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ABSTRACT

This study points out the similarities between the backgrounds of corporate chief executive officers (CEOs) and academic deans. It notes that most CEOs are fairly well educated white males who rose through the ranks of middle management to reach their current positions; the typical dean has a doctoral degree, has often been a department chair or associate dean, and is white, male, and middle-aged. This study explores the influences--parental expectations and participation in school and college leadership activities--that relate to adults as leaders, examining these findings in relation to a study of academic deanship conducted by the Center for Academic Leadership at Washington State University. Almost 70 percent of respondents in the latter study characterized their parents as stressing high standards of excellence during their formative years. Most deans also participated in one or more youth leadership activities, with the majority choosing community-oriented activities. This paper finds that the formative experiences of academic deans and corporate CEOs are similar; parental expectations for both groups are high; both groups have comparable academic backgrounds, and both groups hone their leadership skills in high school and college. Therefore, the paper suggests, reciprocal networking and mentoring between corporations and universities could benefit all those involved. (Contains 27 references.) (CH)

The Nexus Between Academic Deans and Corporate CEOs: An Opportunity in the Making

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The Nexus between Academic Deans and Corporate CEOs:
An Opportunity in the Making

There is a belief in the academy that colleges are not businesses and academic deans are not corporate CEOs (chief executive officers). This may be true. But, when we examine the current profiles of deans and CEOs, we see some similarities. In corporate America, CEOs are somewhere between 40 and 55 years old, male, and white (Robbins, Ehinger & Welliver, 1994). The following statistic illustrates the point. In 1998, only 3% of the top six positions in Fortune 500 companies were held by women (Catalyst, 1998). Most CEOs are fairly well educated, with some sort of postsecondary education—usually an undergraduate degree and perhaps an MBA (Forbes & Piercy, 1991). And, they rose through the ranks of mid-level management within corporate America to reach their current positions.

Almost without exception, academic deans hold doctoral degrees, have records of scholarly endeavors, are tenured faculty, and quite often have been department chairs or associate deans. Twenty years ago, most deans were middle-aged, married, male, white, and protestant. They came from non-professional, small town, native-born families (Cyphert & Zimpher, 1976). Nothing has changed significantly. Indeed, more recent studies (Anderson & King, 1987; Robbins, Ehinger, & Welliver, 1994) suggest that while the number of minorities and women in the position increases steadily with time, the typical dean is still white, male, protestant, and middle-aged (Robbins & Schmitt, 1994).

Within the last ten years, researchers have begun to look into the backgrounds of the (CEOs) of corporate America (Boone, Kurtz & Fleenor, 1988; Forbes and Piercy,

1991). As far as deans are concerned, much research conducted over the past two decades focuses on leadership styles, career paths, and issues related to the deanship (Martin, 1993; Moore, 1982; Townsend & Bassoppo-Moyo, 1996;Tucker & Bryan, 1988). These studies examine deans as mature adults. Few, if any, delve into aspects of childhood, adolescence, or early adulthood of deans.

This article examines two potential influences—parental expectations and participation in school and college leadership activities—that typically manifest themselves early in one's life. We first provide a synopsis of research literature that explores parental expectations, academic achievement, and youth leadership activities as they relate to adults as leaders. We then offer a brief description of a recent, national study of academic deans (the results of which serve as the basis for this piece) followed by a general profile of study participants. Next, we discuss findings from the study that are pertinent to the topics of parental expectations and youth leadership activities. And, finally, we consider the relevance of such findings for colleges and universities and corporate America. In essence, we begin to address the question: just what is this opportunity in the making?

Parental Expectations and Academic Achievement

Parental participation in children's education is not a new idea. Parents have been involved on many different levels since the 1800s (Henry, 1996). Only more recently, however, has the notion of student achievement been tied directly to parent involvement (Epstein, 1990). Several studies suggest that student outcomes are

positively correlated with increased parent involvement (Epstein, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Henderson, 1987; Moore, 1997; Winters, 1993). Indeed, parental involvement affects children's "achievements, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account" (Epstein, 1987, p.120).

Parental expectations are also associated with students' achievement in schools (Smith, 1991). Parents who believe that success in school depends on effort, and not solely ability, are much more likely to encourage their children to work hard and to participate in activities related to academic achievement (Mau, 1997). Some research suggests that high-achieving students come from families who hold high educational and occupational expectations for their children (Okagake & Sternberg, 1993). Powell and Peet (1996) found a positive association between a mother's beliefs about her child's future and the child's academic achievement.

