Women as University Presidents: Navigating the Administrative Labyrinth

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Abstract

Eleven of the 81 public research universities within the Carnegie Classification of Doctoral Universities: Highest Research are led by woman presidents. Using Eagly & Carli's (2007) labyrinth framework, five of the women presidents were interviewed to identify their experiences navigating leadership barriers. Findings indicated that women university presidents demonstrate expertise in three areas: Know the Rules, Hear the Message, and Opt-in. The findings of the narrative study indicate how women university presidents moved through and around organizational barriers to successfully reach the top.

Keywords: Women's Leadership, Educational Leadership, Women, Universities, University Presidents

The question of how women reach and sustain leadership positions is complex. Leadership success is often measured by follower perceptions and expectations. A woman's path to leadership is informed by this metric. According to Eagly & Carli (2007a), women display equal leadership competencies to men but are more often viewed through a bifurcated lens defined by gender. Women are expected to engage communally and lead with traditional female traits. Thus, an agentic leadership style may be acceptable from a male leader but brings confusion when enacted as a female (Eagly & Carli, 2007b; Eagly & Mladinic, 2011). In the end, Social Role Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the implication of gender as a defining boundary of behavior bring challenges for women aspiring to leadership positions.

In addition to follower perceptions of a leader, women face organizational challenges related to career advancement. Eagly and Carli (2007a, b) describe the evolving structure women moving into leadership positions in the workplace with a new metaphor. Previously women who entered the workforce experienced career advancement until suddenly meeting the impenetrable glass ceiling (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Made popular in a 1986 *Wall Street Journal* article by Hymowitz and Shellhardt (1986), the glass ceiling offered a descriptive phrase to explain the implied and explicit bias experienced by women and why they remained underrepresented in top leadership positions. A visual representation of women rising in leadership, yet stopped by an invisible barrier that allowed women to see top leadership positions but never gain access made the glass ceiling a popular metaphor.

Eagly & Carli (2007a, b) broaden the explanation of why women remain underrepresented in leadership through their metaphor of a labyrinth. A labyrinth, with multiple twists and turns, more closely mirrors women's modern career experience. Women face a myriad of challenges in moving toward leadership positions (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, b). Bias in pay, lack of promotion, and a dearth of leadership opportunities create multiple barriers for women. Women do not move past these barriers only to reach a solid glass ceiling. Instead, women move around barriers through a series of twists and turns. The complex navigation of the leadership pathway means some women eventually can, and do, make it to the top. In short, for women, the pathway to leadership is tricky and complicated but not unreachable.

Women no longer encounter a glass ceiling in pursuing leadership positions but a labyrinth. The traditional glass ceiling has been replaced by a complex maze filled with barriers and roadblocks. Women must navigate around these barriers with a precision that permits forward movement. This is not new information to administrative leaders. Talking to female leaders who have made the climb shows evidence that the labyrinth exists (Carli

& Eagly, 2016; Reis, 2015). The ways women navigate the labyrinth defines the next chapter in this narrative.

BACKGROUND

Navigating the labyrinth can be both a rewarding and exhausting experience. Part of the reason stems from the fact that barriers to leadership are often hidden (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Williams & Dempsey, 2014). Unequal pay scales, decisions regarding promotion, bias in social exchange, meetings where a woman's ideas are attributed to a man, all stack up to create a parallel promotion system that requires a woman's constant attention. Male leaders operate on a more linear path, and promotion to leadership positions follows a predictable pattern (Eagly & Carli, 2007b). Women must operate sharp sense-making in order to know when to push through or move around an obstacle. The decisions women make at each turn are what makes the labyrinth model challenging and unique.

Higher education presents specific challenges to women navigating the leadership labyrinth. The passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and the Women's Educational Equity Act in 1974 brought change to the treatment of women in higher education (Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Stromquest, 1993). Commonly referred to as Title IX, this law prohibits gender discrimination in educational systems. Non-compliant institutions risked losing federal funds. Post Title IX, colleges and universities are required to enact equity not only in student admissions but in all areas of the institution (Glazer-Raymo, 2008). These areas include athletic programs, extracurricular clubs, residence halls, and the hiring and promotion of faculty.

