

Learning to be leaders in higher education: What helps or hinders women's advancement as leaders in universities¹

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This paper describes results from an online survey of 26 women from 8 universities, describing times when work and non-work situations have helped or hindered their advancement in university leadership roles. From the 110 reported incidents, 5 categories of factors that make a difference to advancement as leaders have been identified. This research is part of the L-SHIP (Leadership- Supporting Higher Intent & Practice) project and has two main aims. First, to identify factors in universities that help and hinder women's advancement as leaders, as reported by women; second, to produce practical programmes for aspiring leaders and tertiary institutions on how to identify what helps and hinders advancement in university leadership roles, and how to develop effective programmes to harness strengths and address barriers. This research is a first step to the L-SHIP Toolkit for good practice in leadership development in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Gender imbalance among senior University academics is an acknowledged problem in many countries, with only slow progress being made towards equity (Davidson and Burke, 2004). What helps or blocks access to university leadership roles is yet to be understood from the perspective of women. Without better knowledge we cannot be sure that approaches being used to enhance leadership are effective. In common with many higher education organizations internationally, the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' committee has recognised the need to address gender imbalance in

¹ This paper has benefited from the advice of the reviewer of the conference abstract. The suggestions of the reviewer are acknowledged with thanks.

² The research described in this paper has been undertaken collaboratively by the multidisciplinary L-SHIP (Leadership- Supporting Higher Intent & Practice) team comprising the following academics from New Zealand Universities: Airini, Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland; Sunny Collings, Social Psychiatry & Population Mental Health Research Unit, School of Medicine & Health Sciences, University of Otago, Wellington, Kathryn McPherson, School of Rehabilitation and Occupation Studies, Auckland University of Technology; Lindsey Conner, College of Education, University of Canterbury; Brenda Midson, School of Law, University of Waikato; Cheryl Wilson, Consumer and Applied Sciences, University of Otago. The New Zealand Women in Leadership initiative (NZWIL), a national programme with the aim of growing women in university leadership roles, was the catalyst for the L-SHIP project and is acknowledged with enormous thanks and appreciation. In particular, the L-SHIP team thanks the inaugural NZWIL cohort (2007) for their advice, and encouragement which have contributed directly to this research. This L-SHIP project has also benefited from the advice of Dr Sarah Leberman of The New Zealand Centre for Women and Leadership based at Massey University.

senior academic and managerial positions in universities and progress equitable employment outcomes at a time of tertiary sector reform.

Women still only represent 16.9% of professors and associate professors in New Zealand (Human Rights Commission, 2006). Although disparities exist in other countries and in other fields (Davidson and Burke, 2004), statistics about university gender imbalances are particularly concerning. Literature suggests a wide range of difficulties for women in universities including, for example: that they are more likely to be put in 'precarious' leadership positions; and that they are more likely to be under close scrutiny if these roles are undertaken (Ryan and Haslam 2005). Little research about women's own perspectives on both barriers and facilitators is available, particularly in New Zealand. Such research is needed to uncover and proactively address the complex factors likely to be affecting the development of women as leaders in university settings.

One of the challenges is to establish the nature of links between experiences in work and non-work settings and how these affect women's development as leaders in universities. The L-SHIP (Leadership- Supporting Higher Intent & Practice) project was undertaken over 12 months to investigate this question, through a national on-line survey using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954).

The L-SHIP project aimed to increase understanding about what factors women report as helping or hindering advancement in universities. Of particular interest was understanding the ways in which formal and informal experiences influence professional development and advancement by women, from the perspective of the women themselves. This knowledge is intended to help women academics, and their employers, consider how best to harness their potential as leaders, make the most of facilitators they experience, and manage barriers effectively. In particular, tertiary institutions may be encouraged to use the research findings in ways to grow and challenge both young and mature academics, stimulating more mutually beneficial contributions to the sector. Promoting the fulfilment of leadership potential is crucial to rectifying the current imbalance in gender distribution and thus influence in leadership and decision-making in universities. This research contributes to understanding how to increase and enable women in university leadership roles.

RESEARCH AIMS & QUESTIONS

The L-SHIP research has three main aims. First, to identify (as reported by women) those factors that help and hinder women's advancement as leaders in universities; second, to contribute to the development of programmes for women and tertiary institutions enhancing women's advancement in university leadership roles; and third to inform and aid development of more effective programmes which harness strengths and address barriers. The research will inform the development of a L-SHIP Toolkit based on descriptions of good practice for leadership development in higher education.

To achieve these aims, two core research questions guided the L-SHIP project:

- What helps or hinders women to advance in university leadership roles, as reported by women?
- What changes are needed in order to enable women to advance in university leadership roles?

SITUATING THIS RESEARCH

While female student enrolment figures are increasing and women university students aged under thirty outnumber men by 26 percent, this is not reflected in a proportionate rise in female senior academics.³ Less than 17% of senior academic positions are held by women in New Zealand's eight universities (Human Rights Commission, 2006). As long as women continue to be underrepresented as role models as teachers, researchers and managers at the higher levels of academia, tertiary institutions risk losing women to the sector generally but also, risk their competitiveness as they pass over potential leaders who could either fail to be utilised by the institution or be absorbed by other sectors.

