A WILL FOR SURVIVAL: THE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE EXECUTIVES IN SMALL NONPROFIT HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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* * * * *

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This study involves naturalistic inquiry with an interpretive focus and using qualitative methodology to bring to the fore the leadership experiences of eight female executives in small nonprofit human service organizations. These women as founders or rescuers of organizations were challenged to prove organizational effectiveness and to build organizational legitimacy through delivery of services. Armed with more zeal than experience, these women willingly accepted the demands of executive leadership knowing at the outset they were underfunded, understaffed and under the accountability gun in the increasingly competitive and complex arena of the nonprofit sector.

Six general research questions posed during in-depth semi-structured interviews produced findings about leadership strategies, executives’ self-perceptions, motivation, the personal impact of their leadership, and their management of resources.

Strength of will was introduced as the central concept around which the data revolved. Exercising strength of will empowered the female executives to make a way—as in
overcoming obstacles and difficulties. Actions demonstrating strength of will were founding or rescuing an organization with scarce resources, sacrificing personal gain, risking financial stability, and operating on faith.

The findings also indicated that the female executives instinctively applied feminine principles of leadership in distinctly non-feminist settings. In devising strategies, the women were more likely to rely on and combine previous experiences, new learning, common sense, intuition, emotions and spirituality rather than traditional, rational management practice.

For a majority of the female executives, spirituality, a belief in God, was cited as an important factor in their leadership experience. Six of the eight female executives said that their spirituality gave them a strong sense of purpose, direction, and motivation for leadership.

Implications for Social Work research, policy and education are given. The study includes two tables: Characteristics of Female Executives and Selected Organizational Characteristics.
To the memory of my grandparents;
To my parents, my children,
and my grandchildren.

The heritage continues.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This inquiry explores the phenomenon of executive leadership as practiced by eight women who head small nonprofit human service organizations. Through a systematic and rigorous research process, the real life leadership encounters of female executives are brought forward for scholarly examination. This study follows the philosophies and principles of the naturalistic paradigm. Qualitative methods were used to give depth, description, and concrete detail to the study. An interpretive approach was adopted to construct meaning and give significance to the research findings.

The genesis of this particular research arises from personal and professional interests in leadership and particularly in the experiences encountered by women in such positions in the nonprofit sector. Having been privileged to serve in leadership positions in small, nonprofit, human service organizations, I am well acquainted with the challenges of leadership and the pressures to maintain organizational viability. Occurrences from these life
experiences have fueled my motivation to press for completion of this research project, and they also serve as a touchstone for discovery.

**Problem Statement**

Female executives who have founded or rescued small nonprofit human service organizations are challenged to prove organizational effectiveness and to build organizational legitimacy through delivery of services. Such women willingly accept these demands knowing at the outset the organization will be underfunded, understaffed, and under the gun in the increasingly competitive and complex arena of the nonprofit sector.

In order to meet and surmount almost overwhelming administrative requirements, some women executives have drawn from non-traditional sources of knowledge.

Not much is known about the phenomenon of executive leadership as it is practiced by women in small nonprofit human service organizations. Rare are the studies, in the same field, which focus on females who have started their own organizations or who have assumed the leadership position in a small organization.

While much has been written about the leadership styles and strategies of successful executives in the for-profit sector (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Peters & Austin, 1985), little systematic attention has been
directed toward human service administrators (Austin, 1989).
Even less prevalent is research documenting the participation of female executives in a profession where 88 percent of the employees are women (Austin, 1988; Gibelman & Schervish, 1983; Ondenhoff, 1993).

We know very little about how female executives in small nonprofit settings gain sophistication in the art of leadership. A number of leadership theories and models, which explain the emergence, nature, and/or consequences of leadership have been submitted to empirical testing. However contributions to the literature focusing on the personal subjective experiences of female executives have almost been ignored. Hill (1993) comments that there is increasing support for studies which employ the phenomenological approach to make sense of career and organizational experiences.

My personal experience and observation have been that in more than a few instances, female executives have entered the human service arena at the executive level and carved out a niche for their organizations through desire, determination, and dedication. Such women have been able to compensate for their inexperience through a zealous belief in, and a driving passion for, their work. These executives have done more than "muddle through" any professional and personal risks required to move their organizations forward.
Despite the absence of the traditional foundations of formal education, business training, and practical experience in human services, many female nonprofit CEO's have developed and implemented successful leadership strategies.

This research project explores, describes, and seeks to derive understanding from the leadership experiences of female executives practicing in small nonprofit human service settings. Also documented are the ways in which female executives have constructed, adapted, and applied their strategies for organizational survival.

Rationale for the Study

Several goals precipitated the undertaking of this particular research study. One was to confirm or dispel some personally held notions about the experience of being female, heading a small nonprofit human service organization, and coping with the challenges of leadership without benefit of sufficient business training or experience.

Successful female executives heading small nonprofit human service organizations, especially those who have gained expertise mainly through intuitive practice rather than through formal training, have much to share. The naturalistic paradigm and qualitative methodology allow the
multiple voices of the women to speak with power, richness, and diversity about their individual experiences.

In the past, the performances of this particular group of female executives in small organizational settings may not have been acknowledged by contemporary theory or practice. In fact, their activity may have been perceived by some to be little more than anecdotal organizational secrets. Naturalistic inquiry provides an arena in which the expressions of the women in this study can be foregrounded and acknowledged as important exemplars to be studied, publicized, and emulated.

