DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 527   EA 026 240

AUTHOR   Wesson, Linda Hampton; Grady, Marilyn L.
TITLE   The Leadership Challenge: A National Study of Women
                 Superintendents.
PUB DATE   Apr 94
NOTE   21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
                 American Educational Research Association (New
                 Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).
PUB TYPE   Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports -
                 Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Administrator Attitudes; Educational Administration;
                 Elementary Secondary Education; Females; *Leadership;
                 *Leadership Styles; *Superintendents; *Women
                 Administrators

ABSTRACT
                 Recently, serious questions have been raised about
the efficacy of the traditional leadership model, which relies on
rigid hierarchical structure, competition, and control. This paper
presents findings of a study that investigated the leadership
practices of rural and urban female superintendents in the United
States. The study was two-fold: (1) a sample of women superintendents
about their perceived sources of job satisfaction, the benefits
accrued on the job, their sense of self-fulfillment in the workplace,
and personal strengths they brought to the job; and (2) the
leadership practices of these superintendents were assessed using the
Leadership Practices Inventory-Self (Kouzes and Posner, 1988). Data
were obtained from telephone interviews with 30 rural and 21 urban
women superintendents and from a survey of 249 female
superintendents. A total of 174 surveys were returned. Findings
indicate that most of the rural and urban women administrators had
been hired as change agents, and they described their leadership
styles in similar ways. They saw themselves as being successful
builders of collegial-collaborative organizations. Both groups
operationalized leadership skills that fit a new leadership paradigm,
which values change and connectiveness. Both groups received job
satisfaction from their leadership practices, in particular, the
human relations aspect. One table is included. Contains 26
references. (LMI)

The Leadership Challenge: A National Study
of Women Superintendents

Linda Hampton Wesson
Educational Administration
Arkansas State University
P.O. Box 2781
State University, AR 72467
(501)972-3062

Marilyn L. Grady
Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
1204 Seaton Hall
Lincoln, NE 68588
(402)472-3726

2

The Leadership Challenge: A National Study of

Women Superintendents

The prevailing model of educational administration evolved over the

last part of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth centuries

(Callahan, cited in Adkison, 1981). This leadership model paralleled the

managerial changes in business, industry, and government; it defined the

professional manager as a person who had an "internal decision-making

monopoly and authority over others" (Kanter, cited in Adkison, p. 313, 1981)

and relied on rigid hierarchical structure, competition, and control to bring

about results (Ortiz & Marshall, 1988).

There are serious questions about the efficacy of this leadership model.

As early as 1988, researchers in educational administration were asking two

fundamental questions that highlighted this dilemma: "To what extent does a

system of hierarchical control enhance teaching and learning? . . . To what

extent do traditional ranking and emphasis on competition square with the

enhancement of educators as people and of instructional services?" (Ortiz &

Marshall, 1988, p. 138).

Experts in business management (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Block,

1991; Covey, 1990; Helgesen, 1990; Peters, 1988; Wheatley, 1992) have

discussed the changes in leadership models. These changes are depicted as a

shift toward a more flexible organizational structure based on units that are

more lateral and cooperative. Wheatley (1992) considers the need for these

kinds of changes when she says:

> Scientists in many different disciplines are questioning whether
>
> we can adequately explain how the world works by using the
>
> machine imagery created in the seventeenth century, most
>
> notably by Sir Isaac Newton. In the machine model, one must
>
> understand parts. . . . The assumption is that by comprehending
>
> the workings of each piece, the whole can be understood. The
>
> Newtonian model of the world is characterized by materialism
>
> and reductionism--a focus on things rather than relationships.
>
> (p. 9)

In her view, organizational change is taking place in part because the new

sciences have changed the way in which we view the world. Defining the new

sciences as the disciplines of physics, biology, chemistry, and theories of

evolution and chaos that cross several disciplines, she explains the nature of

these changes:

> In the new science, the underlying currents are a movement
>
> toward holism, toward understanding the system as a system and

giving primary value to the relationships that exist among

seemingly discrete parts. Our concept of organizations is

moving away from the mechanistic creations tha: flourished in

the age of bureaucracy. We have begun to speak in earnest of

more fluid, organic structures, even boundaryless organizations.

(Wheatley, 1992, p. 13)

Those in education also have articulated a need for a paradigm shift in

educational administration (Giroux, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1984); beginning with

the educational reform movement in the 1980s, there have been serious

discussions about the need for changes in the traditional, hierarchial, control-

and-command environments found in many schools (Wesson & Grady, 1994).