Effective leadership is essential to the sustainability of Universities. The nature of leadership is, however, dynamic. Recent changes in the politics and funding of University research in many countries have seen an increase in the direct measurement of research outputs. This increasing focus on 'performance evaluation' creates new work identities and understandings of professionalism as educational organizations re-orientate their responsibilities, functions and priorities. Traditionally, people who had 'the knowledge' established themselves in positions of power that maintained managerial hierarchies (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). These hierarchies have been replaced to some extent by new ones that are more related to "performativity" (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). In this new environment, the 'performance' measures such as research outputs and grant acquisition, have arguably come to count more than substantive social action such as addressing social justice issues (Morley & Hosking, 2003). This climate puts pressure on emerging leaders in universities. In terms of career progression, women may be more vulnerable than men to potential deleterious effects of this new culture. It is not known how the new University environment and culture will enable or constrain women's individual capacities to develop, synthesise, communicate and enact their ideas as leaders; how they will consider professional planning (if at all) and how they will make use of systems, networks and authorities.

The research literature points to factors that help or hinder the development of academic women's leadership potential and opportunities for career progression. These factors can be usefully considered in three domains: personal, professional and organizational factors.

Personal factors

Often it seems women make decisions about their future careers based on personal choices about their lifestyles. For example, there is the lure of alternative possibilities such as raising a family (White, 1995) and women often consider their physical and mental health to take priority over climbing the corporate ladder (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). Successful women have reported that work takes priority, as illustrated by fitting home responsibilities around their work or choosing to be childless (White et al., 1997). A disheartening finding is that many successful women work so hard that they report a lack of psychological or physical energy left to invest in their personal lives. This is probably also linked to the perception that it is important to have continuous full-time employment for career success.

³ Downloaded 5th September 2008, from *The National Equal Opportunities Network* at <http://www.neon.org.nz/newsarchive/wil/>

Having a strong self-belief or self efficacy in their ability to succeed and to control the direction of their careers seems to be a common attribute of leaders interviewed by White et al (1997). Self-belief or self efficacy may also be linked to other personality characteristics such as the personal motivation to achieve which may be associated with persistence. While the majority of women in Cox et al (1997) study felt that luck was important, they often attributed their success to hard work, tenacity and the willingness to take up opportunities.

Professional factors

According to White (1995) educational level is one of the most powerful predictors of career achievement for both men and women. Access to higher qualifications and identifying and participating in professional development opportunities, may be strong elements of career enhancement. It seems important then to consider access to qualifications and opportunities for professional development for women in universities and what critical shifts may increase the number of women in senior positions.

In a comparison of factors identified by men and women as contributing to their success, Broadbridge (2007) identified that women put more emphasis on support mechanisms at work whereas men emphasized support from home. Of particular interest to the L-SHIP project is whether participants identify specific support mechanisms in the universities or whether support mechanisms need to be improved.

Some of the greatest issues for women in management positions seem to be related to negotiating “traditional authoritarianism” such as bullying and fear tactics, the gentleman’s club with its protective paternalism and patriarchal dividend, entrepreneurialism that promotes task-focused workaholism, and the nature of expertise/ detachment of “careerism” (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). These forms of management culture have been associated with success (Leonard, 1998) but there is a growing recognition that they constrain both males and females who subscribe to them as modes of operating because of the expectations of heroism, physical and emotional toughness, and self-reliance. It seems that many women are still attempting to conform to this traditional model of career success (White, 1995) but may regret the perceived need to be tougher for their own protection and the “hardening” that results (Marshall, 1995).

Alongside this apparent contradiction (i.e. of success being associated with failure) is a culture of interpersonal behaviour at board and senior levels which has been described as aggressive, rude, and hostile with conflict, personality clashes and politicking being commonplace (Marshall, 1975). Successful women are sensitive to the systems of influence within organizations but are reticent about becoming entrenched in the political game. Some women consider that promotion involves competence in selling oneself to those with the power to promote (White et al. 1997). In contrast, through power structures that tend to be undermine women’s aspirations, they felt they did not belong and are isolated as a consequence (Marshall, 1995).

Issues around power and authority may also undermine ideas put forward in private (or other achievements), especially when private and public statements are in conflict (Marshall, 1975). The failure of powerful people to affirm or act consistently with private discussion can result in feelings of being “orphaned” or silenced, on guard and being forced into defensive positions.

Organisational factors

Universities in New Zealand are currently in a state of reform and are riding the cusp of a wave shifting the culture from modernism to postmodernism. This involves a reconceptualisation and re-identification from the modernist university, that focuses on intellectual and disciplinary traditions grounded in a twentieth-century sense of democratic and academic freedom and is backed by government investment, to a corporate post-modern university that has a clear strategic focus, line-management structures, client service and industry orientation with proportionately lower levels of government investment (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). At the same time there is a changing conception of the nature of knowledge, its generation, use and emergent nature (Davis, Dumara & Luce-Kappler, 2008; Gilbert, 2005). These changes have implications for policies and practices in universities. In turn these changes will shape the type of management and leadership needed to ride the wave.

During the 1990s leadership was equated with executive authority, and there was considerable investment in professional development to maintain CEOs and leadership teams in authority in order to propel reform measures that led to greater self-management of institutions. This is in contrast to the more post-modern view of flatter and more democratic management structures. Recently, there has been an increase in emphasis on vision-building, strategic planning, financial management, marketing, accountability and building leadership teams. Here in lies the contradiction set up between team building on the one hand and line management organized into hierarchical relationships based on functionality and strategic planning on the other.