Another significant goal for this study was that the information derived from this inquiry would add to, broaden and strengthen the body of knowledge comprising executive leadership in social work administration. Advancing a broader conception of leadership, as it is practiced by females in the nonprofit human services sector, will give greater meaning to and understanding of an important process which critically influences organization functioning and effectiveness.

It is also important that the social work profession devote more scholarly attention to the kinds of executive behaviors which contribute to effective services and positive organizational outcomes. It is hoped that information from this study will stimulate further research
on female executives in human services and also lead to the refinement of training and preparation of future leaders committed to serving others.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are those that may be cited for most investigations using largely qualitative methodologies. Limitations are interent within the methodology. The interview process is a limitation in that it must be bounded by time. In the case of the executives, three one-hour periods were deemed within reason considering their busy schedules. Another potential drawback of the process was interviewer bias. I discuss in the methodology chapter the steps taken to address this.

Also, the generalizability of research findings is narrowed because of population samples which are purposive and small. Time and resources did not permit the incorporation of male executives as a unit of analysis. Such an inclusion would have given added depth and richness to the study. In the context of this study, however, the strengths of the interpretive approach far outweigh the limitations.
Definitions of Key Terms

Female Executives The use of this term in this study refers to those women who function as chief administrators of nonprofit human service organizations.

Leadership The actions of an individual, while occupying a position of formal or informal authority, which give guidance and direction to others.

Strategies Actions taken to obtain desired results (Drucker, 1990). The strategies discussed in this study refer mostly to the practices implemented by the female executives to gain control over environmental conditions.

Nonprofit Human Service Organization Human services can be identified as a class of organizations whose "core activities are structured to process, sustain and change people who come under [their] jurisdiction (Hasenfeld, 1992, p. 4)." The term nonprofit is an American expression which distinguishes the human services as belonging to a sector of organizations, "Located between the private, for-profit, and the public sector" (Seibel & Anheiser, 1990, p. 7).

Basic Assumptions

This study assumes that the best way to explore the multiple realities which exist in our world is through the perspective of a naturalistic inquiry which involves qualitative methodologies. Further, this research study
recognizes and will include intuitive human experience, along with more traditional modes, as valid ways of knowing (Weick, 1990). Both genres are viewed as important ways of bringing new dimensions to Social Work inquiry.

Research Questions

The dissertation focused on the following research questions which emerged from the data collected during a pilot study.

1. What are the leadership strategies demonstrated by the female executives in this study?

2. What are the self-perceptions of the female executives as they fulfill their duties and responsibilities as leaders?

3. How have the female executives constructed their knowledge base for successful performance at the executive level?

4. What motivated the female executives to risk organization start-up and continuance?

5. How were the personal lives of the female executives affected by their leadership roles?

6. How have the female executives managed available resources to ensure organization maintenance and survival?
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature section examines the technical literature which informed this study. Conventions of the naturalistic paradigm give procedural latitude, where the literature review is concerned, to investigators operating within the naturalistic paradigm (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A search of relevant texts can be made prior to and also during the investigation. I decided to conduct the literature review as a continuous process throughout the study. The benefit from such a procedure is that as the study emerges and yields unexpected finds, the investigator can keep pace with knowledge constructions, transformations, and introspection through ongoing text review (Patton, 1990).

This chapter reflects on four areas of the literature which are relevant to this work. They are: leadership, executive leadership, female leadership, and human service organizations. Each area is presented below with various approaches and research findings used by other investigators.
Leadership

There is no paucity of literature on the subject of leadership. Studies of leadership began with the concept of the great man and trait theories (Bass, 1990), which viewed leadership as a "magical quality" given at birth to a special few empowered to influence the masses. Further evolutions of theory produced the now widely used rational approach to leadership and the use of sound management skills (Glisson, 1989). Each innovative theory brought changes in conceptualizing what leadership is, how it works, and the ways in which people learn to apply it (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Currently, a number of researchers have taken a more holistic and interdisciplinary stance to leadership and believe that it can be taught and learned (Bargal & Schmid, 1989; Bennis & Nanus, 1985, Drucker, 1990, Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Sashkin and Burke (1990) credit researchers such as Bass, Bennis and Nanus and Burns with ushering in a paradigm shift in the study of leadership. Their reconceptualization of the leadership phenomenon has resulted in a distinction between the roles of leaders and managers. Hall (1990) believes that leadership operative in the institutional level of the organization is quite different from actions displayed in front line supervisory positions. Glisson
(1989) adds that managers are focused toward rational processes and that, "Managers can be trained, leaders are developed (p. 113)."

Bennis and Nanus' (1985) simplistic statement that, "Managers do things right; Leaders do the right thing," is a prime example of the splitting of management and leadership into what Krantz and Gilmore (1990) view as a "social defense." They encourage the use of both leadership and management skills by executives in search of organizational effectiveness.

Bargal and Schmid (1989) recognized the crucial effects of leadership to the life and death of organizations. In their study of emerging trends and theory on leadership, they identified emergent leadership topics in the current literature. The four themes are the leader as: 1) visionary; 2) creator of organizational culture; 3) involved in leadership and followership; and 4) implementer of transactional and transformational styles of leadership.

As I became involved in the process of data analysis, literature review, reporting and discussion of findings, the importance of these themes increased. It was clear that they were relevant and appropriate in describing and explaining the leadership practices of the female executives of this study. Each of the themes is presented below.
The Leader as Visionary

Visionary leadership involves creating an image of a desirable future state that will serve as a guide in formulating strategies, decisions and behavior (Bass, 1991). The ability to translate intentions into realities via vision is considered a prerequisite for modern leaders (Bennis & Manus, 1985; Conger, et al, 1988; Gummer, 1993; Koestenbaum, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) concluded from their unstructured interviews of 90 executive directors that all had an "agenda" or vision for their organizations. They noted:

If there is a spark of genius in the leadership function at all, it must lie in [the] ability...to assemble...a clearly articulated vision of the future that is at once simple, easily understood, clearly desirable, and energizing. (p. 103)

Kouzes and Posner (1987), from their research with top level executives, state that successful leaders inspire a shared vision by getting others to, "Buy into their dreams by showing how all will be served by a common purpose (p. 10)."