However, the gender equity required by Title IX in faculty hiring and promotion has had mixed results in higher education leadership. Specifically, according to the most recent data collected by the American Council on Education (2012), 57% of faculty and administrative staff are women but only 26% are represented in the presidency. Examining that number more closely reveals that the majority of women, 33%, lead community colleges compared to 22.3% who lead doctoral-granting institutions. The narrowing of the path to presidential leadership for women offers a revealing lens into the ways women move through and around barriers, and continue forward to lead research institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the navigational experiences of female university presidents who lead public research institutions. The guiding research questions were:

1. How do female [women] university presidents describe the path to the presidency?
2. How do female [women] university presidents experience the leadership labyrinth?

According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2015), there are 81 public universities with the basic descriptor Doctoral Universities: Highest Research. Of those 81 institutions, 11 were led by a woman president in 2016.

To achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers chose a narrative approach. Narrative research allowed for the collection of stories through the use of dialogue and examination of the participant's lived experiences as university presidents (Clandinin & Connelly, 2009; Riessman, 2008). Each of the 11 presidents was contacted to participate in the study. Five women agreed to participate. In-depth semi-structured interviews were completed with five women presidents who led a public university listed as Carnegie Classification Category Doctoral University: Highest Research. The interviews were completed in-person on the campus of each president.

Interview questions were derived from a review of the literature on women's leadership and the labyrinth model (Bornstein, 2008; Carli & Eagly, 2016; Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, b; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Galzer-Raymo, 2008). A gap was identified in understanding ways women experience the labyrinth at the personal level. An interview protocol (Seidman, 2006) was developed to support qualitative inquiry into the ways female presidents navigate their leadership journeys. Twenty questions were created in the category of career and administrative development. Questions were open ended to give time to the participant to fully tell her story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Riessman, 2008; Seidman, 2006).

The small number of female presidents leading public research universities required specific attention to research protocol. This study was completed with approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the researcher's university. At each interview, the participant was reminded that per the Informed Consent Document, publications from the data collected would not include names or information that identified either them or their institutions. Each participant received a copy of her interview transcript for member-checking and signed an interview verification form which was returned to the researchers.

It is important to note characteristics of the sample. The number of female presidents in the Carnegie Classification category Doctoral Universities: Highest Research is very low. Only 13% of universities in this category had a woman as president in 2016. To better understand the size of the sample, a historical analysis was completed to chart female

university presidents of the 81 institutions. In 2011, 15 of the 81 universities were led by a woman. In 2013, two years later, the number of women presidents dropped to 13. In 2015, there were 14 women presidents of public research universities highest research. In 2016, only 11 of these institutions had a female president, and two women had announced they would be leaving their positions at the end of their term. The summary of the data shows the challenges of identifying this population of leaders. It also represents the pressures of leading a high profile university with the competing interests of multi-level stakeholders, tightening financial budgets at the state and national levels, and the need to keep a university stable in an ever-changing environment. In short, women are a rarity in the male-dominated role as presidents of high research institutions.

The interviews were transcribed and hand coded. The researchers used narrative coding (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) to look for actions, events, and story lines that matched the purpose of the study. Data were hand coded using a first and second cycle coding method (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña 2016). First-cycle coding used descriptive codes to identify experiences of leadership within each participant's story. Second-cycle coding linked data derived from descriptive coding to pattern codes and connected events with action (Saldaña, 2016), which allowed us to identify emerging themes.

The researchers for this study are both female faculty in higher education. Neither serves as an administrative member at her prospective institution. There is the potential that their experience as women in higher education may influence the ability to code the data without bias. To mitigate this possibility, a historical and cohesive analysis was completed to support the reliability of the codes (Riessman, 2008). The primary data were the interviews. To support the themes found in the study, data from the interviews were analyzed in relation to extensive field notes, biographical information collected on each participant, and 290 secondary source articles collected from the news media. Chronology of the participant's story was verified with points of convergence with the themes. This allowed the researchers to create a cohesive history of each participant's leadership journey, and increase reliability of the findings.

FINDINGS

None of the women interviewed had planned to be a university president. Still, each of the five presidents made decisions at multiple points in her career regarding the next step in her career. Each woman conveyed a depth of expertise in reading signals that supported a high-yield choice that in turn, widened her journey in the labyrinth. Findings from this

study show that a woman's time in the labyrinth is directly related to choice, how choice merges with organizational boundaries and norms, that in turn lead back to another choice. This cyclical model of choice was repeated in the three themes that emerged from the study: Know the Rules, Hear the Message, Opt in.

