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Work-life Issues and Strategies for Women Leaders Across the Globe

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Work-Life Issues and Strategies for Women Leaders Across the Globe:

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Women and leadership has recently emerged as an important focus of researchers and practitioners in many countries across the globe. Public, private, and social sector organizations in various settings are now acknowledging the importance of preparing women for strong, competent leadership and also assisting current female leaders in maintaining and strengthening their positions of influence. Of course these efforts and strategies vary significantly among sectors, industries, cultures, countries, and even local communities for some. Yet, one topic that seems to continuously surface with current and emerging women leaders across the globe includes work-life issues—primarily that of balancing work and family or juggling leadership and life. As more women leaders are now juggling family, work, and life demands, it continues to be important for management and leadership scholars to study the barriers, solutions, and opportunities associated with work-life, and also their possible implications (e.g., development, performance, health/wellbeing, enrichment) for future women leaders in integrating the workplace, the home, and also the community (e.g., Edwards & Rothbard, 2005; Frone, 2003). Exploring the work-life issues and strategies for women leaders across the globe can provide valuable insights for scholars and practitioners in understanding similarities and differences among cultures.

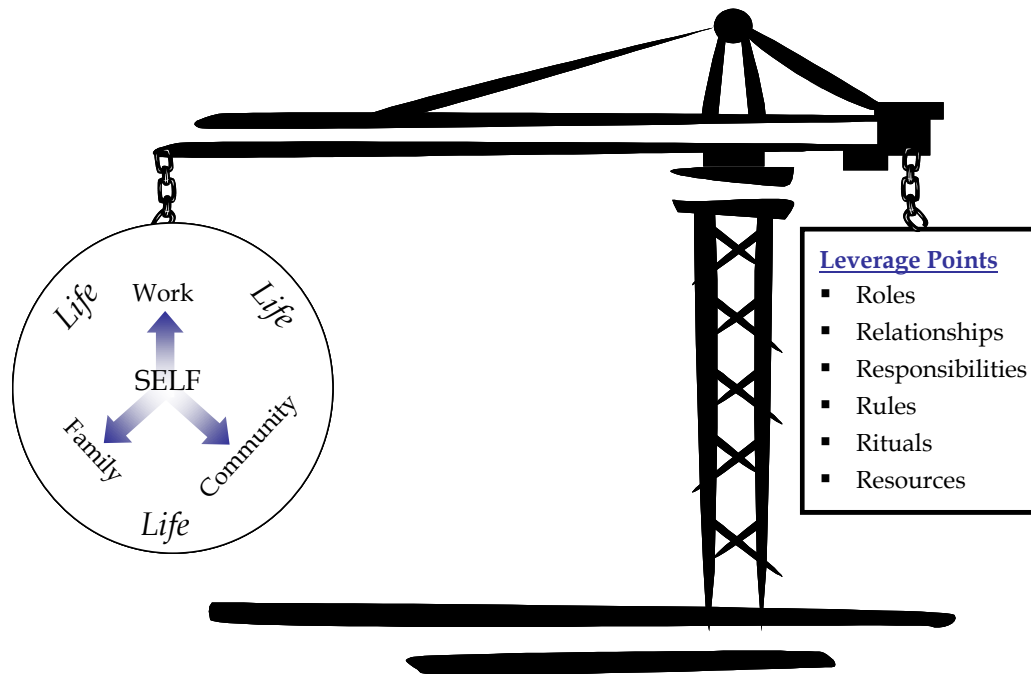
This paper reports on a portion of the data collected from four qualitative studies (e.g., Madsen, 2008) conducted between 2005 and 2009. The general purpose of each study was to explore the “lived experiences” (Van Manen, 2001) of women leaders in developing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies required for successful leadership. Hence, the