Mendell and Gerjuoy (Bass, 1991) elevate visionary leadership to the level of inherent ability by stating that if the talent is not already present, it cannot be effectively taught. Bass (1991) and Tichy and DeVanna (Bass, 1991) counter this assertion with the belief that visionary and inspirational leadership can be stimulated through creative thinking and writing exercises.
Sooklal (1991) distinguishes between vision and a leadership dream. He argues that vision is a poorly articulated construct which has vague ties to reality. Sooklal contends that from the vision comes the leadership dream which becomes increasingly rational and reality-based as it evolves from a personal construct to a social one.

**The Leader as Creator of Organizational Culture**

Culture is exhibited through the practiced beliefs and values that have worked well enough to be considered valid for the organization (Bargal & Schmid, 1989, Daft, 1989).

There is agreement in the literature that culture is an intangible but distinct area of business (Kostenbaum, 1991; Robbins, 1992; Scott, 1991). Those who study and write about leadership, view creating, implementing or changing culture as an important function of leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Yet the task of metamorphosing an organization according to planned design is considered to be the most difficult task facing those in leadership (Conger, et. al, 1988; Koestenbaum, 1991).

**The Leader Involved in Leadership and Followership**

Leadership and followership imply a reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers. Exchange theory has been used to explain the dynamics of the leader-follower dyad (Bass, 1991; Bargal & Schmid, 1989). Exchange theory
predicts that both parties will maintain the relationship if the benefits to each outweigh the costs. The expectation of followers is that they will be helped by their leaders to obtain desired outcomes for rewards that are believed to be distributed equally and fairly.

Heller and Van Till (Bass, 1991, Bargal & Schmid, 1989) assert that leadership and followership are inseparable concepts. Kelly (Bass, 1991) concurs that these concepts are highly similar and notes that the attributes of a good follower are the same as for a good leader. The roles of leader and follower are mutually enhanced by a participatory democratic style.

A study conducted by Glisson (1989) on the effect of leadership on worker attitudes in human service organizations found that leadership is effective to the extent that followers can be influenced to believe in their organization’s goals and values. From research findings, McClelland (Glisson, 1989) concluded that the success of leaders in implementing organizational goals hinged on their ability to temper power, as it affects followers, with maturity and self control.

The literature on organizational change also mentions the importance of a positive relationship between leaders and followers. Bronson’s (1991) results indicated that communication between leaders and followers was crucial to the change process. Malka (1989) observed management
behaviors in 30 Israeli human service organizations and concluded that flexible leader/follower roles enhanced worker satisfaction and significantly reduced absenteeism.

**The Leader as Implementer of Transactional and Transformational Styles of Leadership**

**Transactional Leadership.** Burns, in his seminal work on leadership (1978), proposed that leaders were either transactional or transformational. Transactional leadership, which once was the main focus of experimental research, is now second to the study of leaders practicing the transformational style. There are differences between transactional and transformational leaders (Bass, 1990; Rainey, 1991). The former works within the framework of the self-interest of his or her constituency, the latter concentrates efforts toward changing the framework. This distinction between leadership types has gained considerable importance and is the subject of numerous books and articles.

The transactional leader engages in exchange relationships with followers. Important to such a leader are the abilities of insight and empathy concerning the desires and needs of followers so that the right offers can be made to them for their compliance. According to Bass (1991), transactional leaders are most likely to practice management by exception which is the use of negative feedback and aversive reinforcement. The transactional
style of leadership is typically seen in environments where emphasis is placed primarily on maximizing production outcomes (Bargal & Schmid, 1989).

**Transformational Leadership.** A transformational approach to leadership is exhibited when leaders and followers mutually inspire one another to operate on higher levels of motivation and morality for a common purpose (Bargal & Schmid, 1989). The transformational leader accepts people as individuals and encourages them to make contributions. In this way, levels of aspiration are raised. Koestenbaum (1991) refers to a leader's individual concern for people as "ethics in leadership." Such behavior includes role-modeling, mentoring, developing and training subordinates to increase their marketability.

Bargal and Schmid (1989) draw from Bass' earlier work and divide transformational leadership into the categories of intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and charisma. To the above three, Bass (1991) adds a fourth conceptual dimension of inspirational leadership.

The transformational leader intellectually stimulates followers by heightening their capacity for problem-setting and problem-solving. In showing consideration, the transformational leader recognizes the individual needs of followers and promotes their growth and self-fulfillment. The charismatic transformational leader is one who has the ability to arouse the enthusiasm, emotional involvement and

**Inspirational Leadership.** Bass (1991) differentiates between transformational and inspirational leadership. He views charismatic leaders as highly inspirational, but cautions that it does not follow that inspirational leaders are charismatic. The primary difference, for Bass, between transformational and inspirational leadership is in the way followers accept and comply with the leader's initiatives. Followers of inspirational leaders are more likely to be drawn to the goals and purposes of the leader rather than to personality. Also, to justify their loyalty, followers tend to claim a mutual social philosophy with the inspirational leader. Inspirational leaders also tend to be ideological, making quick decisions and relying on intuition rather than data. Although conceptual distinctions can be made between the different dimensions of transformational leadership, establishing such differences empirically is a challenging and difficult task.
Bargal and Schmid's (1989) message on transformational leadership is:

If they [organizations] are able to develop transformational leaders...Indeed, this is the leadership style that our human services need badly at this point in time (p. 53).