Know the Rules

Each president was cognizant of the rules that defined the boundaries of her chosen profession, and each recognized the importance of rules within the culture of higher education. This was especially true as each president related how she navigated positions prior to entering the leadership domain. One president tells the story of how she joined a hiring committee for a Dean's position and learned that the resumes from women were less robust than those from men.

> *I got involved in the search for a new Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and I was willing to be on the search committee because I wanted to be certain women were included in the pool. I was hot to make certain that I screened all the applicants. Since I was absolutely convinced that the applications for women were simply being overlooked. And what I learned was that while there were applications from women, at that time at least, and this would be close to 1990, there was a pool of over 100 candidates [and] fewer than a dozen applications from women. The pool was not what you, what I, expected to see. And most of the women that were in the pool had somehow, along the way, gotten into administration before they had been promoted to full professor. So they didn't have the scholarly credentials that the men had.*

Learning this information allowed this president to make decisions early in her career that built her academic capital and increased her credibility within the norms of higher education.

> *So I learned a lot from just reading those applications and discovering that, well, you know, if this was something that I might want to do someday, the first thing I had to do was to focus on my scholarship and my teaching, get promoted to full professor. We hired a new dean; and, he promptly invited me to join his staff as an associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. I said no because I had at least another year to go before I could be promoted to full professor. I had to get my grants written, my papers written.*

For this president, being recognized for administrative skills was both a favorable opportunity and a potential obstacle to future success. Good administrative skills did not create a boundary of protection from the need for expertise and experience. In order to

create a more robust administrative resume, this president needed to match her credentials to the highest level of the position. She did not discount the opportunity, but rather, moved around it, returned to the roots of her professorial practice, and then moved forward into administrative leadership when she was satisfied her credentials would sustain her. Knowing the rules of hiring in administration, and the need to build a resume that matched that of her male peers, forced her to make decisions within the labyrinth that slowed her move into leadership; but in the end, helped push her forward.

Other participants in the study echoed the theme of knowing the rules of higher education and the path to promotion at an early stage in their careers. They recognized the importance of making conscious decisions to move within the professoriate in a mindful manner that supported entry into the leadership labyrinth. All five of the women were tapped for leadership positions along the way; but as one participant said, "I had to get my union card." She continued,

> *I loved graduate school. I loved the work of being a professor. I was fully immersed in being in the professorial lifestyle. So, I went up through the ranks, sort of, you know, the ordinary way.*

Another participant described completing a post doc before taking her first professor job. "I was there for 12 to 13 years, (promoted) from research, to assistant professor, to associate professor to full professor" before she began to consider the move to administration.

Knowing the rules of how higher education works proved to be a grounding framework for how these women presidents entered the leadership labyrinth. Certainly higher education operates within traditional boundaries; and, it seems logical that any person, regardless of gender, who seeks to be a president at a research university would need to spend time in the professoriate. But for these women, the time in the professoriate was a purposeful move within the labyrinth to support a vision of leadership that most never thought would be available. As one president said, "I don't know very many women that plan this kind of thing; and, if they do, they're crazy."

The connection between choice and preparation for leadership were woven throughout the conversation with each participant. One president summarized how her history informs the ways she navigates her current leadership position,

> *You really have to understand, you know, your profession. You have to understand higher ed. You have to really be passionately connected to the role of public higher ed. In my case, when I decided to go into the profession as a faculty member, it was*

about what I could do to help people move along in their lives and transform themselves. As a president, chancellor, I do the same thing only on a broader scale.

Hear the Message

Connected to Know the Rules was a second theme, Hear the Message. There is no shortage of advice to women pursuing leadership positions. Career advice, be it collegial or supervisory, was something each woman received throughout her career. Information is both implied and explicit. These messages need to be negotiated carefully and understood in a way that each woman could evaluate the next turn in the labyrinth. The labyrinth, as a connecting metaphor, is "complex and nuanced, but not insurmountable" (Carli & Eagly, 2016, p. 514). Understanding the message, and being clear on associated action, was an integral part of each president's climb to leadership. In the end, understanding the message led to greater learning, and in turn, increased movement in the labyrinth.