The complex interaction of factors

As can be seen from the outline above, the personal, professional and organizational factors that either help or hinder career progression may interact. No one single factor may be identified as the most important. Rather, it is more likely that a combination of factors and consequent strategies are likely to surface. The literature provides some examples about the complexity of capabilities that women consider are necessary for leading change in the tertiary sector. For example (as cited in Blackmore & Sachs, 2007, p. 151) a leader in an Australian TAFE explained what she thought was required as being:

All round human quality that represents an all round integration of knowledge, skills, and personal qualities that are used effectively and appropriately in response to varied, familiar and unfamiliar circumstances. Capability about mastering the direction of change through integrating values self-esteem, awareness of needs, problem formulation and problem solving, evaluation skills, creativity, intuition and imagination with critical capability aimed at continuous improvement.

Despite the complicity inherent in statements such as this, little research has focused on women's own perspectives of both barriers and facilitators to career progression. This project was therefore devised to uncover women's perspectives of the factors affecting their development as leaders in university settings and to enable complexities, potential interactions among factors, to be examined.

The L-SHIP project considers multiple influences that help and hinder leadership advancement, and what universities might do to facilitate the career progression of women.

RESEARCH METHOD: CRITICAL INCIDENTS TECHNIQUE

As an established form of narrative inquiry, the Critical Incident Technique⁴ was used in this project to reveal and chronicle the lived experience of women seeking to advance in university leadership roles. As Bishop and Glynn (1999) have shown in research with minority populations, narrative inquiry provides a means for higher levels of authenticity and accuracy in the representation of experiences through being grounded in a participatory design. Such qualitative studies enable participants to “talk their truths rather than present the ‘official’ versions” (Bishop, 1998; Stucki, Kahu, Jenkins, Bruce-Ferguson, and Kane, 2004).

The Critical Incident Technique is a form of interview research in which participants provide descriptive accounts of events that facilitated or hindered a particular aim. As conceptualised originally, a critical incident is one that makes a significant contribution to an activity or phenomenon (Flanagan, 1954). The critical incident is a significant occurrence with outcomes. The research technique facilitates the identification of these incidents by a respondent. These ‘stories’ are grouped by similarity into categories that can encompass the events and which can guide the construction of professional development initiatives.

Women who had taken part in the first two NZWIL programmes (2007) were invited to participate and were asked to describe times when incidents in work or non-work situations which have helped (or hindered) their advancement as leaders in universities. In particular, through an online survey, participants were asked:

- Can you describe a time when something has happened to you in a work situation that helped in your advancement in university leadership? (work = professional contexts).
- Can you describe a time when something has happened to you in a work situation that hindered in your advancement in university leadership? (work = professional contexts).
- Can you describe a time when something has happened to you in a non-work situation that helped in your advancement in university leadership? (non-work = home, family, and wider life activities).
- Can you describe a time when something has happened to you in a non-work situation that hindered in your advancement in university leadership? (non-work = home, family, and wider life activities).

This structure was used to capture both ‘positive’ stories of success in addition to barrier identification. The critical incident need not be a career incident, since other life-changing events often do impact on career development. Women could nominate up to two stories/critical incidents related to each question meaning a possible 8 stories per participant.

A complete incident story comprises three parts: trigger (the source of the incident), associated action, and outcome. Identification of each component part facilitates the grouping of the incidents into ‘categories’ of incidents that seem similar. Each identified incident meets the following criteria:

⁴ See <http://www.apa.org/psycINFO/special/cit-intro.pdf> regarding the bibliography of Critical Incidents Technique research. This database covers more than 50 years of research on the development and use of the Critical Incidents Technique.

- (1) Is there a trigger for the incident? An associated action? An outcome?
- (2) Can the story be stated with reasonable completeness?
- (3) Was there an outcome bearing on the aim of the study?

At the conclusion of the scrutinising processes (which the research team undertook collaboratively and independently), categories emerge that accommodate the incidents described in the sample group of interviews.

The following questions tested the soundness and trustworthiness of the category system:

- Can the researchers working independently of each other use the categories in a consistent way?
- Are the categories comprehensive?
- To what extent and in what ways are the categories consistent with expert commentary on good practice in encouraging the advancement of women in university leadership roles?

In addition to describing critical incidents participants provided biographical information:

- Age band: 20-29 years; 30-39 years; 40-49 years; 50-59 years; 60 years and upwards
- Gender: Male/ Female⁵
- Ethnicity: Māori, Pākehā/ European, Pasifika⁶, Other
- Country of origin and professional practice

Patterns attributable to participant demographics will be analysed in a future paper.

IMPLEMENTATION: PARTICIPANTS

The research questions were investigated in eight university sites (each university in New Zealand). Participants were invited from women in general and academic positions of leadership in universities who had taken part in the NZWIL programme.

A position of leadership was defined as one in which the participant was:

- (a) Academic Professor, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer or equivalent; Head of Department/School, Dean, Associate Dean; or
- (b) General: General Manager, Manager.

Twenty-six volunteers participated in the L-SHIP research. As indicated by Smith (2006), meta-analysis of narrative research methods suggests that after 8 participants, some repetition of story types can be anticipated. Researchers using the Critical Incident Technique with underrepresented groups have tended to interview and report on between 10-32 participants (McCormick, 1994; Airini & Brooker, 1999), to ensure highest possible levels of trustworthiness. L-SHIP set an initial target of a minimum

⁵ This question was for the participant to confirm their gender is female. This study interviewed female participants only.