Quinn's (1988) contribution to the leadership literature is the notion of a master manager who is able to overcome obstacles to high performance and deal with contradictory objectives and approaches. Through his competing values model (CVA), which is composed of four major models in organization theory, Quinn urges leaders to go against the grain of their hierarchical logic of classical thinking by moving beyond rational management practices.

The CVA offers leaders an integrated approach to viewing their organization. Also, CVA can also assist administrators in critically assessing their current leadership style and considering alternatives which could strategically move the organization in new directions. By working through the paradox of competing values, Quinn offers that leaders will develop a more comprehensive, flexible logic for coping with uncertainty; gain a multiple perspective on problems; and gain reliability in business decisions that successfully integrate conflicting priorities.
Executive Leadership

Executive leadership is usually incorporated with the general leadership literature. However, there are some researchers who have given this topic specific attention. Research on executive leadership has explored the programs, priorities and administrative patterns of executives with emphasis on their behavior and characteristics (Kay, 1994; Schmid 1992).

Organizational theory places the executive at the institutional level of the organization (Daft, 1989) where s/he is concerned with the entire functioning of the organization. Austin (1989) observed sharp differences between the corporate executive and the public administrator. One distinguishing characteristic was that service executives functioned as an interface between social structures such as service production organizations and the organized human service profession.

Turning to the public sector executive, Minert, Ginsberg, and Keys (1993) studied performance characteristics of CEO's heading various state departments. According to this study, a majority of the executives were attracted to their positions for altruistic reasons. Specifically, the most important motivations were the power to create change and influence events and a desire to be of service to people. Concerning significant administrative activities of the CEO's, a great deal of time was spent
locating resources and managing the budget. Inadequate resources for the departmental mission and insufficient staff were the two major problems confronting the CEO's. The conclusion of Meinert, et al. was that CEO's of certain state departments possess characteristics similar to other human service managers.

Schmid (1982) studied the behavior, roles and characteristics of executives in human service organizations. The orientation of the executives was toward centralization--keeping decisionmaking authority in their own hands. Possible reasons for executives adopting this particular style were:

- Lack of management know-how and skills
- Reluctance to take risks
- Intolerance for ambiguity
- Preference for a 'one man show' (p. 105).

Schmid further noted that executives were prone to value visible and immediate outcomes because such results had a positive impact on the flow of resources to the organization. In general, administrators of social service organizations were found to spend most of their time in their offices attending to organization maintenance. Minimal attention was given to managing the external environment.

Schmid commented that executives who are focused on internal operations without planning for the future are open to a management style geared toward crisis management--solving immediate problems and removing obstacles as they
arise. The conclusion drawn by Schmid was that human service executives need to adopt a decentralized management style—directing their efforts toward external relations and competing with other organizations over scarce resources.

Heimovics, Herman, and Jurkiewicz (1995), building on a number of studies on leader effectiveness (Heimovics & Herman, 1990; Heimovics, Herman, & Jurkiewicz Coughlin, 1993; Herman & Heimovics, 1990; Herman & Heimovics, 1990) investigated the political actions of nonprofit executives. From their findings they determined that executives must be able to operate within the existing political framework in order to be effective.

There are researchers (Dachler, 1988; Kay, 1994; Vaill, 1989) who question the current traditional objectivist view—the competence approach—to the study of executive leadership. Their work is relevant to this study because of their interpretivist stance toward the study of leadership.

Kay (1994) proposed that more attention be focused on the theories-in-use—the wisdom, creativity and insight—of leaders in nonprofit organizations. By identifying core metaphors used by executives, Kay suggests that leaders create the meaning of their experience by combining a variety of core metaphors to create other complex, creative, and insightful metaphors that emerge from and give meaning to their actions.
To study leadership from an interpretivist outlook indicates a belief in the interrelationship of thought, language, sense-making and reality including action (Kay, 1994).

**Women In Leadership**

A broad criticism of early management literature and theory is that it reflected a male perspective (Ezell, 1993). Chernesky (1979) found that early research on women in administration contained one of two primary themes on women’s advancement to administrative roles: 1) women can succeed in a man’s world if they learn how to play by its rules; 2) women are responsible for their lack of managerial achievement, and if success is to be attained, women must make the effort to try harder and change (Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Perry, 1992).

Recent studies, however, have begun to include data on both men and women (Powell & Friedkin, 1988). Such research has examined how men and women differ in leadership styles and how perceptions of leaders differ with respect to gender (Nichols & Jenkins, 1992). Ezell (1993) investigated whether male and female social work administrators could be distinguished by their work habits or attitudes about work. Consistent with similar research, his findings suggested that no great differences exist between the genders in the dimensions studied.
Gubelman and Schervish (1993) studied membership data of the National Association of Social Workers and found support for the assertion that a glass ceiling exists in Social Work on the basis of gender.

A few researchers believe that these and other studies have neglected the unique contributions women bring to the work force and especially to the Social Work profession. Some researchers is attempting to correct the research omissions of the past by offering feminist models for macro-practice (Hyde, 1989). Hyde believes that such an approach would nurture both constituency and practitioner. Martin and Chernesky (1989) posed a political Economy Perspective which involves collective action aimed at basic structural changes as a means of improving women's prospects for leadership in human services.