These kinds of changes could transform school onto viable communities.   As

Wood (1990) notes:

We take for granted that our schools are communities, when, in

fact, they are merely institutions that can become communities

only when we work at it. But, with proper attention to all the

individuals within the school, we can create an experience for

students that demonstrates what it means to be a compassionate,

involved citizen. For it is only within a community, not an

institution, that we learn how to hold fast to such principles as

working for the common good, empathy, equity, and self-

respect. (p. 33)

Educational leaders in these "communities of learners" value leadership over

management and emphasize collaboration, consensus building, and

empowerment. Emphasis is placed on vision, values, and guiding principles

(Sergiovanni, 1990). The critical theorist, Giroux (1993), expresses the

distinctive nature of this kind of educational leadership:

Instead of weaving dreams limited to the ever-accelerating

demand for tougher tests, accountability schemes, and leadership

models forged in the discourse of a sterile technician, schools of

education need programs which are part of a collective effort to

build and revitalize a democratic culture which is open rather

than fixed, disputed rather than given, and supportive rather

than intolerant of cultural difference. (p. 22-23)

Methods

To understand more about the leadership practices of the key players in

educational leadership, the superintendents of schools, a study of the women

superintendents in this country was conducted. The study was two-fold in nature. First, we interviewed a sample of women superintendents about their perceived sources of job satisfaction, the benefits accrued on the job, their sense of self-fulfillment in the work place, and personal strengths they brought to the job. Second, we assessed the leadership practices of these superintendents using the Leadership Practices Inventory-Self (Kouzes & Posner, 1988).

Theoretical Framework for the LPI

Kouzes and Posner framed leadership from information they gathered from managers and executives in the public and private sector who described their "personal best;" that is, the leadership behavior used by the managers and executives when they received outstanding results (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). These "personal best" leadership practices can best be described by the following five practices, each of which has two attendant behaviors:

    I. Challenging the process

        A. Search for opportunities

        B. Experiment and take risks

    II. Inspiring a shared vision

        A. Envision the future

        B. Enlist others

    III. Enabling others to act

    A. Foster collaboration

    B. Strengthen others

  IV. Modeling the way

    A. Set the example

    B. Plan small wins

  V. Encouraging the heart

    A. Recognize contributions

    B. Celebrate accomplishments

The Leadership Practices Inventory-Self (Kouzes & Posner, 1988) measures

the extent leaders have adopted these five leadership practices and ten

behaviors.

Procedures

Since we were unable to locate a comprehensive directory of women

superintendents, we solicited assistance from the American Association of

School Administrators, state associations of school administrators, U. S.

Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement

(OERI), state departments of education, and other researchers. We did receive

lists of superintendents' names from state departments of education and state

administrators' groups. However, some states would not release the names of

their superintendents. Thus we were able to identify 346 women

superintendents in twenty-nine states and unable to secure names of women

superintendents in the other twenty-one states. All 346 women superintendents

received a letter explaining the study and were asked two questions: Would

you be willing to participate in the study and how many years have you been a

superintendent? After one mailing 263 (76%) of the superintendents

responded. Of the 263 respondents, 249 (95%) agreed to take part in the

study.

Because we were interested in differences in rural and urban

superintendent, we classified superintendents working in population centers of

50,000 or more or in an area adjacent to such a population center as urban.

All others were classified as rural superintendents. In the initial study all

thirty-one superintendents identified as urban were selected for telephone

interviews. We randomly selected thirty-one rural superintendents for

interviews so that we could have an equivalent number of rural superintendents

for comparison with the urban subjects.

In an effort to verify our definition of urban, we reviewed

characteristics described in publications issued by the U.S. Department of

Commerce (1990 Census of Populations, 1992), the World Almanac (Scripps

Howard, 1990), and Grolier's Electronic Encyclopedia (1991). These sources

suggested a number of complex descriptions of urban areas that did not

enhance our ability to define urban superintendents. Thus, as a part of the

interview, we asked the superintendents to identify their superintendency in

terms of settings. This procedure was compatible with suggestions made by Thomas (1991) for defining urban in educational studies.

Twenty-one urban and thirty rural superintendents were available for a telephone interview during January 1993. The superintendents answered ten open-ended questions in sequence during interviews of thirty to forty-five minutes in length. Each researcher independently reviewed the transcripts of the interviews and identified major themes. The researchers compared their findings to verify accurate identification and naming of the themes. Independently, the researchers developed categories of themes. The researchers then compared the categories and developed the final analysis. (For a full discussion of this study see Grady, Ourada-Sieb, and Wesson, 1994.)