However, there seems to be a point at which parental participation can do more harm than good. Mau (1997) found that children did less well academically when parents were more helping and controlling with their schoolwork. Further, studies indicate that parental support and participation was negatively related to the age of the student (Chen & Buxton, 1989). Younger children seem to benefit more from parental support than do high school age students.

Youth Leadership Activities

In a recent study, Kouzes and Posner (1995) found that many students actually had more leadership experience than researchers originally suspected. But, where is this

leadership experience gained and how does it impact academic success? This section examines research literature that explores two arenas of youth leadership—high school and college. We also touch briefly on the connection between this type of involvement and academic success.

High School

Kleon and Rinehart (1998) found that participation in social organizations and government helps students develop their own leadership abilities—for example, initiative, assertiveness, and objectivity. Similarly, other studies suggest that participation in sports in high school is related to higher levels of self-esteem and higher academic achievement (Willet, 1997; Weiler, 1998). Although, leadership development is a process of self-development, family support in high school (regardless of the socioeconomic status of the individual and his/her family) again appears to be important, even for students who participate in sports, social organizations and government activities (Kouzes & Posner, 1991; 1995).

In fact, in a survey conducted by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation (1998), student leaders reported that parental support was the biggest factor in their success at high school. Fifty-three percent cited backing from their parents when asked to explain their success. The students surveyed were part of the United States Senate Youth Program who were selected as delegates by their state departments of education. The students were asked to describe their parents' role in their education and 79% responded "always positive." Parental support was the most common answer to "Why do some students excel while others fail?"

College

The college years for top ranking executives in this country are strikingly similar. As parental support declined throughout high school, CEOs and others made their own paths and displayed high levels of independence and achievement. The majority of CEOs either received a scholarship or paid most of their college expenses themselves. (Nearly 80% of CEOs also worked while attending high school.) In fact, nearly two-thirds of the CEOs did not rely on parental funding for their college education even though most came from affluent backgrounds (Boone et al, 1988).

Successful CEOs set high standards of achievement in early adulthood, perhaps as an extension of parental support and expectations felt in early childhood (Forbes & Piercy, 1991). More than 90% of them achieved grade point averages of A or B in college. They also participated in activities other than scholarship. A much higher percentage of CEOs (37%) than all college students (2%) participated in at least one intercollegiate sport. Moreover, most CEOs (nearly 75%) held at least one office in a fraternity, club, or other collegiate campus organization during their college years (Boone et al, 1988).

In sum, high parental and self-expectations play a significant role in the development of many top executives. In addition, most seemed to practice at leadership in high school and college. The combination appears to provide them with the bedrock upon which future leadership endeavors are based.

The Study

The study, from which this paper derives, examines the academic deanship as a multifaceted phenomenon. Its overall goal is to establish a baseline of information about deans in the United States. It was conducted by the Center for Academic Leadership at Washington State University.[1] The resulting database includes deans' personal and institutional demographic specifics, their perceptions of role conflict and ambiguity, views of the responsibilities associated with the position, perceptions of job-related stress and the factors associated with it, and understanding of leadership.

The following criteria were used to construct the sample of academic deans. Potential sample institutions came from one of the following three groupings of Carnegie classifications—Research I & II and Doctoral I & II; Masters I & II; or Baccalaureate I & II. In order to make comparisons of institutions across Carnegie classifications, researchers attempted to control for some of the differentiation that exists across categories. To do this, researchers limited the potential institutional population to those universities that had four colleges in common. From this initial group of colleges and universities, 60 public and 60 private institutions were randomly selected from each Carnegie category resulting in a sample of 360 institutions. At each of the sample institutions, the deans of the colleges of education, business, liberal arts, and allied health professions were then asked to complete the *National Survey of Academic Deans in Higher Education* (Gmelch, Wolverton, Wolverton & Hermanson,

[1] The Center is sponsored and partially funded by the University Council on Educational Administration (UCEA).

1996).[2] The overall sample size consisted of 1,370 deans, with a response rate of 60%.