⁶ Māori: the indigenous people of New Zealand; Pākehā: Non-Māori, most often of European ancestry; Pasifika: Peoples of Pacific nation ancestry living in New Zealand.

of twenty participants, anticipating approximately 4 complete critical incident stories per participant.

RESULTS

From 26 surveys, 110 incidents were identified describing experiences women that have had that helped or hindered their advancement in university leadership roles.

Table 1 shows the number of incidents submitted in each of the four question areas (help/ hinder at work; help/ hinder in non-work context):

Table 1: Incidents participants reported that have helped/ hindered their advancement in university leadership roles

Work = professional contexts	
Work situation that helped advancement in university leadership	48
Work situation that hindered in advancement in university leadership	23
Non-work = home, family, and wider life activities	
Non-work situation that helped advancement in university leadership	33
Non-work situation that hindered advancement in university leadership	6
Total	110

As shown in Table 1, women in this study reported more helpful incidents than non-helpful: 74% of the recorded situations were for helpful incidents; compared with 26% that were unhelpful. In addition, more than twice the incidents women described occurred in work situations: 65% of the recorded incidents happened at work, compared with 35% in non-work situations. Most work incidents women reported were in response to a question about helpful (68%) events, as were non-work incidents (85%). Of the reported hindering incidents, these negative experiences were proportionately more present in work situations than non-work situations. While 32% of work incidents were reported as hindering advancement in leadership, only 15% of the non-work incidents submitted by the participants were identified as hindering advancement.

Analysis of the incidents produced five categories and nine sub-categories. Four submitted incidents were eliminated because they did not meet the criteria of a complete story.⁷

Table 2 lists the categories and subcategories, and frequency of occurrence. All but two of the categories had sub-categories which are also noted in the table. Each incident was classified according to the one category only, that is, to the category that appeared most applicable.

⁷ See the section 'Research Method: Critical Incidents Technique' above for an explanation of the components of a 'complete story' within the Critical Incidents Technique research method.

Table 2: Categories and sub-categories of what helps and hinders women's advancement in university leadership roles.

Category	n =	Sub-categories	n =	% of categories
Work relationships	30	Collegial relationships with seniors: Decision-making by those in power and also includes more informal measures taken by seniors.	15	14
		Collegial relationships with peers: The ways in which the support or lack of support from peers influences career development.	11	10
		Unsupportive collegial relationships: Bullying and/ or peer relationships that might be unsupportive or destructive.	4	4
University environment	20	Policies and practices: The formal and informal policies and practices employed by a University.	10	9
		Application of policies and practices: Involves the application of University policies and practices to the individual case – i.e. the day-to-day administration or decision-making in practice.	10	9
Invisible rules	4		4	4
Proactivity	31	Planned proactivity: Generally refers to a predetermined course of conduct with a view to advancement.	10	9
		Spontaneous proactivity: A spontaneous course of action prompted by an opportunity presenting itself, with less time for considered reflection. Includes situations where a participant has recognised an opportunity and immediately acted to capitalise on it, despite uncertainty about consequences.	11	10
		Professional development: Both formal and informal measures taken with respect to professional development.	6	6
		Change in attitude.	4	4
Personal circumstances	21		21	20
Total	106		106	100%

Consistent with the Critical Incident Technique each category was checked for its trustworthiness. This happened both formatively (in the development of the categories) and summatively (at the finalisation of the categories).

As a first step, two members of the research team, working independently of each other, grouped and identified each category. Each category list was then discussed between the two researchers, to ensure the categories could be justified alongside the research data, and expert commentary on good practice in encouraging the advancement of women in university leadership roles use the categories in a consistent way. A list of eleven categories was developed through this process. A third member of the research team was asked to use this list and categorise ten

incidents selected from the total list of 106 incidents. Feedback from this process helped clarify the categories, and the identified ways in which the number of categories might be reduced further by thinking more thematically. The original two researchers reviewed the eleven categories and reduced them to five; by grouping several related categories from the list of eleven categories. They tested the five categories against fifteen randomly selected incidents – each researcher working independently to categorise the incident, then discussing together each categorisation. 100% agreement was achieved. Two further team members were asked to independently categorise ten selected incidents, using the list of five categories. 100% agreement was achieved and feedback from this process helped refine the title of some categories (e.g. an initial category title of ‘Rules of the game’ became ‘Invisible rules’), and the sub-category descriptors.

DESCRIPTION OF CATEGORIES

This paper describes categories and sub-categories of what makes a difference for women’s advancement in university roles, as reported by women.

Categories are explained along with examples of the incidents in the category, showing the range or variation within each category and sub-categories.

1. Work relationships

Twenty eight percent of the incidents reported in this study related to work-place relations. This category relates to professional, collegial relationships with peers and seniors (either positive or negative). This category describes situations in which the workplace was itself an agency for change, in relation to increasing women in university leadership roles. Three sub-categories of practice that support women’s advancement in university leadership roles were identified: (1) Collegial relationships with seniors; (2) with peers; and (3) bullying or unsupportive colleagues.

1.1 Collegial relationships with seniors

This sub-category describes incidents involving colleagues with power along with more informal measures taken by senior staff. This was the second most frequently reported type of incident (14% of all incidents). In all but two of the recorded incidents, collegial relationships were described as being helpful for women seeking to advance in university leadership roles. Positive outcomes from collegial relationships with seniors include: appreciation of the role that positive relations can play in advancing one’s career, realisation that one project done well can lead to bigger projects, increased confidence, greater recognition for research and leadership, realisation of the benefits that come from operating collaboratively rather than for individual gains only, and access to further job opportunities. A negative outcome from collegial relationships with seniors can be the realisation that not everyone acts with the best motives when trying to encourage women to take on more responsibility.

