Chapter 2

Mentoring Female Leaders at Multiple Levels in One Higher Education Institution

Meagan Moreland
Northeastern State University, USA

Tobi Thompson
Northeastern State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter includes a case study of female leaders in one higher education institution where there are more female leaders than male leaders. The authors seek to explain the mentoring involved to develop the female leaders of this institution. The objective of this chapter is to determine what types of mentoring takes place for women interested in leadership positions. The purpose is to make those mentoring programs, whether formal or informal, more available to any female interested in seeking a position of leadership.

INTRODUCTION

According to Glass and Franceschini (2007) as cited in Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011), women lag behind men in leadership positions in higher education. In fact, only 30% of college presidencies were held by women in 2016 (Johnson, 2017). Moreover, “Despite the number of female graduates available for leadership positions, women do not hold associate professor or full professor positions at the same rate as their male peers” (Johnson, 2017, p. 4). This disparity is more drastic as the prestige of the position increases (Bichesel & McChesney, 2017; Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014). Some reasons for this may be dissatisfaction with the “deprecating culture of the academy” (Patterson & Chicola, 2017, p. 36), the feeling that women might be punished for wanting to lead, a lack of clear expectations for promotion, and feelings of “alienation, hostile climate, low job satisfaction, and failure to become fully engaged in the academy” (Patterson & Chicola, 2017, p. 36). However, Dunn, Gerlach, and Hyle suggest that women may possess the leadership characteristics universities need in order to meet the needs of rapidly changing
Mentoring Female Leaders at Multiple Levels in One Higher Education Institution

demands (2017). “Because they have not been socialized in accordance with the male-centric leadership model, they are relative outsiders who must forge new ways of leading. Women have more freedom than their male counterparts to ‘role-make’ as opposed to ‘role-take” (Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2017, p. 9).

While the culture of a university plays a role in the development of leaders, research suggests mentorship might alter that trend allowing more females to serve in leadership positions. Edds-Ellis and Keaster (2013) cite multiple studies (Lyons & Oppler, 2004; Noe, Greenberger, & Wang, 2002; Wanberg, Kaymeyer-Mueller, & Marchese, 2006) indicating the following positive effects of mentorship on women aspiring to be leaders: “…mentoring assists proteges with adopting an organization’s cultural norms, increasing career opportunities and mobility, and expanding their professional networks” (p.1), as well as “…allows aspiring female leaders to develop important knowledge about the expectations and complex roles of leadership in higher education” (Edds-Ellis & Keaster, 2013, p.1). Schott (2004) found higher levels of confidence in female administrators who had mentors (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

While research is clear that mentoring of women leaders empowers women to lead, there is no one, clear-cut mentorship program. What is more, women in leadership positions at our university often say there is not a formal program to mentor women. This informality of mentorship may actually be what makes a mentorship successful according many researchers because the relationship forms “out of natural interactions between the mentor and the mentee… [instead of] matched through a mentoring program” (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011, p.18).

Background: History to Present - Mentorship From the Past

The University researched through this case study has a rich history. The 1906 normal school was planned and directed by a native of Ohio, who replaced a supervisor of Cherokee schools, practice, and reading. This university became a state institution in 1909.

Over the years, many women have held important leadership positions at the university. One important member of the faculty served as Dean of the women’s college from 1944 until she took a job with a textbook publishing company in 1956. She returned, however, in 1954 as a diagnostician and technician of the reading lab due to the increased demand by university students and nearby public schools needing assistance with reading problems (Agnew, 2009, p.19).

In 2007-2008, the university welcomed the first female president. She served as interim during the academic year until a full-time replacement was seated. Currently, the provost of the university is a female who has been a leader in several roles throughout the last decade.

Methodology

The researchers chose case study research to thoroughly understand mentorship as it pertains to female leaders within one university. Merriam (2001) defines case study research as descriptive. This case is particularistic because it is centered on a particular situation. Case study research is heuristic and should enrich the understanding of the case (Stake, 1995).

Barone states when applying case study research, multiple sources of evidence strengthen the results (as cited in Duke & Mallette, 2004) After data collection, application of the constant comparative method regarding the data will occur to disaggregate the information. This method allows themes to emerge for analysis. Interviews coupled with a questionnaire and observations serve as the two methods of data.