

How Six Women Deans of Agriculture Have Attained Their Leadership Role: A Qualitative Study

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There is a disproportionate ratio of men to women in leadership roles in higher education and agriculture. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lives of women deans in agriculture in an attempt to conceptualize the leadership styles they have developed as a result of their positions as deans in a predominantly male field. Six women deans of agriculture were interviewed and observed in an attempt to recognize the impact their personal journeys have had in developing their leadership styles and attaining their leadership role. The overarching conclusions for the women in this study was that their leadership role was not limited to their education and work experience, gender, peoples' perceptions of women, fairness, or power. In addition, each of the women deans in this study exhibited personality traits such as surgency, conscientiousness, agreeableness, adjustment, and intellectance, which are traits considered relevant for leadership effectiveness.

Keywords: deans; women; higher education; leadership

Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of followers to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007). Therefore, leadership is not a trait internalized by leaders but rather an interactive event between the leader and follower. Furthermore, the leader is affected by those individuals he or she leads (Northouse, 2007), which attests that leaders are not born, they are made.

Leaders invent themselves by following; they develop character and vision as a result of experiences and growth through following and learning from individuals who have influenced them (Bennis, 1989). Thus, since there is no *leader cookie cutter*, leaders may come in “every size, shape, and disposition – short, tall, neat, sloppy, young, old, male, and female” (Bennis, 1989, p.39). In fact, the diversity of these individuals is and will continue to be critical in affecting change in organizations and our rapidly changing world (Bennis, 1989). Today’s society should not be content with preparing only a selected few for leadership; however, all individuals should be encouraged to develop leadership

skills in order to gain maximum benefit from their diverse talents and skills (Madsen, 2008).

While contributions of all types of leaders are vital, factors such as gender tend to hinder the involvement of capable individuals whose talents may improve the competitiveness and viability of an organization (Madsen, 2008). Furthermore, there is an unmistakable difference in the leadership and decision-making power bestowed on men and the responsibilities allotted to women in organizations and society (Eagly & Carli, 2004). There are four types of explanations for the absence of women’s occupancy in high-level leadership positions: (a) underinvestment in human capital (e.g., education, work experience); (b) the difference in leadership styles of men and women; (c) the nature of men (not women) to lead others; and (d) discrimination against female leaders based on gender norms (Eagly & Carli, 2004).

Gender gaps in workplace leadership occur when women’s human capital investment in education, training, and work experience is lower than men’s (Eagly & Carli, 2004). Today,

women attain university degrees at higher rates than men, which discredit this portion of the argument. However, women's salaries and representation in leadership roles are not equivalent with men's (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). A factor which further supports this statement is women's greater involvement in domestic work (housework and child care), which may result in women acquiring less training than men, contributing less effort to paid work, and experiencing more interruptions in work history (Eagly & Carli, 2004). While men increasingly share in housework and child-rearing responsibilities, the majority of domestic duties are still performed by women; resulting in necessary breaks from employment, less job experience, and missed opportunities for advancement (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Therefore, domestic expectations impose an added burden on women advancing in leadership positions and account for slowed career progress and reduced earnings (Northouse, 2007).

The difference in leadership styles of men and women is another explanation for the exclusion of women from leadership roles. The style with which an individual leads largely determines the leader's influence; any difference is generally perceived as a product of gender and ultimately affects people's views of who should advance to a leadership position (Eagly & Carli, 2004). As more women have begun occupying positions of leadership, studies have been conducted to determine whether or not there are distinct differences in female and male leadership styles and identify which types of leadership are best suited to conditions faced by contemporary organizations.

Beginning in the early 1980's, leadership researchers began studying a new, future-oriented style of leadership introduced by James MacGregor Burns as *transformational* leadership (Northouse, 2007). Transformational leadership is a process which changes and transforms people and organizations. According to Eagly and Carli (2004), transformational leaders "state future goals, develop plans to achieve those goals, and innovate, even when their organizations are generally successful" (p. 285). Leaders of this approach articulate to followers the problems in the current system and offer a compelling vision of what a new organization could be (Lussier &

Achua, 2007). Such leaders first establish themselves as role models by gaining the trust and confidence of their followers. Transformational leaders then encourage followers to develop their full potential and thus contribute more effectively to their organization through mentoring and empowerment (Eagly & Carli, 2004). Therefore, the drive of transformational leaders to shift their followers' focus from their personal needs, aspirations, and values to a concentration on an organization's collective interest, may be crucial in helping organizations adapt to current geopolitical, social, and economic changes (Lussier & Achua, 2007).