Example 1: Helpful practice

Earlier this year (as a senior lecturer at a university) I was appointed to a role running a research centre (in addition to my responsibilities as a senior lecturer etc). The helpful incident was bumping into a more senior male colleague who congratulated me but who then recommended that I insist on being relieved of some other duties. This was also a piece of advice that I received... from women colleagues. It made me realise that I have been very corporate and conscientious in my behaviour at the university and have always just had more and more tasks and responsibilities added to

my job without any being given up - so my job just gets bigger and bigger. I am now in negotiation to rebalance my job to a reasonable size!

Example 2: Unhelpful practice

Last year ... my two immediate superiors (both male) put significant pressure on me to take on a role managing a research centre in addition to my other responsibilities. I did this because 1) I have management skills and contacts that are useful for the role; and 2) I was led to believe it would be a very important factor in getting promoted to Associate Professor, and 3) they were in a bind over filling the role and I thought I was being very helpful to the university. I took on the role, in addition to everything else I do. It did not help my promotion prospects at all, in fact it hindered them because the role eats up the time that I would have spent doing further research and writing - and as I have now learned all the promotion committee is really interested in is publications in top journals. This was a rude awakening for me on a number of fronts; 1) superiors and managers in a university environment are not looking out for your/my career advancement, they are looking to "get the monkey off their back" (whatever the monkey may be - a role needing to be filled, a problem situation, etc); 2) universities ... at promotion to what would be considered 'leadership' ranks (i.e. Associate Prof, and Prof) are really only interested in quality and quantum of research output, they are not interested in corporate behaviour, leadership behaviour etc⁸; 3) I am the only person truly interested in my career and its advancement.

1.2 Collegial relationships with peers

Survey data showed that women's advancement in university leadership roles is affected by support or lack of support from peers. Of the 11 incidents, three cited situations in which peer relationships had been unhelpful. Such situations included peers stigmatising a colleague, and explicit and public challenges to the academic integrity of another participant. Helpful relationships with peers were those that were supportive and congratulatory towards a peer who secures a leadership role, offered opportunities to peers to lead, encouraged women to take up such opportunities, and collaborated in research and article writing. Positive outcomes from collegial relationships with peers included increased confidence, increased resilience and job retention, improved negotiation skills for better job conditions, reciprocity towards peers leading to further opportunities being shared with each other, improved writing skills for journal publications.

Example 1: Helpful practice

During my doctoral studies (before I began teaching fulltime, I just taught very occasionally, within a New Zealand university) my supervisor invited me to take part in a conference, although I didn't feel ready to speak to an international audience about my work. However, I did it, had the paper refereed, and got a tremendous response from the audience. I realised that my efforts into making the presentation, as well as the paper itself, interesting and relevant were actually unusual amongst the academics attending. Many of them took for granted their position in international academia, and made very little effort. The response from this time - now over 10 years ago - helped impel me to where I am now.

Example 2: Helpful practice

I had been an academic for [less than ten] years (all at a single university in New

⁸ Please note that we do not make comment here about actual rules for promotion within institutions which we understand take a number of factors into consideration. Rather the quote suggests a 'perceived' rule about promotion that a number of participants referred to.

Zealand) and unhappy for most of those and seriously thinking about quitting [my discipline] altogether. I had however during that time been very fortunate to have found a very strong and powerful collaborator and supporter. He had been alluding that it would be good if we could be at the same university but no positions had become available at his university. He then moved universities and within a year or so a real position was created, in part specifically with me in mind, at this university. He knew of my doubts with continuing as an academic but encouraged me to apply for the position, which I did and was successful. Even once I had been offered the position I had serious concerns about leaving where I was - I was very scared and very stuck and I felt that I was risking everything, as I was so emotionally involved with it all and had gotten lost in the circumstances really. I was worried that I would be no happier at the new place and that leaving almost immediately after arriving would be unfair on the university. My supporter assured me that having one year of a good person and them leaving was far better than never having them at all. A second confidante who had previously worked with me confirmed what I guess I already knew that my current place of work was killing me and that I had to get out and give myself a chance to rediscover myself and [my discipline]. Terrified, I accepted the position. Six months later I moved and I have never regretted it. I am still here ... years later, well supported, and happy and loving [my discipline] - what better support and outcome can you get.

1.3 Unsupportive collegial relationships

This sub-category relates to times when women's advancement in leadership has been affected by bullying and/ or peer relationships that might be unsupportive or destructive. This sub-category was the least frequently reported of the kinds of work relationships influencing leadership aspirations, and represented 4% of all incidents reported in this study. All incidents in this sub-category were unhelpful and included inappropriate advances by a former research supervisor, intimidation, overly critical criticism under the guise of a peer review, and bullying. Outcomes of such negative collegial relationships are drained energy levels, diminished confidence, fear that confrontation with the unsupportive peer could affect one's career.

Example 1: Unhelpful practice

I was teaching a ...course in a ...university which did not go well for various reasons. After each class the director of the programme would ask the students how the course went. [The director] then put pressure on me saying that the students were unhappy with my teaching. [The director] kept putting pressure on me and intimidating me. I reached a point of frustration and reported [the director] to the head of department who then dealt with the person. I also became very assertive with this person and basically told [the director] to "back off" and that [they were] director of programme and not director of me. After this incident I really lost my confidence in teaching. I did several teaching courses offered by the university to help me get over this. I lost out on promotion that year and it took me some time rebuilding my confidence in teaching. I also learnt to become more assertive. I also realised that my real strengths lie in research and in supervising research students. This occurred about mid-career.

