees’ mistakes and failures to meet standards, and waits until problems become severe before attending to them and intervening (Judge & Bono, 2000).

Burns (cited in Deluga, 1995) holds that leadership cannot be separated from followers’ needs and goals. Its essence lies in the interaction between the follower and the leader. This interaction takes fundamentally two different forms: transactional and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership occurs when there is an exchange between people which can be economic, political or psychological in nature. The relationship between the leader and the follower is purely based on bargaining and it does not go beyond this.

However, transformational leadership occurs when the leader and the follower elevates one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Transactional leaders encourage subordinates by appealing to their self interest and offering rewards in exchange of work effort which are contingent reward and management by exception.

Transforming Leadership is vision, planning, communication, and creative action which has a positive unifying effect on a group of people around a set of clear values and beliefs, to accomplish a clear set of measurable goals. This transforming approach simultaneously impacts the personal development and corporate productivity of all involved (Anderson, 1992, p. 37).

Transformational leaders urge followers to go beyond their self-interests and be concerned about their organisation. They help followers to realize and develop their potential. These leaders identify the needs of their followers and then consider those needs to enhance development. They gather their followers around a common purpose, mission or vision and provide a sense of purpose and future direction.

According to Bass and Avolio (1997), transformational leaders act as role models for their followers and encourage them to question problems that underlie basic assumptions from different perspectives. They want their followers to regard challenges as opportunities and they cooperate with them to elevate expectations, needs, abilities, and moral character. Dubrin (1995) states that charismatic and transformational leadership are closely related with each other in literature, but reminds the reader that not all
leaders are transformational until they bring about a change in their organisations.

Transformational leaders try to widen the interests of their subordinates and to evoke the acceptance for the mission of the group (Bass & Avolio, 1990). They take the time to get to know the people they work with, what they need to know to perform at their best, and how far they can be challenged and supported (Avolio, 1999). They look for new directions that can be taken and evaluates the chances when taking risks but does not support the status quo.

The transformational style allows one to take advantage of the skills and knowledge of experienced subordinates who may have better ideas on how to accomplish a mission. Leaders who use this style communicate reasons for their decisions or actions and, in the process, build in subordinates a broader understanding and ability to exercise initiative and operate effectively.

However, not all situations lend themselves to the transformational leadership style. The transformational style is most effective during periods that call for change or present new opportunities. It also works well when organizations face a crisis, instability, mediocrity, or disenchantment. It may not be effective when subordinates are inexperienced, when the mission allows little deviation from accepted procedures, or when subordinates are not motivated. Leaders who use only the transformational leadership style limit their ability to influence individuals in these and similar situations.

While transactional leadership involves telling, commanding, or ordering and using contingent rewards, Transformational leadership is based on inspiring, getting followers to buy-in voluntarily and creating a common vision. Transformational leadership is what most of us refer to when we talk about great leaders in our lives and in society (Schermherhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 2005).

An issue that strengthened the review of these leadership styles was to explore how the female leaders involved in my study used the transformational and transactional styles of leadership to take advantage of the skills and knowledge of experienced subordinates to help them cope with the challenges they face.

### 2.2 COPING STRATEGIES OF WOMEN LEADERS

As more women gain work experience and the education necessary for them to be qualified as leaders, organisations have been subsequently called upon to re-establish and expand their notions of what constitutes effective leadership as it relates to gender, stereotyping, and role expectations. Rosener (1990) advocated for those reconsiderations and added that they should include “a valuing of diversity of leadership styles” (p. 125) if an organisation hopes to be successful in its mission.

In his analysis of an effective leader, McGuire (2002) stated that leaders must support, develop and nurture staff. Effective leaders set a standard for ethical behaviour and seek diverse perspectives and alternative points-of-view. Not only do leaders encourage innovations, initiatives, collaborations and strong work ethics but they also expect and provide multiple opportunities for staff to engage in continuous personal and professional growth. Furthermore, leaders must collaborate and cooperate with others on a daily basis. Leaders communicate high expectations and provide acquired information to foster understanding and to maintain trust and confidence. Every organisation depends on capable leadership to guide it through its activities. Adusah-Karikari (2008) found that three attributes and strategies contributed to the successes of women leaders in Ghanaian universities. These are: determination to succeed, perseverance, and planning.