Helgesen's study (1990) of four executive women is pertinent to this research in that she investigated the strengths these women brought to their leadership role. Helgesen records how, as women assume positions of authority, they bring their values with them. Such actions, which Helgesen calles feminine pronciples, are radically transforming the workplace. Helgesen identified the following characteristics or feminine advantages:

- Attention to process and not focused on the bottom line.
- Willingness to look at how actions affect others and not asking what's in it for me.
- Concern for wider needs of the community rather than task-oriented—the work is important.

- Disposition to draw on personal and private experiences.

- An appreciation of diversity as opposed to intolerance.

- Impatience with rituals and symbols that divide people rather than adherence to protocol and structure.

Helgesen believes that the above feminine attributes were nurtured in the private domestic sphere.

**Human Service Organizations**

Hasenfeld (1992) describes the human services as a distinct category of organizations with uniquely identifiable attributes. Of the eight distinguishable features listed by Hasenfeld which set the human services apart from other nonprofits and private sector organizations, the three most important are: 1) people as raw material (input); 2) human services as moral work; and 3) human services as gendered work.

Unlike other organizations, the human services receive people as inputs or "raw material" to be transformed through service delivery and returned to the environment. Involvement with people through an exchange of services gives rise to ethical issues concerning clients and the judgments and values placed on the decisions and actions pertaining to them. This aspect of operation puts human services in the context of moral work.
The predominance of women in the industry, especially in direct service work, qualifies human services as a gendered profession. A gendered perspective of human services implies the existence of tensions between feminine and masculine concepts of organizational development and structure. Hasenfeld (1990) believes that there is a feminist orientation toward human services which de-emphasizes characteristics associated with bureaucracies such as hierarchy, competition, individualism, and conflict and emphasizes egalitarianism, cooperation, nurturance, and peace.

The gendering of human service organizations also has political as well as social implications in that female-based industries are said to have a lower social status which affects organizational legitimacy and resource development. Hasenfeld (1990) commented:

A vicious cycle is formed whereby lack of resources results in poor services that further reaffirm the low legitimacy of these organizations and their clients, and contributes to the devaluation of gendered work (p. 9).

While Hasenfeld identified human services as a typology within organizations, McMurty, Netting, and Kettner (1990), structurally defined their uniqueness within the third or nonprofit sector and labeled them as voluntary service agencies. Recognizable structural features are:

- Incorporation as private, nonprofit entities
- A formal structure and operating budget
- Oversight by an elected board of volunteer directors
- Employment of professionals and/or a volunteer staff
- Services to clients are ongoing and designed to prevent or resolve individual, group, family, or community problems.
- Clients opt for involvement with agency to receive preventive or ameliorative services.

Additional factors cited by Gallagher and Weinberg (1991) as unique to nonprofits and human services are:

- Nonfinancial objectives. Showing a significant financial gain is not the primary goal.
- Many nonprofits operate without a financial "risk cushion."
- Nonprofits have multiple publics—clients and funders—to whom accountability must be given.
- Competition for clients and dollars is increasingly becoming a way of life for nonprofits.
- Nonprofits attract public attention because of their special status.

Despite the distinctive differences between the two sectors, nonprofits are rapidly adapting strategies which lead to behaviors similar to business in the for-profit enterprise (McMurty et al, 1990). Although benefits may be gained from borrowed practices, Patti (1987) cautions that the transferability of technique among sectors should not be taken for granted.

The context within which human services organizations have traditionally operated has been changed by the encroachment of for-profit enterprises offering similar or identical services. The result is that all sectors are forced to act more efficiently and effectively (Bargal & Schmid, 1992; Hasenfeld, 1989). Also, because of
environmental shifts, social agencies have been compelled to devote substantial amounts of time and energy to developing and maintaining relatively stable and secure funding sources.

Hasenfeld and Schmid (1989) used a biological metaphor to explain how environmental changes induce the birth, growth, maturity, decline and even death of human service organizations. These researchers drew from their Integrative Model of the Life Cycle of Organizations to discuss the six stages of organizational development. As an organization advances through each cycle, its resource needs change accordingly. In stage one, formation, identification of potential resources for funding is unclear and the means of securing solid funding is unsure. Advancement to development, stage two, is accompanied by specific sources of funding and the development and establishment of mechanisms for securing and disbursing them. As the organization moves to stage 3, maturation, it is now in a position to receive a steady flow of resources. During the fourth stage, elaboration, resource acquisition shifts to exploring possibilities of new sources and stabilizing existing sources. Organizations experiencing cycle 5, decline, also encounter sharp decreases in resources and legitimization. The final stage, death, ushers in a total loss of resources and societal sanction.
Many of the books and articles examined to this point have focused on larger nonprofit organizations such as hospitals and public agencies. In their work on strategic planning, Burkhart and Reuss (1993) attempt to fill the void through their study of small and medium sized nonprofit organizations. They devised two fictitious agencies which represent one of two nonprofit organizational types--the paid professional staff model or the volunteer organizational model. Organizations of the first type rely on paid employees, usually professionals, to implement the policies of a volunteer board of directors. The mode of operation is through direct service to clients. Contractual obligations which involve funding relationships generally necessitate a somewhat more formalized structure.

A volunteer board of directors heads the second type of nonprofit organization. However, there are few or no paid staff. The service provided is that of distributing resources such as volunteers, expertise, funding and materials. Organizations of this type are less formal in structure.