Burns (1978), Avolio (1999) and Bass (1998) compared transformational leadership to *transactional* leadership. Transactional leadership resembles traditional management practices, producing a give-and-take relationship between the leader and his or her followers. This style involves assigning a subordinate responsibility, rewarding them for meeting objectives, and correcting them for failing to meet objectives (Eagly & Carli, 2004). Transactional leadership facilitates an exchange of effort for rewards which provides for the achievement of both leader and follower agendas (Kuhnert, 1994). Transactional leadership is effective because followers benefit from fulfilling the leader's requests. Conversely, transformational leadership motivates followers to accomplish more than what is anticipated of them, transcending their own self-interests for the good of the organization (Northouse, 2007). While transformational and transactional leadership styles are very different, both can contribute to effective leadership.

When determining the distinction between transactional and transformational leaders, it is helpful to associate this comparison with the difference between managers and leaders. While leadership and management both involve influence, working with people, and effective goal accomplishment; they are also two different constructs. The overriding function of management is to provide order and consistency to organizations, whereas the primary function of leadership is to produce change and movement (Northouse, 2007).

Lussier and Achua (2007) described transformational leaders as "influential, inspirational,

and charismatic” (p. 382), whereas transactional leaders are classified as “task- and reward-oriented, structured, and passive” (p. 383). A connection can be made linking management and transactional leadership in that transactional leaders reward followers for performing specific behaviors that meet the leader’s expectations and punish followers when performance does not meet expectations. Transformational leaders are similar to charismatic leaders in their ability to articulate a compelling vision of the future, and influence followers by arousing strong emotions in support of the vision (Lussier & Achua, 2007).

Although there are clear differences between transformational and transactional leadership, like management and leadership, both styles are effective in leading followers. In addition to transformational and transactional leadership, Burns (1978), Avolio (1999), and Bass (1998) distinguished a third leadership style labeled *laissez-faire* leadership. *Laissez-faire* leaders abdicate responsibility, delay decisions, do not provide feedback, and make little effort to help followers satisfy their needs (Northouse, 2007). Unlike transformational and transactional leadership, there is no exchange between *laissez-faire* leaders and their followers and no effort to help their followers grow.

Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003) confirmed the generalization that women’s typical leadership styles are more transformational than those of men, especially when providing encouragement and support to subordinates. Thus, women are more focused on the aspects of leadership that promote effectiveness. In addition, women leaders were more engaged in rewarding followers’ behaviors, an aspect of transactional leadership called contingent reward (Lussier & Achua, 2007). Conversely, male leaders appear to be more prone to exhibiting aspects of transactional leadership other than contingent reward, such as corrective and disciplinary actions that are either active (timely) or passive (belated) (Eagly et al., 2003). Moreover, men are also more likely to operate as *laissez-faire* leaders, who take little responsibility for managing (Eagly et al., 2003).

Another explanation as to the disproportionate occupation of men in leadership roles asserts that men have an evolved psychological charac-

ter that equips them with a natural tendency to seek leadership and take a dominant role in situations (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Evolutionary psychologists link current sex differences in behavior to the differing reproductive pressures males and females experienced in the early history of the human species (Eagly & Carli, 2004). While men possess an internal instinct to compete for dominance and mating partners, as well as a tendency to evolve dispositions of aggression, risk taking, and competition for status; women possess a predisposition to invest more in the offspring and depend on their mates to provide resources to support them and their children (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007).