This example highlights the ways in which collegial relationships can have an enduring and significant impact. Whilst there may have been an issue (self recognised) in the teaching of a course, the management strategy, which was perceived as humiliating and threatening, had long lasting effects.

2.0 University environment

Ten percent of the reported incidents described how women's advancement in leadership roles was affected by both university-wide and local workplace policies

and practices associated with being an employee of that institution. Two sub-categories of practice were identified: University-level policies and practices; and day-to-day application of the University policies and practices. In summary, University-level policies and practices were identified as predominantly unhelpful towards women's advancement in leadership; while the day-to-day 'local' application of policies and practices was more likely to be helpful.

2.1 Policies and practices

This sub-category relates to the formal and informal policies and practices employed by a University. In this context women's advancement in leadership is helped or hindered by University level policies and practices. Eight of the 10 incidents in this sub-category were identified as being unhelpful towards women. Incidents in which the university environment was perceived to be unhelpful towards women's advancement in leadership included: lack of clarity about what Universities are looking for in leaders or who they regard as leaders; negative attitude towards women having children and maternity leave, or being ill; weak systems for dealing with accusations of misconduct; and limited opportunities when existing leaders at the end of their careers stay on in their roles. Helpful University environments were described as those enabling women to take on leadership roles, even when this meant ignoring the political agendas of others who did not support such an appointment. Such support had the outcome of increased motivation to commit and deliver in the role, and loyalty towards the organization and senior leadership in the University. Outcomes of unhelpful university environments included either actual or perceived dangerous working environments, misguided paternalism, and lack of transparency about leadership goals.

Example: Helpful practice

When I applied for the role of Head of Department I had to do a presentation to the Department...For a variety of reasons people had a heap of personal agendas and I didn't meet all of them. In fact for some people there I met none of them. During the question time some people were overtly hostile in their questioning. Following the presentation from each applicant to the role, staff were invited to submit their recommendation for appointment to the Dean and/or the Vice-Chancellor. The HR Manager specifically said that only advice on who to appoint should be sent. A few days later the Dean called me to say that I had been appointed to the role. He said he and the Vice-Chancellor had received advice strongly against appointing me. They had looked at that advice as well as the balance of positive advice and materials I had provided in my application. The Dean recommended appointing me. The Vice-Chancellor decided to support that appointment. The fact that they decided to go with their own professional judgments and support my appointment meant the world to me. Their positive belief in my ability to deliver and deliver well helped me to get into this leadership position, for sure, but also helped me to believe even more deeply in my capabilities. Their commitment to me matters a great deal. As does the fact that the whole decision-making process was totally proper by University rules. And in turn I feel very, very committed to this role. The fact that the Department staff now are very warm towards me and comment on the positive change from me coming in as Head, is encouraging.

Example: Unhelpful practice

Trigger: Having children. I was a lecturer at this stage - had been lecturing for only two years when my first child was born, and five years when my second child was born. Actions: Although I did not take too much time out for each of my two

children (6 months leave for first and 3 months for second, both followed by some part-time for 6-9 months; back fulltime after a year), I feel that this time meant I was behind on research productivity and have never really caught up. Also another unintended consequence, was that for my first period of research and study leave my children were both still very young (2 and 4). I really wanted to go away for this period but because both children were in fulltime care, I would have had to pay full fees for the first 3 months and half fees for any months subsequent to maintain their place upon return! This was financially prohibitive and meant I did not get that international exposure and development of research networks for my first period of leave. Again, this put me behind the playing field. Outcome: Slower career progression, but for me personally this was a choice. Having family is a big part of my life and I do not work evenings or weekends - this is family time. I have no doubt this results in lower research productivity, but so be it.

This woman identifies that whilst having children is clearly personal choice, there can be long term effects on careers rather than it merely being a brief interruption typified by pregnancy and maternity leave.

2.2 Application of policies and practices.

The reported incidents highlighted the ways in which the application of University policies and practices affects the individual – i.e. the day-to-day administration or decision-making in practice – can help or hinder women’s advancement in university leadership roles. Nine percent of all incidents described times in which the application of policies and practices impacted on women, with eight of the 10 incidents being helpful with regards to advancement in leadership in universities. Two unhelpful incidents were attributed to actions by the Head of Departments and resulted in (a) staff moving to other Departments, and (b) staff feeling frustrated by the University appraisal system. Helpful incidents included encouragement by supervisors to present research at conferences and to author articles, and with the appointment of a new Head of Department came the realization of the way in which University appointments can dramatically affect a Department’s morale and environment. Outcomes of helpful day-to-day administration of University policy and practices include increased confidence as a researcher and writer, greater opportunities to take on responsibilities and consequential improved time management, and recognition of the importance of role models and high personal goals.