Bargal (1992) also studied small nonprofit entities by drawing from the literature two case studies of self-help organizations and examining the early stages of their development. Important to his analysis were the clustered variables of founders' personality characteristics, organizational processes, and the organization's relations
with environmental and societal contexts. Bargal's findings were that the two organizations, though different in their orientations, followed a seven-step sequential pattern of development as follows:

1. An acute crisis to which the founder was subjected.
2. A profound feeling of helplessness and/or despair.
3. Exposure to the possibility of a previously untried solution.
4. A new solution to the problem emerges.
5. The solution is practiced and the organization receives recognition.
6. People needing the service are attracted to the organization and become members.
7. A provisional organizational structure is established and initial interorganizational ties are initiated.

This typical and recurring sequence, Bargal posits, is an example of the problem-solving cycle, and founders/originators of self-help groups seem to follow such a pattern. Bargal also suggests a list of propositions relative to the clustered variables that could serve as the basis for further research and verification.

**Summary**

The above review of the literature brought together ideas and issues pertaining to leadership, leaders and nonprofit human service organizations. Studies which had relevance were reviewed in order to determine whether there were knowledge gaps which could be addressed by this study.
It is important to note that many of the studies mentioned in the preceding review were directed toward executives of large corporations or organizations. Few studies exist which examine the leadership experiences of those individuals, especially women, who lead the small nonprofit human service agencies. The perspectives presented were useful guides in comparing findings with existing information. Austin (1989) makes clear the need for specific research concerning human services agencies and the executives who run them. This review of the literature strengthens the need for this research project and others which bring seldom recognized leaders to the fore.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The intent of this chapter is to discuss the methodological choices made in the conduct of this study. Recognizing the debate which surrounds research methods in the Social Work profession, this chapter begins with a discussion of inquiry paradigms, their importance to Social Work, and how they relate to this study. Concluding this section will be an explanation of the details surrounding the steps taken in the general design, management, and validation of this study.

Social Work research has a long history of allegiance to the powerful influences of positivistic social science. From this perspective, human behavior occurs within a social context that is orderly, stable, and governed by rules. Actions are causally influenced by external stimuli, with outcomes that are specific, predictable, and generalizable to large populations (Allen-Mears & Lane, 1990).

The prevailing belief for adherents of positivism is that scientific inquiry, which follows rigid, prescribed methodologies, can be conducted systematically, objectively
and with a true view of reality preserved in time-tested theories (Tyson, 1992). Also, social science researchers and particularly those in Social Work, have been persistent in clinging to assumptions borrowed from other disciplines. Such tenets as a value-free science heritage, were in many cases authoritatively transmitted to aspiring practitioners and researchers.

Yet, a number of researchers in Social Work have become uncomfortable with such a deterministic and monolithic view and approach to understanding the multiple dimensions of human phenomena. Increasingly, researchers are recognizing the elusiveness of objective measures when considering the complexity and richness of human experience. They also recognized the fact that the positivistic view of science established and even institutionalized the concept of subjugated knowledges. Such thinking infers the existence of a powerful hierarchy which orders what is to be included or excluded in the domain of formal knowledge (Hartman, 1992).

An increasing number of researchers, desiring to maintain social work values, have begun seeking and exploring more contemporary philosophies and open methodologies. Their intent is to carve out a new scientific niche for Social Work which fits with its
dialogue orientation of promoting social justice and empowering persons oppressed by or marginalized within this society (Whilker & Gottschalk, 1988).

Social Work practitioners and researchers are now encouraged to swell the ranks of those opting to shift from the role of expert observers of client behavior to a mode which facilitates and embraces listening, honoring, and validating the experiences of clients so that practice and research are enlarged by the contributions of all (Hartman, 1992; Tyson, 1992).

Three reasons are given by Ruckdeschel (1985) as to why Social Work should adopt a qualitative perspective: 1) The assumptions about human behavior and the qualitative methodology stand in "Dialectical relationship to each other"; 2) Because of the values of the profession, Social Workers bring a sense of purpose to the qualitative perspective which informs the process; and 3) The qualitative approach aims at synthesizing social theory, practice, and research, by using research as the lead system.

Researchers with a philosophical bent for naturalistic inquiry are drawn to an investigative form that welcomes ambiguity (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), that facilitates and embraces a joining of practice and research, and which yields relevant and important knowledge about the complexities of human social interaction (Tyson, 1992).
Research methods carry with them inherent philosophical messages about what should be considered useful knowledge in the domain of science. The politically charged task of situating oneself within the frame of a particular paradigm for investigation of phenomena gives insight into a researcher's ontological orientation. To take such a stand, especially when there is controversy within a chosen discipline over the use of alternative methods, one needs to be anchored in a solid foundation of knowledge about human science research and supported by strong personal values and beliefs.

After thoughtfully examining my tastes, talents, and personality, I felt an affinity toward qualitative inquiry. As a fledgling in research, I was faced with the task of selecting an approach to research from a variety of models which all bore a strong family resemblances to each other, yet there were slight differences (Erickson, 1986). The common bond was that all the approaches emphasize understanding or the illumination of meaning (Hoshmand, 1989). I experienced some confusion about what to call this different type of research and how to order my investigation for cogent reflection. I found that those who wrote about alternate paradigms use different terminology to discuss and explain these new assumptions.