Personality traits are of further relevance in understanding gender differences in effective contemporary leadership. Most managerial experts advocate the more feminine and androgynous skills of negotiation, cooperation, diplomacy, team building, and inspiring and nurturing others rather than distinctively masculine traits and skills (Eagly & Carli, 2004). These feminine qualities parallel those that depict transformational leadership. In addition, some characteristics that are known to derail leaders are intimidating or abrasive style, arrogance, and coldness (Nahavandi, 2003), are at least stereotypically masculine (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Therefore, it is unlikely that effective leadership in contemporary organizations consists of traditionally male behaviors or that men’s attainment of leadership roles reflects their natural dominance.

Additionally, leadership scholars have identified five broad personality trait categories that correspond to many of the specific traits found relevant for leadership emergence, advancement, or effectiveness (Yukl, 2010). This five factor model of personality, or the *Big Five Model*, distinguishes five personality traits: (a) surgency, (b) conscientiousness, (c) agreeableness, (d) adjustment, and (e) intellectance (Yukl, 2010). Surgency is defined through specific traits such as extroversion (outgoing), energy/activity level, and need for power (assertive); conscientiousness is characterized by dependability, personal integrity, and need for achievement; agreeableness is described through attributes including cheerfulness and optimism, nurturance (sympathetic, helpful), and need for affiliation; adjust-

ment is identified through the specific traits of emotional stability, self-esteem, and self-control; and intellectance is defined as curious and inquisitive, open-minded, and learning-oriented.

The dearth of women in high-level leadership also points to prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors as a liable cause. The term *glass ceiling* was introduced in 1986 in the *Wall Street Journal* (The Corporate Woman, 1986), which rapidly spread among journalists and other writers and soon became part of the culture (Eagly & Carli, 2004). While this metaphor paints an unmistakable picture of the invisible barrier that challenges the ascent of many women to high-level leadership positions, what is not so clearly understood is that women face a variety of obstacles throughout their leadership journey. Women and men are not granted equal access to entry- and mid-level positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007); indicating that a woman's trek to leadership is complex with resistance and prejudice, but ultimately attainable and a goal worth striving for.

Prejudice toward female leaders materializes from the incongruity that people often perceive between the characteristics typical of women and the attributes of leadership roles (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Women are associated with communal qualities (e.g., being especially affectionate, helpful, friendly, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive), which convey a concern for the compassionate treatment of others (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These traits are inconsistent with those society perceives to be necessary for successful leadership, which are predominantly argentic (e.g., being assertive, dominant, forceful, self-reliant, masterful) (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). People readily associate leadership qualities with masculine characteristics, placing the daunting task on women to find an effective balance between showing their followers compassion and demonstrating assertiveness and maintaining control (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007).

The gendered nature of leadership has significantly influenced the lives of women who have chosen to pursue leadership roles (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). There is little published research on the advancement of influential individuals in higher education, and even less literature is available on the development of high-level women leaders in education. But research-

ers' interest in women's development of the leadership competencies that are essential for effective leadership in postsecondary education is steadily growing (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Hatch (2002) stated feminist researchers take interest in "exposing material differences gender makes in women's life chances" (p. 16). Therefore, this article explored the leadership styles developed by each woman dean, the gender discrimination each faced in their journey to dean-ship, and how these factors impacted the women's personal development and professional advancement to their leadership role in agriculture.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lives of women deans in hopes of understanding their leadership and personality styles along with challenges they have faced in becoming deans of agriculture. The central research question addressed during the study was, *How have women deans of agriculture attained their leadership role in agriculture?*

Methods/Procedures

Research Approach

In order to fully comprehend the experiences participants shared, the study was performed using the qualitative mode of inquiry, which provided for a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Gathering information from interviews, observations, documents, and pictures provided the researcher with a bank of data from which themes could be created, interpretations made, and a "rich, full picture of a research situation" painted (Wright, 2002, p. 8). A phenomenological approach was utilized in an attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of study participants in order to understand how and what meaning they construct from their lived experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Phenomenology allowed for the accurate interpretation and description of the meaning of the six women deans' experiences in attaining their leadership roles in a predominantly male field.