A Profile of Deans in the Study

The responses received generated a relatively balanced sample both in terms of gender and institution type. Forty-one percent of the responding deans were women. Roughly 12% of the entire sample hold minority status. Of the respondents, 58% work in public institutions, 42% in private universities. One-third are deans in research universities; 46% are at comprehensive universities; the remaining 21% are located at baccalaureate institutions. More than 40% work at universities located in urban area; about 30% are in rural institutions; the remainder classified their universities as suburban. Of the total responses, 29% of the deans work in colleges or schools of education, 29% in liberal arts, 23% in nursing or public health, and 18% in business.

Deans, on average, are 54 years old and have served in their current positions for 5.6 years. Eighty-two percent of them are married; the majority (52%) still have children living at home. Overwhelmingly, most (more than 90%) believed that universities are good places to work. Fifty-five percent had mentors. The majority of responding deans (59%) viewed themselves as both being administrators and faculty. A smaller percentage (34%) categorized themselves as administrators; relatively few (7%) classified themselves solely as faculty. (See Table 1.)

[2] Based on experiences gained in survey research done on department chairs where 10% of the sample were women, researchers made the assumption that a similar pattern would reveal itself in deans if a completely random sample were collected. As a consequence, in a purposeful attempt to increase the number of female respondents, researchers included colleges of nursing.

Study Findings as They Relate to Parental Expectations and Youth Leadership Activities

Almost 70% of survey respondents characterized parents (guardians) as stressing high standards of excellence during their formative years. Women and minorities were significantly more likely to classify their parents in this manner. Men were more apt to classify their parents as interested in their achievement but satisfied with average performance. However, as a whole minority status deans were less likely to suggest that their parents were satisfied with mediocre performance. Only 3% of the sample suggested that parents showed no interest in or obstructed their achievement. Indeed, it appears that early parental commitment and expressed high standards of excellence that parents hold for their children greatly impacted the ultimate success of the deans in the study. (See Tables 2 and 3.)

We have no study data that directly assess academic success in high school or college. But the assumption can be made that deans performed as well academically as corporate CEOs or they would not be where they are today. In addition, because post-baccalaureate education can be relatively expensive, chances are that their education, at least in part, was self-funded through loans, work, and scholarships.

As to youth leadership activities, most deans took advantage of one or more opportunities. However, of the six possibilities that the study explored— athletics, literary organizations, student government, clubs, service organizations, and fraternities/sororities—in which deans might have participated, no one area proved common to the majority of respondents. More deans do appear to have engaged in

leadership roles in community-oriented activities, such as student government (45%), service organizations (50%), and club activities (50%). Such pursuits do not require individual prowess or wherewithal to the degree that other options might. For instance, literary/newspaper efforts may require writing and editing skills (29%), athletics demand coordination and ability (30%), and fraternities/sororities membership may depend on popularity or access to money (<20%). Overall, 73% of those deans responding to this question took a leadership role in at least one service, social, or literary organization or club.

Male deans were more active in athletics than were women. This may have been the case with many of our female survey respondents (who tended to be 50 years or older) because, at the time they were in high school and college, opportunities for women to participate in athletics were not as readily available as they are today. Women may have been more active in newspapers, service organizations, and clubs because these were the leadership avenues open to them. Minority deans seemed to have taken on significantly more leadership roles than their white counterparts, especially in fraternities/sororities, newspapers, service organizations, and clubs. (See Tables 4 and 5.)

Discussion

This study makes it readily apparent that academic deans and CEOs of American businesses come from very similar stock. Parental expectations for members of both groups were, for the most part, high. Deans and CEOs appear to hold similar academic

records suggesting that they have comparable scholastic ability. Both deans and CEOs practiced and honed their leadership skills in the relatively risk-free environments of high school and college.

Such findings suggest that a common ground exists upon which partnerships, collaborations, and leadership exchanges can be built. Colleges and businesses increasingly engage in partnerships and collaborative efforts. Few, if any, however, champion leadership exchanges that place deans in the shoes of CEOs and CEOs in those of academic deans. Such exchanges might be six month or year- long endeavors that expose deans and CEOs to the rigors and complexities of leadership in their respective organizations. The success of each, in its own way, depends on dealing with comparable issues—diversification within employees and those served, funding, the need to build external and internal support networks for the organization, and the need to offer services and products that someone wants to buy.