One president recounted her move from professor to administration.

I got put on a lot of committees. Many of them were really good ones to have some exposure on, and other ones were a lot of busy work. But, one of the committees that I served on was a [high profile] committee. And the chair of the committee came up to me, after he'd gotten to know me for a few years and said, 'I've been watching you serve on this committee, and I think that you will be bored here, because you've been on all the important committees, including the dean's committee, etcetera. And I think that, I can tell, that you really like new challenges.'

This committee chair told her to look for positions in her discipline of study, and he said that he would nominate her, "because at this level, you don't go and nominate yourself. It's better to be nominated because you want to appear to be known by other people." This process led to several interviews.

I went on several interviews to different places. I don't know how many of them I was really qualified for; and how many of them, you know, they wanted to check the box of having interviewed a woman. But the interesting thing for me was that it was my first inkling that I really enjoyed learning more about being asked questions about the future of [broad discipline] versus my own narrow discipline.

Listening to this president, it is important to understand the context of her story. At first, her comment appears to be a data point associated with women and mentors, and the support women get from mentor relationships. However, coding the data this way undermines the social capital earned by women and the agency of decision. Both of these are integral parts of the labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007b). All leaders, male and female, report gaining some support or advice from a mentor (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz & Lima,

2003; Clayt, Sanzo & Myran, 2013). In short, "no one does it alone" is true for both genders. Although the position of women in organizations makes their experience seem more unique, data from this study shows that women did not cling to the mentor relationship as the key to opportunity. Instead, each president took the message from the experience and translated it into new learning that she used to further her leadership movement.

Interpreting messages was important for another president as she described her decision to enter graduate school. She was unsure how to move forward with her career and decided to meet with an administrator at a public research university to get advice.

> *So I drove up, met with [Name]. He smoked his pipe and stared out the window. He sent me off to have lunch with these women, who I later found out were really important women; but, I didn't know that at the time, because there's no Google. I mean, it didn't exist. So there's no way of knowing because there's no Google to ask, or you know, Siri, to tell you who these people are. So I figured it was a wasted trip.*

Later that month, she received a letter in the mail with a job offer as a graduate assistant and an application.

> *And again, I'm a first generation college kid, you know. Not very experienced. I thought this is how it always works. So I had misjudged this experience with these women and [Name] so badly that I figured I better come.*

She summarized her learning from that experience.

> *I was very much a product of, you know, at that point in time what you would call the old boy system. But, [Name]'s all boy system was almost all women. Yeah. Which is you know, very fascinating to me. I learned a lot from that.*

In addition to subtle messaging, each woman president received explicit messages that caused a turn in the labyrinth. As one president described,

> *I got into a discussion with the provost, and I basically said to him, I'm not thrilled at being the lowest paid arts and sciences dean among the AAU schools. I think I'm better than that, and, I think I deserve better treatment than that. At which point he said, 'Okay, but there's nothing I'm going to do about it.' And I said well, I think I'm just going to have to look for another job.*

She explained that she had been getting phone calls for different positions. The message she received regarding her salary gave her reason to take action. For these

participants, explicit messages about bias in promotion and opportunity were easy to hear, but challenging to act on.

Specific to the labyrinth, one woman described how she transcended the bias she experienced as a provost at a public institution and how she interpreted that experience within in the context of broader self-assessment.

> *I had very little respect for [university leader], and I realized I really didn't want to be his provost. That's number one. And number two is I realized probably, for the first time in my life, very late in life, in my professional career, that I'm not able to go back and do the same thing that I did before. I realized how much I enjoyed new challenges and different things; and so, then this [presidential] leadership position came open. I decided to go ahead and allow my name to be put forward. And of course the rest is history.*

Hearing the message was a silent skill that served each woman well during her leadership career. The data from this study shows that the experience of understanding implicit messages was as important in creating action as was understanding explicit words. Operating within the labyrinth requires skills in both. The overlay of the reflected narratives of the women on their past experiences gave rich context to the power of the small and large messages heard within the labyrinth.