Twenty-five women deans and associate deans were identified as possible study partici-

pants using the 2009 Directory of Deans and Directors of Academic Programs in Schools and Colleges of Agriculture (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, 2009). The deans of agriculture were then analyzed based on the region of the United States they were located. The researchers sought to engage women deans from each region of the Continental United States (North, South, East, and West), and the identity of the deans and their affiliated institutions remained confidential to protect the parties participating in this study. Deans of agriculture in each region were contacted and questioned about their willingness to participate in the study. Eight of the twenty-five women agreed to participate and then, because of job responsibilities, two of the women declined to participate. Therefore, the sample for this study consisted of six women deans of agriculture in land-grant institutions.

Researchers, Validation Strategies, and Research Bias

Four researchers were involved in this study: (a) a primary researcher and (b) three secondary researchers. The primary researcher conducted the in-depth interviews, made field visits, analyzed data, and led the composition of this manuscript. A more detailed description of the primary researcher is given in the next paragraph. In regard to the secondary researchers, one is a female, associate professor in the Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communications Department at the University of Tennessee and is currently employed in a college of agriculture with a woman dean. She assisted with the research design, data analyses, and manuscript composition. The other secondary researchers are males and are also employed at the University of Tennessee. Both assisted with data analyses and manuscript composition.

Prior to the study, the primary researcher reflected on qualities she possessed which may impact relationships with the environment and people in the study. First, the primary researcher holds a strong passion for agriculture as she grew up on a farm and was pursuing a degree in agriculture. The primary researcher's strong interest in this field may result in more focus on the selected women's impact in agricul-

ture and how they have achieved their current status. Next, the primary researcher is female and possesses moderate feminist beliefs. She takes special interest in the stories of women who have overcome challenges in fields subjugated by males. This may influence the interview questions asked of participants pertaining to how they have achieved and attained leadership positions in agriculture, a predominantly male field. Finally, the primary researcher has developed leadership characteristics and independence, skills which have led to successful attainment of leadership roles. Prior to commencing the study, the primary researcher believed women deans were independent and have assumed many leadership roles throughout their lives.

In an effort to bracket the primary researcher's own knowledge and presuppositions, the researcher reflected on personal biases of the research topic and assumptions of the outcomes of the study prior to and during the research to maintain as impartial of a position as possible. The primary researcher personally reflected on each occasion of contact and communication with the participants. The primary researcher also structured the research question and probing questions in such a way that did not lead or guide the participant's responses in a predetermined direction.

In addition to the primary researcher's efforts to reduce the impact of bias on the data collected, several validation strategies were employed to document the accuracy and value of this phenomenological research study. Prolonged engagement in the field by the primary researcher and the triangulation of data sources, methods, observation notes and reflection journals were techniques used to establish credibility (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, member checks of data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions were performed by the women participants involved in the study to also confirm credibility of the findings. From the primary researchers' observations, a thick description of the participants in their working environment was constructed to help readers determine the transferability of the research. Dependability of the study was established through a peer review by another researcher trained in qualitative analysis throughout the research process. Furthermore,

confirmability was established by bracketing the researcher's assumptions.

Gaining Entry

After this research was approved by the University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board, each perspective participant was contacted by phone and email to secure authorization to participate in the study. Prior to conducting the interviews with each individual, an informed consent letter was signed and collected at the interview.

Data Collection

The methods employed to collect data in this study included one to two hour in-depth semi-structured interviews that were audio-taped, in which the primary researcher asked open-ended, non-leading questions (Creswell, 2007). The interviews focused on revealing the influences and experiences which helped to develop each woman. The interview protocol asked each participant to describe her family upbringing, her immediate family, and her road to becoming a dean of agriculture. The primary researcher's presence as a participant observer in the environments of each of the six women deans for two days was also utilized to gather data. During each field visit, the primary researcher recorded descriptive and reflective notes as she observed events and interactions in each dean's daily routine. This enabled the primary researcher to gain an accurate account of the field as well as maintain subjectivity in understanding each dean's experience.

Data Analysis

The in-depth interviews were transcribed and analyzed along with the primary researcher's field notes by the primary and the female, secondary researcher. The field notes were utilized to describe the facts and details related to the women deans and their environment. In addition, the field notes captured the primary researcher's thoughts related to the women deans and their environment. These field notes were utilized in the data analysis to assist both the primary and secondary researchers' in recalling what had occurred during the field experience.