#### 2.2.1 Determination to Succeed

On determination to succeed, Adusah-Karikari posited that the patriarchal ideology of Ghanaian society continued to be reflected in the universities, which leads to women experiencing a range of discriminatory and gendered exclusions within the higher education system. These experiences, she said, are destructive in that they often represent subtle forms of oppression. Despite these setbacks, a majority of these women and the study have come so far in their academic areas as a result of their personal abilities and determination to succeed. In support of this assertion, Gray (1995) said that to participate fully in the academy would involve the following options: “to accept the rules and procedures; to resist these or to engage in constant personal and professional negotiation, making some compromises along the way” (p. 57).

#### 2.2.2 Perseverance

Adusah-Karikari (2008) again pointed that considering the experiences that female leaders have, no doubt, without perseverance, women would have already quit. In agreement to the above statement, Culley et al. as cited in Adusah-Karikari (2008) stated that the concordance between the idea of female virtue and the image of the mothers tends to work against our capacity to achieve or ever to aspire to such professional success. As mothers, women are expected to nurture, as professionals we are expected to compete. They added “the personal costs in attempting to survive in academe are very high, get if one desires to be a successful academic, perseverance is crucial” (p.12).

#### 2.2.3 Planning

“If you fail to plan, you plan to fail” so goes an adage. For women in higher education in Ghana, the demanding job expectations of maintaining a family and
a career depend heavily on the ability to plan. In addition to planning, there is also the need to factor in the possibility of unforeseen contingencies; thus, a backup is always needed for the working mother.

In the view of Colbeck (2007), when faculty members integrate and plan their personal and professional roles, they accomplish personal and work goals at the same time. Colbeck further argued that work or family boundaries are permeable to the extent that activities from one domain easily or frequently interrupt activities in the other. When this happens, planning is the key. Clark (2000) also articulated that borders between work and family are flexible to the extent that the hours and locations often may be varied easily. Adusah-Karikari (2008) stated that the ultimate aim of planning is to be able to strike a balance in achievement of professional and work goals. Bailyn (1974) noted that the key seems to be a balance of commitment to work, family, and society – without exclusive involvement in any areas.

Walker (2004) also suggested networking as a successful strategy for women in leadership position. She stated that single-handed effort to breakthrough barrier is rarely achievable. King (1997), as well as many feminists, argued that networking is the only way to get through the “glass ceiling.” According to her, “networking could help those who want to rise to positions of leadership, could encourage women to work towards a senior post and could offer support to the pioneers who are already at the top and may still be picking from their bodies the shards of glass ceiling which clung as they came through” (pp. 94 – 95).

Effective leaders reach out to others for support and assistance, build partnerships, secure resources and share credit for success and accomplishment. Spencer and Kochan (2000) argued that the administrative leadership style of a school is the key element to the effectiveness of the school and that an ineffective leader can nullify even the best of teachers’ and parental efforts. Contemporary educational reforms place great premium on effective leadership and management of schools. The logic of this position is that an orderly school environment which is efficient and well managed provides the preconditions which enhance student learning. Schein (1985) opined that efforts to enhance women’s opportunities in management need to focus on changing the design and structure of the work itself so as to facilitate an interface between work and family.

3.1 POPULATION
The target population for this study was women in senior administrative positions in the University of Cape Coast who held positions as Heads of Units/Centres, Heads of Departments, Deans of Faculty/School, Assistant Registrars, Senior Assistant Registrars, Deputy Registrars, Vice-Chancellor or women in the University who had ever held such positions.

The rationale for selecting the University of Cape Coast as a case was based on the fact that, the Vice-Chancellor’s position which is the highest position in the University administration was being held by a woman during the time of this study. The total population was 28.

3.2 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE
Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Patton (2002) asserted that the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Qualitative studies require a sample that will be typical of the population concerned and whom the researcher can solicit the necessary information. The purposive sampling procedure enabled me to sample views from different categories of people who could provide the needed information. This sampling technique enabled me to target those perceived to have information about the topic raised.

In total, 10 females were identified for interviewing. The participants were selected for various reasons such as their current or previous involvement in leadership positions. The 10 participants comprised 4 Heads of Department, 3 Assistant Registrars, 2 Senior Assistant Registrars and 1 Deputy Registrar.

3.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT
I solicited the views of the participants using a semi-structured interview guide. A semi-structured interview guide involves a series of open-ended questions based on the topic areas the researcher wants to cover. A semi-structured interview guide was used because the open-ended nature of the questions provided opportunities for both interviewer and interviewees to discuss the topic in more detail.