With the permission of the authors, the Leadership Practices Inventory-Self (Kouzes & Posner, 1988) was mailed in July of 1993 to the 249 women superintendents who agreed to take part in the study. One hundi··l seventy-four (70%) of these women completed and returned the Leadership Practices Inventory-Self.

Findings

The initial study investigated these superintendents' perceived sources of job satisfaction, the benefits accrued on the job, their sense of self-fulfillment in the work place, and personal strengths they brought to the job.

The results of this study, which consisted of telephone interviews with twenty-

one urban and thirty rural women superintendents, can be described as

follows: Most of the urban and rural women superintendents have been hired

to be change agents, and they describe their leadership characteristics in

similar ways. Whether in a highly bureaucratic, urban organization or a small

rural setting, these women superintendents are successfully building collegial-

collaborative organizations. Both are operationalizing leadership skills that fit

a new leadership paradigm that values change and connectiveness (Shakeshaft,

1987).

   The results of the follow-up study delineate more clearly the leadership

practices of these superintendents. An analysis of the scores on the five

categories of the Leadership Practices Inventory-Self (Kouzes & Posner, 1993)

reveals mean scores for the 174 women superintendents at or above the

eightieth percentile.[1] This percentile ranking is classified by Posner and

Kouzes (1992) in the self-assessment and analysis manual as a high ranking.

In fact, they state that "studies indicate that a high score is one at or above the

seventieth percentile" (p. 12).

Insert Table 1 about here

The percentile ranks of these women superintendents indicate that they ranked highest in Inspiring a Shared Vision (90th percentile) and lowest in Enabling Others to Act (80th percentile), but what is most remarkable is that they exhibit high mean scores in all of the leadership practices. With thirty points possible in each practice, the lowest mean score for a category is 25.25 and the highest mean score for a category is 27.31. It is evident that these women do well in the five practices and ten accompanying behaviors that have been described by Kouzes and Posner as the "fundamental practices and behaviors in exemplary leadership" (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 279). Although Kouzes and Posner caution against interpreting the LPI-Self scores independently of LPI-Other feedback, the normative data of the LPI-Other have mean scores for each category that are only plus or minus 1.2 points different from the mean scores for each category of the LPI-Self.

Consideration needs to be given to the differences between our sample of women superintendents and the sample used to norm the LPI-Self. The normative sample consisted of 3,601 males and 1,011 females. (See Posner and Kouzes, Psychometric Properties of the Leadership Practices Inventory, 1992, for a full discussion of the LPI.) This sample did not include educators but according to the authors did represent a "full array of functional fields (e.g., management, marketing, finance, manufacturing, accounting, engineering, sales, human resource development, information systems, etc.)"

12

(Posner & Kouzes, 1992, p. 2). The normative sample was only 28%
female, but the scores indicate that "male and female respondents are more
alike in terms of their leadership practices than they are different. . . although
female managers reported that they engaged in Modeling the Way and
Encouraging the Heart more frequently than did their male counterparts"
(Posner & Kouzes, 1992, p. 14).

Discussion

We began our initial study by looking at the positive aspects of the
superintendency because many previous studies focused on the pathology of
the position rather than its benefits. As the superintendents in this initial study
talked about what was satisfying about the job and what were the benefits of
the job, we found that what they liked about the job was the way they were
able to lead--their leadership practices. These leadership practices seemed to
be very similar. In general, what they enjoyed was the human relations part
of their job--those leadership practices that emphasized the relational aspects of
leadership. They recognized the importance and placed value on all kinds of
relationships. Those named specifically were relations between and among
teachers, relations between and among children, and relations with the
community, the school board, and state department personnel. Because the
initial study indicated that the superintendents we interviewed were using
leadership practices different from the practices that have been traditional in

13

educational administration, the LPI-Self was used to provide quantitative data and discrete terminology to the kinds of practices these superintendents were using; the data also contribute to the triangulation of the initial findings (Mathison, 1988).

We chose the LPI-Self since this inventory came closest to empirically measuring the conceptual leadership framework that became apparent as we interviewed these women superintendents. Also other researchers had used the LPI to measure what is termed transformational or visionary leadership (Stoner-Zemel, 1988; Tarazi, 1990), a term we thought best described the superintendents we had interviewed. We now have quantitative data that corroborates our initial findings. Both urban and rural women superintendents are using leadership practices that are indeed different from the prevailing model of educational administration, and this shift in leadership practices resembles the paradigm shift in leadership depicted in business management literature. As Wheatley (1992) suggests,

> If the physics of our universe is revealing the primacy of
>
> relationships, is it any wonder that we are beginning to
>
> reconfigure our ideas about management in relational terms?
>
> (p. 12)

This research indicates that there is reason to believe that women superintendents in this country are seeing the "primacy of relationships" and

do configure their ideas about management in relational terms. It is interesting

to speculate if other superintendents are doing the same.