Furthermore, data was examined using several methods, which included identifying significant statements and elements of meaning; creating textural and structural descriptions; and recognizing descriptions which revealed commonalities among the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007). Emerging themes from all data were coded and sorted into specific categories that emerged from the data by the primary researcher and the female, secondary researcher. Once the data was analyzed and coded and specific themes were identified, the primary and secondary researchers explored theoretical frameworks to explain the leadership styles and personalities of the women deans of agriculture. In addition, the primary and secondary researchers identified Eagly and Carli's (2004) research as a viable explanation after the data analysis to explain challenges the women deans of agriculture had face. The specific categories were similar to the themes identified by Eagly and Carli: human capital (e.g., education, work experience); the difference in leadership styles of men and women; the nature of men and not women to lead and dominate others; and discrimination against female leaders based on gender norms. In addition, observation notes and reflection journals were kept by the primary researcher. The primary researcher and the female secondary researcher analyzed and coded the interview transcriptions, observation notes and reflection journals to determine what type of personality traits each woman possessed. This process was utilized to see if there were common personalities amongst the women deans. Those traits that surfaced were closely aligned with the *Big Five Model* which consist of personality traits such as surgency, conscientiousness, agreeableness, adjustment, and intellectance. Furthermore, the male, secondary researchers confirmed that the emerging themes that were sorted into the aforementioned categories and personality traits were representative of the data.

Findings

When discussing the women deans' experiences, only one woman dean's quote is utilized to describe the theme; however, the quote is representative of what the other women's opinions were as well. This provided the opportunity for

the researchers to use thick, rich descriptions to support the themes that emerged from the data.

Possible Challenges for Women Leaders Identified by Eagly and Carli (2004)

Underinvestment in human capital. While research shows that women do not achieve leadership roles due to a lack of education and work experience (Eagly & Carli, 2004), these six women all have doctoral degrees and numerous years of experience in agricultural fields. The deans in this study obtained degrees in agricultural and extension education, agricultural engineering, animal science, biology, horticulture, and entomology. They have also assumed numerous leadership roles in their pursuit of deanship. In addition, the majority of the women deans are married with children which compared to their mothers was quite different. One dean described the landscape for women during the transitional time between now and when they were being raised by her parents.

Now, during that period of time, there were very few females that sort of branched out of their sort of pre-determined career fields at the time, and so for a female to be in agriculture was really not, I don't know that there were any here to be honest with you...you live in the sort of social expectations and so that was just sort of the first group of more females entering into college working outside the home. More and more women were working outside the home and taking on professional careers, so I was just sort of on that edge, that cutting edge of that transition period.

Gender discrimination. The areas of discrimination identified and discussed in this study are perceptions of women, fairness in the workplace, and power structures. Five of the six deans provided accounts of discrimination they experienced in their journey to deanship. Bias and opposition were encountered by these women as they pursued agricultural degrees and careers, joined agricultural organizations, applied and interviewed for faculty/administrative positions and promotions, advanced to higher levels

of leadership, and entered into departments comprised primarily of males. As they discussed their experiences, each woman was quick to comment that they grew as professionals because of the obstacles they had to overcome. Moreover, one woman dean acknowledged that if we understand and support both perspectives (men and women) and educate people about these viewpoints, as a society we will become more accepting of each gender.

It's a real challenge, because I don't like partitioning people out. I like to help men to understand women and women to understand men and understand that when we bring things to the table that...if you work with women alone, I think it's easy to create an 'us against them' attitude or men with women. I don't ever want to create an 'us against them'. I think men and women bring some unique things to the table in very different ways. I also know that there are things that I can do that a man couldn't do, in terms of working with students, I mean...if I give a hug to a student, it's very different than if a man gives a hug to a student...even if that student needs a hug. But men can do things like being more authoritative and more direct. Men can get away with that type of leadership, but there are things that women can get away with that men can't. And I also know that if I have to deliver bad news to somebody, they're much less likely to take me on and yell and banter back than they are if a man told them. They would be more argumentative, and so they would challenge that more than they might with me because of this sense of respect. And so there are some huge advantages, so you need to know what are the advantages, what are the disadvantages, and recognize that I will never be a person that can pound my fist on the table and say this is the way it's going to be guys, but there are some other things that I have that are an advantage in terms of gender roles in a workplace that men don't have. Basically, it is one having an un-

derstanding of what those differences are and how to use them appropriately.