overarching research question for each study was as follows: What are the lived experiences of women leaders in developing leadership throughout their lives? The phenomenological research methodology was used to conduct in-depth interviews with a variety of women leaders in these studies: 1) U.S. governors, 2) U.S. university presidents, 3) Emirati women business and government leaders in the UAE, and 4) Chinese women leaders in higher educational settings in China. Each interview was audio taped, transcribed, and analysed based on generally accepted data collection procedures for this type of methodology (Van Manen, 2001). The instrument was developed in 2005 by the author and was used in all four studies. A subsection of this instrument focused specifically on work-life issues (e.g., challenges, opportunities, strategies, solutions), and this is the set of data analysed for this paper. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the work-life issues (including work-family balance) of women leaders across three different cultures. It seeks to bridge two topics (work-family balance and leadership) by investigating the following across cultures: 1) How do women leaders deal with work-life issues? 2) What impact or consequences has work and family or work-life issues had on the careers of women leaders? 3) What organizational initiatives, if any, have helped women leaders address work-life balance challenges? 4) How do women leaders perceive that their work-life issues have influenced the perceptions of others?

The theoretical framework for this study will be Morris and Madsen's (2007) Work-Family-Community model illustrating how the self can interact with integrated multiple life domains. This model (see Figure 1), built on the work of others (e.g., Bailyn, Drago, & Kochan, 2001; Voydanoff, 2005), outlines six "leverage points" (six "Rs") that will serve as a framework for discussing the results of this study. These leverage points (role demands, relationship demands, responsibilities, rules, rituals, and resources) can suggest areas that are worthy of

scholarship consideration in initiating a research agenda and/or developing interventions to ultimately promote healthy integration in work, family, and community for women leaders (e.g., Voydanoff, 2005).

Figure 1: Self Interacts with Integrated Multiple Life Domains



The first leverage point area involves holistic interventions that address *role demands* within the domains of work, family, and community (Morris & Madsen, 2007). Roles are culturally defined behavioral expectations that an individual is expected to fulfill. A second involves creating holistic solutions that address *relationship demands* within these domains. Relationships are connections, affiliations, and associations existing between two or more people. The third leverage point involves holistic interventions that bolster capacity for managing *responsibilities* associated with role and relationship demands. The fourth leverage

point area involves generating holistic solutions that are sensitive and responsive to the *rules* that govern action within the operating environments of work, family, and community. According to Morris and Madsen (2007), rules are codified characteristic responses of thought that shape and govern the direction of action and behavior. A fifth gives special holistic consideration to the *rituals* (highly structured and fixed patterns of meaningful prescribed action and behavior) germane to work, family, and community. *Resources* represent a final leverage point area salient to enriching and integrating work, family, and community. Resources are described as the existing or expanded cognitive, economic, psychological, and/or physiological abilities or capacities to prevent a life event or transition from becoming a crisis (e.g., Boss, 2002).

In sum, this paper will discuss a portion of the results of four studies from three cultures that focus on how leaders deal with work-life issues, what consequences work-life issues have had on their careers, what related organizational initiatives have been helpful, and how their work-life issues and strategies have affects others perceptions of their leadership capabilities. Results will be shared in the theoretical framework described (role demands, relationship demands, responsibilities, rules, rituals, and resources). Findings will provide insights that will offer numerous implications for designing leadership development programs for women leaders in various cultures. Understanding work-life challenges and solutions in and among various countries is important for the development of quality and effective leadership development programs and opportunities. Awareness of this information can also provide more comprehensive insights to identify and understand possible strengths and weaknesses in skills, abilities, assumptions, and perspectives. This depth is critical for practitioners interested in individual leadership development efforts that are centered on women interested in obtaining, maintaining, and progressing toward a variety of influential positions. Implications will also

include a look at the similarities and differences of work-life balance among women across countries. General strategies will be offered as well as a discussion around the future of global guidelines for women leaders to deal effectively with work-life balance. Although there are a number of limitations for this study, it provides a starting point to the exploration of how educators, trainers, scholars, practitioners, and others might assist in helping women become and/or continue to be strong leaders in their workplaces, governments, and communities.

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