3.3.1 Pilot-Testing of Instrument
In finding out if the instrument would obtain the required responses and devoid of ambiguity, a pilot test was conducted in the University of Education, Winneba. Five women in senior administrative positions were purposively sampled. Individual participants were made to understand the purpose of the study after I had made a personal introduction.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS
This section constitutes how data gathered from the field was analysed. Analysis of the data was done by summarising the mass of the data collected and
presenting the results in a way that communicated the most important features. This was done by transcribing the recorded interviews. This provided the basis for data processing, analysis and presentation. To reduce the amount of raw data, I read the transcripts for a second time with the research question in mind. During the second review, I used numbers and colours to identify the similarities and differences of the collected data for further analysis. The analysis began by coding every item of information so that I could recognise differences and similarities between all the different items. Through constant reading, comparing, connecting, grouping, and regrouping, a long list of relevant and important repeating ideas was put into categories. The resulting ideas were examined for commonalities, differences, and patterns. For each interview, a long list of relevant, recurring phrases or important points made by each respondent was developed. A phrase most frequently mentioned or emphasised was also incorporated into the title of the individual profile for each respondent.

4.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research question sought to explore the nature of leadership styles adopted by the female leaders in discharging their roles and responsibilities. In trying to identify the leadership styles practised by the female leaders from the data collected using the interviews, every respondent attempted to specify a leadership style that she employed, although some stated this implicitly. Their views were sought on the type of leadership styles practised in their administration and whether in their opinion, they perceive any differences in leadership styles of males and females.

Although individual participants had their own unique leadership style and approach, some patterns of similarities emerged across the board and some key differences were also identified. On the whole, respondents were of the view that leadership styles practised were democratic, at times it could be participatory, other times it could be situational or the three used complementally. For example, Respondent J stated that she used the democratic leadership style. She said,

I try to operate in a democratic kind of style. I always involve the people I work with, from the junior most to the top, I always involve them. I make sure that whatever I do they know something about it so that whenever I am not in the office at a particular point in time they can also stand in and do what is expected (Interviewed on 26/03/2012).

According to Respondent H, it is uncommon to see a leader adopting a single style of leadership. She responded as follows:

I wouldn’t say I have adopted one style. As for autocratic, I am not. Whenever I want to come out with any change in the office, I call my colleagues, those under me, both senior and junior staff. We sit down and discuss it or if possible I call my chief and see how best we can go about the change. I normally solicit; we bring ideas together to solve problems (Interviewed on 21/03/2012).

Respondents seemed not to have a clear-cut and a single leadership style, but the exigencies of the moment determined the kind of style to use. Respondent B indicated that; “I wouldn’t say laissez faire, I wouldn’t say autocratic, I combine a lot of styles depending on the situation. I take any leadership style depending on the situation” (Interviewed on 03/03/2012).

Each of the ten women identified the importance of focusing on the people and relationships and the tasks required within their roles in their administration. The women described their leadership approaches and behaviours with varying degrees of focus on relationships and tasks. They each expressed at least some focus on both relationship and task in their preferred and more natural ways of leading as well as in the ways in which they led in the institution. For example, respondent I stated that:

My human relations are always good but if you try to push me you will have me bad. This work is what gives me something to eat so when I am doing it I have to do it to the best of my knowledge. You don’t have to do it haphazardly. I always want to involve everybody here. At times we assess our work and make corrections (Interviewed on 23/03/2012).

The above findings are consistent with a study by Eagly and Karau (2002) who found out that female leaders favour more democratic and participative styles than their male counterparts.

On the whole, each of the women advanced that while relationships and tasks were both important, building relationships and cohesion in a group was the most important. Without strong relationships, nothing would get done and the skills they had would not be very significant. Based on the self-described leadership styles of the women in the study, it is evident that the women leaders in this study viewed feminine leadership characteristics, such as understanding followers, being
approachable, and being democratic, as key to their own leadership effectiveness. These descriptions also suggest that the women leaders in this study have adopted, at least in part, alternative leadership styles that challenge traditional masculine notions of leadership. Further, the descriptions suggest an integration of feminine and masculine leadership styles among the women leaders in this study.