Table 1
Results of LPI-SELF

	Female Superintendents (N = 174)		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Comparative Percentile
Challenging the Process	25.78	4.29	83
Inspiring a Shared Vision	25.67	4.27	90
Enabling Others to Act	27.31	4.55	80
Modeling the Way	25.25	4.20	83
Encouraging the Heart	25.51	4.20	82

Endnote

1. The manual for the LPI reports percentile rankings only for the
aggregated self ratings and observer ratings and does not separately report
percentile equivalents for self and observer ratings, thereby making a direct
comparison of our sample subjects with one national sample somewhat
problematic. Since self ratings tend to be higher than observer ratings and
since our sample data included only self-ratings, it seemed more appropriate to
compare our sample data with the national data on self-ratings. To do this, we
calculated a weighted mean and standard deviation for the national data, which
takes into account the uneven representation of men and women in those data.
We then calculated z scores for all possible scores on the LPI-Self. This
enabled us to create a table of percentile rankings in self-ratings for the
national sample scores. It was then a straightforward procedure to calculate z
scores for our sample mean scores of 174 women superintendents in each of
the five leadership domains of the LPI using the standard z score formula and
then consulting a table of areas under the normal curve to derive percentile
rankings for our sample.

References

Aburdene, P. ,& Naisbitt, J. (1992). Megatrends for women. New York:

Random House.

Adkison, J. (1981). Women in administration: A review of the research.

Review of educational research, 51(3), 311-343.

Block, P. (1991). The empowered manager: Positive political skills at work.

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Covey, S. R. (1990). Principled-centered leadership. New York: Simon &

Schuster.

Giroux, H. A. (1993). Living dangerously: Multiculturalism and the politics

of difference. New York: Peter Lang.

Giroux, H. A. (Ed.). (1991). Post modernism, feminism, and cultural

politics. Albany: State University of New York.

Grady, M., Ourada-Sieb, T. & Wesson, L. (1994). Women's perceptions of

the superintendency. Journal of School Leadership, 4(2), 156-170.

Grolier Electronics (1991). Grolier electronic encyclopedia. Danbury, CT.

Grolier Electronics Publishing.

Helgesen, S. (1990). The female advantage. New York: Doubleday.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1988). Leadership Practices Inventory-Self.

San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Co.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1987). The leadership challenge: How to

get extraordinary things done in organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1993). Leadership practices inventory: A

self-assessment and analysis. San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Co.

Mathison, S. (1988, March). Why triangulate? Educational Researcher,

17(20), 13-17.

Ortiz, F. I., & Marshall, C. (1988). Women in educational administration. In

N. Boyan (Ed.). Review of research in educational administration. New

York: Longman.

Peters, T. (1988). Thriving on chaos: A handbook for a management

revolution. New York: Random House.

Posner, B. Z., & Kouzes, J. M. (1992). Psychometric properties of the

leadership practices inventory. San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Co.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1984). Leadership and excellence in schooling. Educational

Leadership, 45(5), 4-13.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1990). Value-added leadership: How to get extraordinary

performance in schools. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Scripps Howard Co. (1990). World Almanac. New York: Scripps Howard Co.

Shakeshaft, C. (1987). Women in educational administration. Newbury Park,

CA: Sage.

Stoner-Zemel, M. J. (1988). Visionary leadership, management, and high

performance work units: An analysis of workers' perceptions. Unpublished

doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Tarazi, M. (1990). Leadership factors related to conventional/nonconventional

leadership styles perceived by male/female leaders. Unpublished doctoral

dissertation, United States International University, San Diego.

Thomas, R. M. (1991, November 15). Defining urban in educational studies.

Paper presented at the Western Regional Conference of the Comparative

and International Education Society, Los Angeles.

Wesson , L. H., & Grady, M. L. (1994). An analysis of women urban

superintendents: A national study. Urban Education, 24(4), 412-424.

Wheatley, M. J. (1992). Leadership and the new science. San Francisco:

F rrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Wood, G. H. (1990, November). Teaching for democracy. Educational

Leadership, 8(3), 32-37.

Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge Dr. Dan Cline, Professor of Education,

Center for Excellence in Education, Arkansas State University, for the

technical assistance he gave in the preparation of this paper.