Opt-In

The third theme that emerged from the data is Opt-in. Each president noted specific opportunities in her life that compelled her take an administrative role and lead in a challenging position. Each woman's leadership journey was different, and thus, the response to opportunity reflected this diversity. According to Carli & Eagly (2016), for women the path in the labyrinth is highly personal and individualized. Thus, being a female president of a public research university did not mean each woman mirrored the other's movements. It means each woman experienced opting-in and choice and knowing when opting-in was worth the risk. Sometimes opting-in meant taking an unpaid position, and sometimes it meant choosing to leave an institution. However, in the end, for these participants, opting-in was always a choice.

One president described her labyrinth experience as a series of unpaid positions in addition to her faculty duties.

> *I didn't really look for administrative positions; but, I kind of accreted them. They were never paid. They were always kind-of "in addition to" everything else I was doing. I became director of [a program on campus], which was an unpaid position. I was the training director for a [research center on campus] which was also, you*

know, an unpaid position. No course relief or anything. I just sort of went ahead and did it on top of everything else. And I found out, I was really good at doing this.

In addition to her emboldened expression of accomplishments, her work in unpaid positions brought her social capital. She said, "One of the associate deans said to me at one point, 'you know, in the dean's office here, we know if we want something done right, we go to [her].' That's the reputation I got and it was a good reputation to have."

A second participant discussed her decision to leave an administrative position earlier than she planned. She was working as a high-level administrator at a research university when she was called for another position.

I had not intended to move from there; but, another headhunter came and asked me whether or not I'd be interested in the position of provost at another university. I have to say, I told the headhunter that I actually don't believe that it is appropriate or borderline unethical to move in less than 5 years, because people have spent a significant amount of money getting you out there, getting you adjusted, learning the community. But the headhunter said 'you know, this [University] is a pretty unique place, and you know, things don't always happen in your life exactly when you want them to.'

She said she decided to apply and opt-in to the opportunity. She explained the learning that came from the risk.

I was very attracted to that position because it was really the first time I had a chance. It was the opportunity and the challenges of looking across the whole university and seeing how all the different parts, departments and colleges interacted with each other.

She eventually moved from this position to become a university president.

A third president described how she moved through a series of positons that opened up at one university and summed up each move with a connection between risk and choice.

Then, as it happened, a position opened in the Provost's Office, that was assistant provost or other. And, it had some interesting things [specific to the campus]. So, that seemed like an interesting thing to do, and, something I was unprepared to do. So, I did it. Okay. So there's a little bit of risk taking. You know, sort of, that I can do this stuff, that I can learn this stuff. That's an early part of this.

A fourth president recalled a series of decisions she made as a mid-level administrator member to opt-in and, how that prepared her for her eventual role as president.

I got involved in the budgeting process and the appropriations, went to regents' meetings, and started to observe university leadership. When I was at [University],

I had all these campus experiences; but, I also had linkages to the system with other provosts and other chancellors. And so, during about a 10-year timespan, I got to, in some ways, to take the mystery out of the leadership position as chancellor and president.

The fifth president took the view of opting-in as a process of doing the next thing and learning by doing. She summarized her career with a series of events where she was compelled to opt-in, but she also learned that, for her, less analysis of choice proved more rewarding. When asked if she had planned to be a university president she answered,

You know, you do make certain decisions during your career that ultimately can lead in this direction. And, if it works out, it's often times serendipitous that it does. There are people that I know that have planned, that this is what they wanted to be, and good for them. I'm glad they planned it. I can't say that this was ever part of any plan that I had.

The idea of opting-in as a choice, and the ways a series of choices might mimic a plan, is systemic of the labyrinth metaphor (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Women face numerous obstacles to leadership, and each turn in the labyrinth requires a choice. In the day-to-day linkage, it is challenging to see the connection of choices over time. However, as more women make it to the top in leadership positions, the ability to reflect and re-create shows similarities in the pattern. True, each journey is specific to the individual. Yet, the action to opt-in is universal.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the navigational experiences of female university presidents leading public research institutions. In 2016, 11 of 81 universities in the Carnegie Classification category Doctoral Universities: Highest Research were led by a woman. These presidents led the top research institutions in the US and had traveled complicated journeys to reach the presidential position. For the study, in-depth, semi-structured interviews of five of the 11 female presidents were conducted. Their stories provide data to support the labyrinth metaphor.