Example: Helpful practice

This incident took place in my current New Zealand University...The trigger was the restructuring of the YYY Faculty which led to the proposed disestablishment of my discipline group within the ZZZ Faculty and moving half of the academic staff to the YYY Faculty. I had only been in the university for [a few] months and mine was one of two ... appointments aimed at raising the research profile of the discipline group. We had worked hard to do this in the few months until we heard via a public email that we were to be dismembered as a group. There was widespread upset not only in the manner of announcing the change, but the proposal to break up a group that was beginning to gain some traction as an academic entity for the first time. Together with several colleagues, I was involved in a concerted action to re-invent the existing major by refocusing it [away from areas associated with YYY Faculty... We gradually gained approval for the new major and have spent the last 9 months working on the new courses, advertising the changes and gaining support from many other departments. Half way through this period I was offered and accepted the position of discipline group leader for the new major. Although this does not mean promotion in a concrete sense, it gives me a far higher profile within the Institute and Faculty and has

led to several opportunities that will contribute to my career plans. Further outcomes from the trigger event are that we have a new major with a year to prove its effectiveness and I have both a great deal more confidence in a leadership role, pleasure in getting a disparate group into forming a team and a much better understanding of how the university runs.

Example 2: Unhelpful practice

I have had at least two bosses who have not been interested in my career development or progression. In one case this meant no annual appraisals nor any career guidance of any kind. In the other case this meant two-yearly appraisals that were a record of what I had achieved but with no useful discussion of future directions. This lack of assistance in this area has meant I have felt that my career progression has floated along rather than had any specific direction. How much this has had to do with the fact that there were no senior academic women in the Schools I worked in I don't know.

3. Invisible rules

This category relates to the reality of academia compared with its myths. Sometimes referred to as 'playing the game'. Includes situations of acknowledgment or realisation that certain things are done in certain ways, despite the rhetoric that might accompany university or academic requirements. Three of the four incidents in this category were helpful for women's advancement in leadership roles. They included 'learning the rules about academic realities' and subsequent need to be realistic about gains and trade-offs. The one unhelpful incident related to a perception that rewards for taking on leadership roles are infrequent and hard to get.

Example: Helpful practice

I have a colleague [overseas] whose research is closely aligned with mine. Once, I was approached by an American academic to write an encyclopaedic entry on the history of a particular [matter] in America. "Why not ask x, y, or z?" I thought, those people being more than capable - my research is New Zealand based! Somewhat unconfident (story of my life I think), I asked this [overseas] colleague, 'Hugh' (not his real name) if he would like to co-author it. He jumped at the chance and therein started a lovely professional relationship... As a result of my approach, 'Hugh', who edits a journal in our field, has invited me several times to contribute; he also asked me to guest edit a special issue, to edit a monograph in a series for our professional association, has ensured I have been an invited guest keynote at 2 overseas conferences, and we plan much more together. His position within this particular professional association has enabled him to help me; so, a good turn on my part has been returned to me manifold! Subsequently, when he was approached by an international editorial board to join their board of directors, he also recommended me, so now I am on that Board too.

4. Proactivity

Twenty-nine percent of all incidents related to the ways in which being proactive can help or hinder women's advancement in leadership roles. This proactivity revealed itself in women taking responsibility for their life, rather than looking for causes in outside circumstances or other people. It can be contrasted with "reactive" or "passive." This category describes situations where women identified they were the agency for change in relation to their own leadership roles. There are four sub-categories for proactivity: planned proactivity, spontaneous proactivity, professional development, and change in attitude.

4.1 Planned proactivity

Ten of the 31 incidents in this category described times when women have undertaken a predetermined course of conduct with a view to advancement. Such actions included determining priorities, stair-casing a career from a small start, actualisation (seeing self as a professor), and making a conscious decision not to make a management role in order to focus on research interests. Positive outcomes of planned proactivity include achieving leadership roles, learning that obstacles are something to work around. Two incidents described how planned proactivity can lead the woman to feel different than her peers in academia when she had followed through on her own commitment to put a major effort into academic advancement, and had subsequent achievements, which made her stand out from her peers.

Example: Helpful incident

I made a decision NOT to take on a managerial role. This was a tough call as I felt that everyone was expecting me to take over the headship. I knew I didn't have the personality to do it, particularly as our department has serious issues with personality conflicts. It would mean sacrificing my research momentum. There were people in our department who didn't research, and one of them actually said to me that I would be crazy to take the role, as they looked to me to take the research leadership role - not to become a manager. So I have continued to refuse this role, and continue to be successful in promotion, so it seems the university accepts that this is a valid path. I contend that it is unrealistic to expect academics to do absolutely everything in a way that excels - I already do excellent teaching, consultancy and research - should I ALSO be expected to be a manager?!

4.2 Spontaneous proactivity

Ten percent of all incidents (n=11) related to times when women's advancement has been helped by spontaneous proactivity. All incidents in this sub-category were helpful and described times when women have undertaken a spontaneous course of action prompted by an opportunity presenting itself, with less time for considered reflection. This included situations where a participant has recognised an opportunity and immediately acted to capitalise on it, despite uncertainty about consequences. Incidents included applying for a leadership role such as a professorial appointment, Head of Department, or Associate Dean, before feeling ready; capitalising on research leadership opportunities despite initial hesitations; and taking advantage of networking opportunities. Outcomes included promotions, offers to lead discipline groups and senior committees, access to places of influence, and major research contracts.

Example: Helpful practice

I was two years into my PhD which I was studying part-time as I was working full-time at a NZ University (as a lecturer). A television news crew came up to our office to ask one of my colleagues what he thought of a recent issue. While the crew was packing up I handed the director my business card and explained I was doing my PhD on the area and would be happy to provide further comment on similar issues in the future. Within a month I was appearing regularly on TV news and had to quickly brand myself as an expert. Featuring on one channel led to requests from other media outlets. Since 2002 I have been interviewed over 100 times in the news media on an enormous variety of subjects, some only vaguely related to my field of research interest. My contribution to the University's public profile through my news media reputation has been a helping factor in my promotion applications.