For example, Bogdan & Biklen (1992) explain qualitative research as the paradigm and list ethnomethodology and
phenomenology as theoretical frames. Tyson (1992) offers the term heuristic paradigm as the nominal for identifying a nonpositivistic research option for Social Workers. Hoshmand (1989) discusses alternate research paradigms (as opposed to alternative which indicates a hierarchical system) which, for her, includes the naturalistic-ethnographic paradigm, the phenomenological paradigm, and the cybernetic and other high-context paradigms. Erickson (1988) selects the term interpretive to identify the group of observational techniques which includes ethnographic, qualitative and phenomenological research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) produced a classic work about the alternative paradigm and called it Naturalistic Inquiry. They admit that this research style has other aliases. Their reasoning for this is that:

It [naturalistic inquiry] has so many names because the persons who profess to practice it tend to take different views of what it implies. In the same way that persons who profess to be known as Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Fundamentalist, Baptist and so on, they hold to these more specific labels in an attempt to differentiate their particular doctrines from those of others (who needless to say, they believe have turned away from the true way. (p. 8)

Extracting what was useful for me from these and other researchers, I am able, as a researcher/practitioner of Social Work administration, to position myself philosophically in the naturalistic paradigm using an interpretive approach to research.
To conduct research from an interpretive paradigm, one automatically sets sail on a voyage in search of meaning. It is a search which will challenge the researcher and the researched, always with the goal of constructing and integrating what reality is for the moment. Erickson (1988) notes:

What makes such work interpretive or qualitative is a matter of substantive focus and intent rather than of procedure in data collection. (p. 119-120).

My focus and intent are to wrest meaning from the influences of human interaction on the designated phenomenon under investigation based on the actors' point of view. Through the interpretive model, I made use of rigorous technologies which allow for incorporation of methods from the positivist heritage. Such blending further established the interpretive perspective as a viable methodology for integrating knowledge, values, and actions to create structure and meaning (Haworth, 1984).

**Research Design**

By positioning myself in the naturalistic paradigm, alignment is automatically made to employ a majority of qualitative methods. The goal here was not to uncover universal truth, but perspective--a holistic approach to understanding a phenomenon and its attendant situations.

The design for this study incorporated elements and procedures recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) such as
conducting research in the natural setting of the phenomenon, involving the human-as-instrument, incorporating tacit knowledge with qualitative methods, purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, emergent design, and development of grounded theory. The latter involved negotiated outcomes, leading to case reports which were ideographically interpreted and tentatively applied.

Because of the emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry, it is difficult for the researcher to plan and describe precisely the final form of method and analysis. The advice of Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1987), to implement a careful pilot, was taken. Issues addressed were those of initial focus, site location, subjects, access questions, number and type of data sources, ethical matters, data processing and display, and the level of research skills needed.

The nature of naturalistic inquiry makes small purposive samples the norm. The logic behind this practice is that the researcher will select "information-rich-cases" which will yield details and understanding about the phenomenon in question (Patton, 1990).

The sampling strategy for this project was purposive and produced a range of variations on dimensions of executive experience, age of organization, and strategies employed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) conclude that qualitative
researchers will find the technique of maximum variation sampling most useful and one which will provide the broadest range of information possible.

**Overview of Methods**

Qualitative methods involve the normal human activities of looking, listening, speaking, and reading as a natural means of gathering information. The interview was the predominant method for data collection and consisted of interactive and sequential sessions with participants. The interactive and dialogical exchanges between the researcher and participant are crucial in establishing a collaborative relationship that leads to reciprocity and negotiation of meaning (Lather, 1991). Theories derived from such a process are grounded in mutual understandings that have significance and relevancy for the people involved.

During the interviews, account was taken of non-verbal cues and noted along with other thoughts in a self-reflexive journal. Peer reviewers served as methodological attendants and provided cathartic relief. Organizational documents were analyzed for additional sources of facts.

In addition to providing information through interviews, female executives gave further input through scrutiny and confirmation of case reports via member checks.

A theory grounded in the research was developed and supported through periodic participant examination, review
of data, pertinent literature, and my personal theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to the phenomenon.

Theoretical sensitivity depends on previous experience, reading or other involvement a researcher might have had with a particular subject. Occurring at the conceptual level, theoretical sensitivity alludes to, "Having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t." (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42)

**Focus for the Inquiry**

The pattern for this research project follows closely the design elements outlined for naturalistic inquiry by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

The phenomenon of executive female leadership in human services organizations was selected as the focus of this inquiry for several reasons: 1) women outnumber men in social welfare by a two-to-one margin (Martin & Chernesky, 1989), yet only a few studies have focused on the role of women in social work administration; 2) Based on my personal experiences as a female executive of a small nonprofit organization, I wanted to see how closely my experiences paralleled those of other females in similar circumstances and if so, how did they handle and solve their critical issues and maintain organization survival.
Participants in this study were female executives, four African American and four Caucasian, who headed small, nonprofit human service organizations. The organizations directed by the women employed them full-time for a period of not less than three (3) years. The organizations were in operation for a minimum of three and no more than 15 years.

The Setting

The natural setting, as opposed to a contrived, manipulated environment, was the arena of choice for this study.

The geographical site for this study was Franklin County, located in central Ohio. Serving the county's population of 981,437 residents, through a variety of offerings, are more than 800 nonprofit human service organizations.

To be designated as nonprofit, all organizations must carry a 501(c) (3) tax-exempt status. This means that nonprofits are expected to conduct business in a noncommercial mode for the benefit of persons in need or those whose needs are not met in the general marketplace (Brice, 1992).

The effects of a tough economy have forced many of the agencies to compete for limited dollars amid a shrinking pool of resources. About 41 percent of nonprofits in the area belong to one of four federations which operate within
the county. Federations such as United Way and The Black United Fund of Central Ohio (BUFCO) mount local fundraising campaigns and disburse the proceeds to members. The amount of dollars received is dependent on the success of fundraising events and, in some cases, the receiving organization's role, level of service, and need for its particular type of service in the community.