During the interview, there was a question which specifically asked the participants to tell whether there exist differences between male and female leadership styles. The participants gave somewhat less straightforward or more evasive, responses. In their responses, nine out of the ten female leaders said that there is no sharp difference between the leadership style of males and females citing that the choice of style is largely dependent on the individual leader rather than his/her gender. One of them stated,

It depends on the individual leader. A leader may behave in a particular way not because the person is a male or female but just because he or she is a different person altogether. The leadership style depends on the people you are dealing with (Respondent J interviewed on 26/03/2012).

Some respondents were of the opinion that, it is rather a perception than a reality that men and women have different leadership styles. For example, Respondent C said that men and women are not different at leadership but are perceived as different. Masculinity is an implicit construct in the perception of leadership, and what women do is rarely defined as leadership. There is no difference between male and female leadership styles but societal norms define the expected roles of behaviours of men and women. The same behaviour in men and women is judged differently. Everybody comes from a cultural background so some leaders have been influenced by their culture.

Similarly, in response to the question whether there exists differences between male and female leadership styles, Respondent F said, “I don’t see any major difference between male and female leadership styles. All the same, I think women generally like involving people a lot. Men and women have different goals and motivations” (Interviewed on 05/03/2012). However, Respondent A in her response said:

I do find a difference between male and female leadership styles because a lot have to do with hard and soft skills of leadership. The soft skills of leadership refer to the empathy, the counselling, that aspect of leadership but the hard skills also refer to the authoritarian form of leadership and combining both hard and soft leadership makes you successful (Interviewed 07/03/2012).

Deducing from the above, most of the participants saw no significant differences in the leadership styles of male and female leaders. This finding disagrees with the conclusion of many earlier researchers like Helgesen (1995), Kezar (2000), and Eagly and Johanessen (2001) among others. However, one issue worth noting in the study was that, most of the respondents were of the view that men and women are not different at leadership but are perceived as different. Masculinity is an implicit construct in the perception of leadership, and what women do is rarely defined as leadership. Societal norms define the expected roles of behaviours of men and women. The same behaviour in men and women is judged differently. This is in support of what Helgesen said. According to Helgesen (1995), women set aside time for sharing information within the organisation, whereas men do not easily share information with others. Women view themselves and their roles in life as complex and multidimensional, however, men primarily viewed themselves through their jobs and position. In support of this, Gilligan (1982) stated that gender roles that male and female decision makers experienced in childhood may cause them to come to the workplace with different sets of skills and traits. Women’s goals are more likely to be concerned with the wider community, whilst men’s goals are more likely to be concerned with their own positions and outcomes. Men are more concerned with competitive success, and women are more focused on doing a job well.

According to Sinclair (1998), men tend to be motivated by achievement whilst women’s motivation is marginalised as it is driven by affiliation. Men are less concerned with human relations and are more aggressive. A major message emerging from the study was that attributes are influenced by physical make up of males and females.

5.1 FINDINGS

All the participants claimed to have employed opened-door leadership strategies more than autocratic style of leading their colleagues and subordinates. The adoption of democratic leadership style, participatory leadership style, and situational leadership style were been found to be largely associated with female leaders than men.
There was a question which specifically asked the participants to tell whether there exist differences between male and female leadership styles. In their responses, nine out of the ten female leaders (administrators) said that there is no sharp difference between the leadership style of male and females citing that the choice of style is largely dependent on the individual leader rather than his/her gender.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The participants in the study were confident that they were up to the tasks of squarely facing and surmounting challenges/ adversarial situations. The study maintains that decision-making is significantly affected. In K. Grint and Davies, C. (2011). New perspectives on leadership: The changing face of leadership. Cape Coast: University of Cape Coast. Coping strategies such as participatory leadership, determination to succeed, mentoring subordinates and delegation of power, continuous learning and planning served as support that strengthened these women against much of the difficulties they encountered in their professional roles. Prevailing social norms still act as a disincentive to women in Ghana’s higher educational system. The patriarchal nature of Ghanaian society has gradually crept into the universities. This culture, consciously or unconsciously, shapes women’s experiences in higher education.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made for possible implementation:

1. The University Management should initiate an educative programme that will help females in leadership positions to cope with challenges relating to the combination of family duties with their leadership responsibilities.
2. The University should make its mentorship programme more functional. The programme should also incorporate a special (succession) plan for future female leaders by identifying all potential ones for specific positions and guide them accordingly.

6.1 REFERENCES