4.3 Professional development

This sub-category relates to those times when women have advanced their leadership opportunities through taking both formal and informal measures with respect to professional development. Incidents included learning from mentors and team work, increased self-awareness leading to improved time management and willingness to take immediate opportunities, and completion of doctoral studies. Outcomes from professional development include greater ability to prioritise what matters most in order to advance in leadership, appreciation of different approaches to problem solving, and increased success in securing research grants.

Example: Helpful practice

[I became] convenor of the Management Group for [a University Centre, outside my discipline area]. I was nominated to this role and continued to do this for a couple of years. The position gave me experience in a range of management related activities including negotiating pay, dealing with staff disputes, financial matters, lobbying etc. [The outcome was the] development of management skills. These should stand me in good stead for career advancement.

4.4 Change in attitude

Four incidents described times when a change in attitude has helped or hindered advancement in leadership roles. Unhelpful incidents associated with job applications resulted in a reluctance to apply for further leadership positions. Helpful incidents were associated with a realisation of one's rights (such as a 'right' to balanced lifestyle), and also the importance of nurturing one's development.

Example: Helpful practice

Early in my career as a Lecturer in New Zealand I was working with academics that seemed to talk about publishing as a hugely difficult process. As writing and English had never been my strong subjects, it took me quite some time to develop confidence in my writing ability. So my strategy was to stay safe by writing with my PhD supervisor for many years, particularly as a Lecturer. My supervisor enjoyed this writing relationship, but took the driving position in terms of structure for our writing projects. In hindsight, I wish I had been braver to break out earlier from the pattern I got myself into of hiding behind my supervisor's coat tails. Luckily this person moved overseas which forced my independence. While it was, and remains, a good relationship between us, it took me some time to realise my own skills as a writer.

5. Personal circumstances

One fifth (20%) of all incidents related to ways in which personal circumstances helped or hindered women's leadership advancement in universities. Eight of the 21 incidents were unhelpful and included stress due to personal relationships, ill health, bereavements, low self-esteem and depression, the decision to return to New Zealand as an academic and finding fewer opportunities than overseas, having children and maternity leave. Incidents were reported that leadership advancement could be hindered due to restrictions on hours available to work or travel. At the same time the incidents indicated that children were regarded as the priority, and life is therefore managed with this in mind and with a positive outlook. Helpful personal circumstances included family connections that helped facilitate a meeting with a person well known in one's own discipline, having children, and health. In two instances major trauma from divorce or bereavements were associated with a realisation of what 'matters' in life; that life is short and needs to be balanced with reduced stress. These realisations were seen to be helpful in shaping one's approach

to undertaking leadership roles in universities. Outcomes associated with personal circumstances include recognition that work/life balance is important, career advancement, and accommodation of family and mothering responsibilities into work/life balance. Having children was identified as both unhelpful to careers, yet exceptionally important to the individual as mother. Such an incident has been titled: Unhelpful yet holistically significant.

Example: Helpful practice

It may seem strange to say that separating from your husband helped your career, but this is the case for me. It may be more understandable when you see it in the frame of not being happy or not feeling valued in that relationship...Separating from my husband was very liberating and it then allowed me to enrol in a PhD. Gaining this qualification has been pivotal to my career advancement. Without it, I would not be considered a serious academic in my institution...

Example: Unhelpful yet holistically significant

One of the major events that clearly has hindered my career progression was having my first child. Besides maternity leave, the amount of time that I have had to spend at home due to sicknesses and illnesses, and the amount of time I am simply too exhausted to do those important parts of my job that lead to career development (e.g. writing papers and applications), have hampered what I have been able to produce. The flip side of this is that both of my children are gorgeous and I wouldn't give them up for the world!

CONCLUSION

In addition to the role individuals play in developing their own careers in the tertiary sector, it is clear that other people as well as university structures and processes contribute to the outcome we currently see where proportionately few women are in leadership roles. Five themes encompass our participants' experiences and consequently what they say makes a difference to advancing in university leadership roles: Work relationships, University environment, Invisible rules, Proactivity, and Personal circumstances.

We do not suggest these findings are generalisable (given the single country focus and the necessary limits of the methodology). However, we do propose that individuals and their host institutions could and should be challenged to re-think their approach to leadership development. This is not merely to enhance the number of women in an exercise of tokenistic parity but because there are likely to be significant benefits to staff and students in universities, to the universities themselves and indeed to the communities we serve.

Further development of this work will be undertaken to explore the L-SHIP project findings in relation to international literature, but meantime we suggest our findings be considered in the light of four core areas:

- 1) The advancement of women in university leadership roles is strategically important to the tertiary education sector, to each of its stakeholders (from students through to staff, and those who use and benefit from university services), and indeed to the future of our societies.
- 2) To increase the number of women in leadership roles, universities (including their potential leaders) need greater understanding of how women leaders negotiate the personal, professional and organisational landscapes both informally and formally for career advancement.

- 3) Winning leadership roles takes more than simply a written application. The skills required can be enhanced using a number of individual and structural actions.
- 4) Research into university leadership is strengthened through (a) interdisciplinary and inter-institutional collaborative investigation teams; (b) methods that provide a rich picture of the experiences of those seeking to advance in leadership; and (c) research intentions to provide new knowledge and to be applied for positive change.

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