Perceptions of women. There are perceptions individuals have about women in the workplace, particularly in agriculture. Some of those perceptions are that women involved in agriculture cannot accomplish certain tasks that need to be done. As one woman dean described:

When I first applied for the academic position I was a post-doc, and the academic position opened up and I applied for that and the dean at the time told me we don't really want you because you're a woman, we don't think you can do the job. We want someone who can do the research in fruits and I said, 'Well, what is it you think I can't do? I've installed irrigation, I've grafted trees, and I'll show you how to graft one right here. I've planted 57,000 trees; I know how to do this. He said, 'Well, you know, if you've done the practical things...can you drive a tractor?' and I said, 'Yes.' 'Can you drive a backhoe?' 'Yes, it's no big deal.' 'Post hole digger?' 'No big deal.' And he said, 'Well, can you calibrate a sprayer?' I said, 'Yes.' And he said, 'Well how would you calibrate a sprayer?' He kind of copped an attitude. So I described to him how you would calibrate a sprayer. He said, 'Well, how would you do the irrigation?' So I showed him a typical irrigation layout, you know, and he said, 'Oh, well okay, maybe you would be a good candidate.' So he let me go ahead and apply and interview and I got the position. I put in a 40-acre orchard...a research orchard right away and got the irrigation in under the railroad. But, that was one of the examples of...I guess they were going on perception.

Fairness. Fairness between men and women in the workplace can sometimes be daunting or at least the perception that exists appears daunting. One women dean described her experience of getting promoted to tenure as such.

Like when I went for promotion and tenure, I received my tenure and they

decided not to grant me promotion and their justification for that was...they said I needed to have some international experience, well there was nowhere where that was specified in the documents for associate professor, and the two guys that went up at the same time I did didn't have international experience, but they got promoted. I had more pubs than they had, so basically....And they said I could fight it, but at that time the back log for fighting it was about three years to have a hearing, so it was easier just to go get the international experience and then apply the next year, and I got it the next year. But I remember thinking that, the fairness issue was not right... And one other case too where there were five directors in the department and I was the director of _____, the only woman, and I was being underpaid by \$20,000. All the guys, even the ones that came after me had higher salaries...so...I had to fight that, and it took eight years before I won that, well I won it in five but it took three years to collect. So, there were problems, but I learned a lot there. I learned about fighting when things are unjust, you know, you have to fight. You may not always win, but you have self-respect at least.

Power Structure. The power struggle that takes place in the workplace can be critical to the success of either party. As one dean described:

When I became the department chair and they saw me as...shifting in the power structure and when it became evident that I was my own person and I was not going to carry forward their agenda...all hell broke loose...to put it mildly and it was a really difficult year...The dean at the time convinced me to change job positions. In retrospect, I recognize that I was not going to win that battle and I also recognize that there was nothing that I could have done, no accomplishment I could have made, no...strategic goal I could have

set and reached that would have won the respect of this group of men...because it was so fundamentally a problem of my gender. There was absolutely nothing that I would be able to do to win their respect, and it's very difficult to lead people who don't respect you.

The Big Five Model Personality Traits

These six women deans can be characterized as having strong leadership characteristics based on the *Big Five* personality traits: (a) surgency, (b) conscientiousness, (c) agreeableness, (d) adjustment, and (e) intellectance.

Surgency. Surgency is defined as individual possessing traits such as extroversion, energy, and need for power. As demonstrated by the deans, they are passionate and assertive concerning work.