Three themes emerged from the study: Know the Rules, Hear the Message, and Opt-in. The first theme, Know the Rules, provides the labyrinth framework and context. According to Eagly & Carli (2007a, b), the labyrinth metaphor offers a concrete understanding of social phenomenon and provides an image of how women can, and do, reach leadership positions. For these participants, knowing the rules, or more specifically, how intellectual experiences inform university leadership, served as the foundation for the

labyrinth journey. Knowing the rules grounded each participant in her profession and gave guidance to her choices.

Knowing the rules did not negate bias or create a linear path to the top. Moving through the labyrinth is cumbersome and slow (Carli & Eagly, 2016). However, Know the Rules offers clarity to the question of agency and gives guidance to ways women can make positive career decisions. According to Williams and Dempsey (2014), if a woman can understand the challenges to leadership within her organization, she is better armed to confront the challenges.

The presidents interviewed for this study indicated that they had to understand the credentials needed for success. Higher education can be an unforgiving environment for university leaders. These women stepped into leadership with robust resumes and knowledge of the environment that supported them in their leadership journeys.

Similar to how Know the Rules gives a defining boundary to the labyrinth, Hear the Message offers insight on ways to interpret implied and explicit meanings in leadership promotion and organizational structure. In this study, each president identified moments in her career of Hear the Message, where she was given a message about inclusion or lack of inclusion and needed to make a decision based upon that message. The idea of choice, and how women enact decisions, is relevant as well.

According to Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2008; 2012), the word "choice" implies the actor has free will. However, for women in academia, there is no free choice. Every choice is made within a traditional hierarchy, and thus, requires a woman to pay close attention to the impact of her decision (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2008;2012). For these participants, the connection between Hear the Message and choice was tightly woven as each woman moved through the labyrinth.

The third theme, Opt-in, explains the breadth and depth of movement female leaders make in regard to personal navigation in leadership. For these women, Opt-in is not the opposite of Opt-out. None of the women interviewed identified making a decision in which she disengaged. Each movement in the labyrinth was forward, sideways, or around. If a woman chose not to stay at a university due to bias in salary, promotion, or work conditions, she did not Opt-out, but rather, Opted-in to a different direction. In short, Opt-in equals repeated momentum, which in turn, defines each woman's labyrinth journey.

The theme of Opt-in supports Eagly & Carli's (2007a, b) description of the labyrinth as a viable metaphor that "to be successful, women must continue to carefully chart a path through the impediments and puzzles they encounter"(p. 522). The word *continue*, defines the essence of Opt-in and merges with Sandberg's (2013) theme that women must

repeatedly lean-in. In practice, the labyrinth metaphor is helpful in defining how women experience paths to leadership, but does not describe a seamless or worry-free road. A woman working her way through the labyrinth may well find the experience exhausting. However, in reviewing the leadership paths of these women presidents, one finding is universal. When faced with a barrier, women in the labyrinth must Opt-in at each new direction.

CONCLUSION

This study identified and described the navigational experiences of five women university presidents leading public research institutions. Although the number of women leading in this category of institutions remains small, with only 13% of public Doctoral Granting: Highest Research universities having a female president, there is power in their stories. Sharing the stories of women who have sustained a successful path to leadership paves the way for social change (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, b).

Eagly and Carli (2007a, b) are correct, in that women are breaking through the glass ceiling (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Much has been written about leadership and the difficulties women experience when navigating leadership positions (Bornstein, 2008; DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; Williams & Dempsey, 2014). The story often carries the same history of bias and barriers but little information about how women actually get it done. For the participants of this study, the model of the labyrinth more closely mirrors their experience. There is no guidebook for how a woman moves past barriers and into university leadership. Each president created her own path through skillful navigation.

It is more than simple luck that women are finding their way to the top. Although disproportionate to men, women are leading Fortune 500 companies, research-intensive institutions, and making strides in this platform. The new story that needs to emerge is to report the skills women use to make it to that level and survive. Universities do not make vertical movement easy for women, and each journey is traveled alone. Learning how women reach top levels of administration is valuable in creating a collective voice for women in leadership. As organizations change and women access their social power, the number of women in top leadership positions will continue to increase. It will never be an easy role, and there will always be barriers along the road. However, in the end, leadership for women is about taking the next step. Collecting the narratives of women in the journey brings communal understanding to the experience. Each woman's path to leadership may be her own but builds on the paths of women who have come before her.

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