CEOs can learn about working in and guiding collaborative organizations whose memberships encompass vastly diverse populations (not only in terms of race/ethnicity and gender, but also in terms of discipline, which governs their approaches to problem solving, learning, innovation, and creativity). College deans can learn from corporate CEOs about planning in the midst of uncertainty, raising and managing funding, and making the most of political contacts.

In this era of continual change, businesses try to become "universities." And, universities struggle to preserve the very essence of what makes them true universities—an appreciation and desire for learning for learning's sake. Leader

exchange programs have the potential to heighten in CEOs and deans a healthy respect for the value each of their organizations affords society and the ways in which two seemingly unique institutions complement each other. At the same time, such exchanges offer these leaders the chance to hone their leadership and managerial skills in different arenas.

Universities have the opportunity to remind corporate executives about what it is that makes our universities great. At the same time, universities can expose deans to and educate them about aspects of leading an organization to which they may have not been privy. Corporations have the same opportunities. The networking and mentoring that could result from such exchanges carries immense benefits for all those involved.

Conclusion

The nexus between deans and CEOs lies in their common experiences in high school and college. In both cases, parental expectations and youth leadership activities seem to play a role in preparing them for future leadership positions. Kouzes and Posner (1995) suggest that the road to leadership is paved with many occasions to discover. Can universities and corporations afford to squander the opportunity to build on such deeply embedded common experiences—to provide their leaders with new pathways to discovery? We believe the answer is no.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	*N*	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Personal					
Gender = Male	780	0.59	0.49		
Married	778	0.82	0.39		
Age	770	53.9	6.2	31	76
No. Children at Home	776	0.5	0.9	0	6
Ethnicity					
White	786	0.88	0.32		
African American	786	0.06	0.24		
Hispanic	786	0.03	0.17		
Asian American	786	0.02	0.14		
Native American	786	0.003	0.05		
Years as Dean	786	5.6	4.5	0.16	27
Had a Mentor	767	0.55	0.50		
Viewed Self as . . .					
a Faculty	771	0.07	0.26		
an Administrator	771	0.34	0.47		
Both	771	0.59	0.49		
Institutional					
Public Institution	770	0.58	0.49		
Research/Doctoral	764	0.33	0.47		
Comprehensive	764	0.46	0.50		
Baccalaureate	764	0.21	0.40		
College . . .					
Education	769	0.29	0.45		
Liberal Arts	769	0.29	0.45		
Nursing	769	0.23	0.42		
Business	769	0.18	0.38		
Good Place to Work	771	4.23	0.81	1	5
Location					
Urban	762	0.44	0.50		
Suburban	762	0.27	0.44		
Rural	762	0.29	0.45		

* All means not listed ranged from 0 (minimum) to 1(maximum).

Table 2: Parental Expectations for Deans

High Expectations/High Performance	69%
Interested/Adequate Performance	28%
Disinterested in Academic Performance	2%
Negative Impact on Performance	1%

Table 3: Significant Differences in Parental Expectations

Variable	Mean	*t*-Statistic	*p*-value
High Expectations			
Male	0.65	2.96	0.003
Female	0.75		
Interested			
Male	0.31	2.82	0.005
Female	0.22		
High Expectations			
Minority	0.77	1.66	0.097
Other	0.68		
Interested			
Minority	0.20	1.81	0.071
Other	0.29		

t-Statistics are reported as absolute values

Table 4: Deans' Participation in High School & College Leadership Activities

Athletics	30%
Literary Organizations	29%
Student Government	45%
Clubs	50%
Service Organizations	50%
Fraternity/Sorority	20%
Participation in at least one of last 5	73%

Table 5: Significant Differences in Participation in Selected Leadership Activities

Variable	Mean	*t*-Statistic	*p*-value
Athletics			
Male	2.74	6.67	0.000
Female	1.97		
Literary/Newspaper			
Male	2.27	4.79	0.000
Female	2.80		
Service Organizations			
Male	3.15	5.17	0.000
Female	3.65		
Clubs			
Male	3.17	3.98	0.000
Female	3.56		
Fraternities/Sororities			
Minority	2.54	3.75	0.000
Other	1.91		
Literary/Newspaper			
Minority	2.83	2.17	0.033
Service Organizations			
Minority	3.94	4.33	0.000
Other	3.29		
Clubs			
Minority	3.59	1.79	0.076
Other	3.31		

t-Statistics are reported as absolute values

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