But in the classroom, oh my goodness...I get in the classroom and I am wound up for the day. I tell you what, when I guest lecture...I've begged to teach, they think I'm crazy. When I was at _____, I taught every freshman orientation class, I taught six sections of freshman orientation every fall and we met twice a week. So I had 12 contact hours along with everything else I was doing and I wouldn't give it up. I was passionate about not giving it up. It is rewarding, encouraging, engaging, motivating, exciting. Getting in front of students just really revs me up. So I don't want to pass up that opportunity.... Every job I've ever taken, that's been my measure...is this the kind of job that I could spend the rest of my career doing and feel rewarded and feel like I'm making a difference and feel like I can contribute in very meaningful ways? I never want to take a job where I feel like I'm taking more than I'm giving, I never want to take a job where I don't have that passion for what I do, and I never want to take a job that I don't think I'm adequately prepared for. You always have to take that next step, but you know inside whether you have

the tools, if it's the right time for that step.

Conscientiousness. A conscientious individual exhibits specific traits including dependability, personal integrity, and need for achievement. The deans desired for community and to feel pride in the work they do and feel energized. In addition, the deans have launched discussions with department chairs to empower faculty members.

We want people to feel proud of what they do here, they have every reason to. The work of this college is so important and so valued. To feel safe, to feel comfortable, to feel proud, and to feel energized, that's what we're looking for. We are a very large organization, can I ensure that every pocket across the college feels that way...no, but where we don't, we try hard to know that that's true and be an active part of the solution towards something better. So we explicitly launched a series of conversations about what some characteristics of healthy departments were. And that turned out to be a very revealing and important tool for many of our chairs...empowering for lots of our faculty.

Agreeableness. Agreeableness is characterized by traits such as cheerful and optimistic, nurturance, and need for affiliation. Deans value the relationships they have created in their institutions with both faculty and students.

I think you have relationships with people that seem to last forever, and some of the relationships that I'm enjoying here have carried over from my previous institution. A lot of my kids still come by, and they'll probably be mine forever. One of mine works for _____ now in _____, and I'll see the emails to me that are title 'mom', you know, I did this, and it gives me the chance to be proud of him and how much he's grown. It's a good feeling to have your students coming back and becoming full-fledged professionals too or having people that you've been able to work with or encourage become

leaders here. That's exciting. Or when you've been able to dream up ideas with the help of a real committed team and those ideas work. That's exciting!

Adjustment. An individual who possesses emotional stability, self-esteem, and self-control exhibits an adjustment personality trait. The deans acted as mediators in diverse, sometimes hostile environments where people had many differences. In addition, they took on leadership roles in the face of adversity.

But in my department, there was a lot of conflict between new people who had been hired from the _____, and people who had either been in _____ for...30 or 40 years or people who grew up there and were on the faculty. And there was just this huge divide and I was often the person who could cross that divide.... I ended up having quite a number of leadership roles in difficult things that had to happen in the department. The chair would be looking for somebody to lead who could make it happen without World War Three occurring. For example, I led a reevaluation of space and reassignment of space for the faculty, there is nothing more precious in a university than space. People will fight to the death for their space. So I had to find a way to make a totally transparent and fair process and I was an assistant professor so I was like really dancing a fine line.

Intellectance. Intellectance is defined as an individual who is curious and inquisitive, open-minded, and learning oriented. As was expressed by the deans:

I like being able to interact with and to be knowledgeable about majors beyond the one that I came from. My department of _____ is housed in the same _____ department _____ with _____. Did I know anything about those majors or anything about the types of stuff they did? Nahh, even though I was in the same building. But now that I'm in this office, I have a

much better understanding for...what they do with their major, what they're trying to accomplish with the education of students...and the three programs that they offer there...where their students go and the types of things they do and the types of backgrounds that they come from. I never would have known that type of thing. I mean we've got ___ departments...we have _____ undergraduate majors in this college and... I get to have access to information that I never would have seen before.

Transformational Leadership

Eagly et al. (2003) confirmed the generalization that women's typical leadership styles are more transformational than those of men, especially when it came to providing encouragement and support to subordinates. In addition, transformational leaders are more focused on the big picture of the organization instead of just the day-to-tasks that need to be accomplished. Perfectly stated by the deans:

I've read in a number of documents that there's a kind of tipping point in the diversity of a community. When you have a very homogeneous community, it will function through the filter of whatever those groups of people are, if it's all men, or all Caucasian, whatever the homogeneity is, it's going to function with that as its primary filter. If you start bringing in diversity and you just drop in say one person, they're going to be very much influenced by the weight of whatever that filter is. If you've got 9 men and one woman, it's going to function like a male society and that is going to be the expectations of that woman, to function like a white male. If it's a white male society, she's going to be asked to function like a white male, only problem is...she's not. So as you shift that and you become more and more diverse, there's a place where there's a kind of a tipping point and you lose that homogeneous filter that the society is functioning under. You start to get it functioning like the diverse society that

it is...which means you're taking into account everybody's views and the way they are, and their needs, what they need to be successful, and I think that that's what we need to do to really transform the institution, is to arrive at that tipping point. Everybody agrees that once you get there it's a really great thing. People say, "Oh, how are you going to maintain excellence?" But once you hit that tipping point, you realize how much you bring with the diversity...the viewpoints, the ability to be creative, the projects that people are willing to take on, the kind of work that's being done...it all gets better.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The overarching conclusions for the women in this study was that attaining their leadership role was not limited to their education and work experience, and they grew from their obstacles related to gender discrimination. This explanation is supported by the findings of Eagly and Carli (2004). These women even stated they wanted to understand both men and women to make the academic environment a better working place. The perceptions of women in leadership positions have not always been positive but these women deans learned to be great strategists and establish their presence within the University.

In addition, women's experiences related to power structure within the workplace were related to the natural tendency of males to lead and dominate others. However, these women overcame that issue quickly. Even though these women overcame many obstacles there are still questions that surfaced. Hence future research should be focused on the following questions: (a) Are there differences in communicating vision and goals among men and women deans? If so, how are these differences perceived among the faculty?, (b) What is the most effective ways to communicate vision and goals within colleges of agriculture?, and (c) How are women deans viewed by colleagues in their institutions?

Transformational leadership is a process which changes and transforms people (Lussier & Achua, 2007). Another conclusion of this study

is that these six women deans displayed characteristics of transformational leaders and each of the women deans in this study exhibited personality traits such as surgency, conscientiousness, agreeableness, adjustment, and intellectance (Yukl, 2010).

Women and men pursuing leadership positions in academia can benefit from other women's experiences. Knowing some of the gender barriers that could exist in academia can assist both women and men in the preparation of becoming a leader in the agriculture academia arena. There is a tendency for individuals to choose people like themselves and by understanding different perspectives in leadership (women and men's perspectives) one can work on making the organization stronger. This study described how women attained deanship, but how have male deans obtained and attained their leadership role in agriculture?

In addition to recognizing the gender barriers which exist in an organization, one may want to evaluate their personality traits such as those included in the *Big Five Model*. If one analyzes their personality and determines that most of the personality traits are solid, one may be ready to pursue a leadership position. However, if one is deficient in several personality traits, then one may want to consider leadership development training. Some questions that still remain are: (a) How do men and women deans compare on measures of the *Big Five Model*? and (b) What is the relationship between faculty/institutional moral and their dean's score on a *Big Five Model* assessment?

Discussion

There are several areas one could focus on and learn from when hearing from women deans in agriculture. The first area of emphasis is on the original voice of each woman who told her story. Five of the six woman deans had similar discrimination and power structure experiences and each still became a dean of agriculture. They even referenced that because of those obstacles, they grew professionally. As the research team, we believe that any job is going to have obstacles and it is clearly how we handle those obstacles, which defines our advancement in the workplace. One could argue there are

negative perceptions of individuals and unfairness in the agriculture sector but it is the job of the individual to change those perceptions. If individuals continually allow obstacles to keep them from succeeding, then we will continue to stifle one's professional advancement. All individuals must continue to strive to change negative perceptions.

According to Yukl (2010), there are five broad personality traits which correspond to leader effectiveness. These women deans of agriculture exhibited many of those traits: (a) surgency, (b) conscientiousness, (c) agreeable-

ness, (d) adjustment, and (e) intellectance. These traits are not only seen in women but men too (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). One can utilize this information to assist in training of faculty members who wish to pursue a career as a dean. Furthermore, there is value in understanding these traits, how to effectively apply these traits in the workplace and how each individual (male or female) exhibits these traits. By having the overarching understanding of different leadership styles and gender issues, one has a better understanding of how to attain a leadership role as a dean.

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