In their 1992 and 1993 campaigns, the United Way raised $87,206,000. Successful drives have resulted in member agencies receiving 90 percent of their funding needs with an additional 10 percent held in reserve if the agencies can show they are addressing needs of youth and elderly target groups by achieving measurable outcomes.

Non-member organizations can benefit from United Way's efforts and are eligible to receive funds through several grant programs if their services fit within designated critical needs areas. For the most part, smaller human service organizations, because of their size and informal structure, have difficulty qualifying for inclusion among the ranks of United Way sponsored agencies.

Two African American female executives in this study lead organizations belonging to BUFCO. With two years of service to its credit, BUFCO, through its federal employee solicitations, has raised approximately $40,000. The member
organizations' share of the dollars raised, while beneficial, in no way equal the disbursements received by United Way members.

Organizations left to their own devices for fundraising depend on tried and tested techniques of generating dollars, or they must resort to creating and developing their own approach. Typical alternatives which may be used singly or in combination include: solicitation of individual donors, proposals to foundations or government agencies, contracting for services rendered, and conducting annual fundraising events.

Nonprofit human service organizations as well as other types, can be likened to biological organisms in that they are born, mature, decline, and even die. Yet, unlike their life form counterparts, organizations can prevent decline and death through renewal (Hasenfeld & Schmid, 1989). To some degree, executives in this study were affiliated with organizations displaying characteristics which identified them as in the entrepreneurial and/or collectivity stages of their development cycle (Hasenfeld & Schmid, 1989). These particular stages are the early processes of a life cycle model of human service organizations. Each stage is associated with certain organizational characteristics. The organizations led by the female executives in this study can be described in the following manner.
External Environment: Unstable --> moderately stable

Resources: Unsure --> mechanisms in place for identifying and securing resources

Strategy: Reactive --> proactive based on a single type of service

Structure: Informal --> organic

Management Style: Informal

Size: Small

Human Resource: Amateur, based on founders skills --> based on group dynamics and teamwork

(Hasenfeld & Schmid, 1989)

Realizing that the setting for this research is highly contextual, it was not my intent to generalize findings to other settings or to all female executives heading small nonprofit agencies. However, through the process of "thick description," the background, circumstances, conditions, and experiences of participants were specified to allow the reader familiarity with them and the research setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**A Pilot Study**

The pilot study, in addition to answering and solving basic research problems, was conducted to gain preliminary interviews with executives from human services and the philanthropic community. In selecting a sample for the
pilot, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) advise that participants should be drawn from the target population. The sample consisted of one female executive who headed a nonprofit human service organization and four persons, two males and two females, involved in grant-making.

**Interview with an Executive**

For the pilot, no standard interview schedule was prepared. Interview sessions were about an hour in length and proceeded from open-ended questions relative to personal and organizational background. Over a three month period, three interview sessions were held. The first session, because of interviewee reticence, was recorded by interviewer notes. Following the first session, a solicitation letter was developed and presented at the next session in addition to verbal explanations. Succeeding sessions were tape recorded.

**Interviews with Grant Makers**

The dialogic exchanges with those who award dollars to nonprofit organizations were held to gain a clearer picture of the nonprofit setting. I was also interested in how grant makers viewed nonprofit executives and what qualities they considered essential for leadership effectiveness.

The females, a Caucasian and an African American, held executive positions in well established philanthropic organizations in the community. The same racial composition existed for the males; however, their roles were somewhat
different. The African American male was executive director of a newly organized minority fundraising federation patterned after the United Way. An extensive background in fundraising and working with numerous nonprofit organizations were prominent accomplishments in the Caucasian male’s background.

The pilot study afforded me an opportunity to experience and sort out issues such as gaining access, scheduling and other logistical matters, instrument development, data collection, and analysis. Most important, this study helped determine focus and contributed to the development and refinement of research questions.

Post-Pilot Changes

The pre-investigative experience led to decisions on focus and boundaries for the investigation. Initially, both male and female executives were to be included in the study. However, through the pilot I observed that women seemed more likely to head the smaller, less established nonprofit human service organizations while men are positioned at the helm of the larger, traditional agencies. Based on the assumption that men and women executives would probably not be equally positioned in regards to resources, organization legitimacy, and other concerns, the decision was made to center attention on female executives and their leadership strategies.
To enhance entry into the field, an introductory script
was revised. The purpose of the script was to inform
participants about their commitment, project expectations,
and my background. In addition, a participant consent form
developed for the first meeting was modified for future use.

Scheduling issues with the executive extended the time
originally allotted for the pilot. A practice adopted for
future participants was to schedule blocks of time in
advance.

Another issue addressed was the wording and content of
interview questions. My original intent was to use only a
brief set of questions to guide discussion so that I could
remain open to responses from participants. With helpful
input from committee members, the decision was made to use
an interview schedule to insure that the same information
and material would be collected and covered with every
executive. The use of the interview schedule was not a
hindrance to interviewer flexibility or spontaneity in
probing areas not written into the schedule.

Listening to audio tapes provided feedback on my
interviewing technique and presentation of questions. I was
also sensitized to the fact that even though consent had
been given for participation in the study, there was still
some reticence toward the use of a tape recorder. In the
larger study, emphasis was placed on confidentiality, anonymity, and participants were told the tape could be stopped at any time.

Omitted from the actual study was the activity of unobtrusive observation. Attendance at a board meeting proved to be a poor exchange of time and energy expended for data collected.

In the next section, I describe the methods of inquiry used for this study. Specific procedures were followed in order to optimize the researcher/researched relationship and to gain a clear meaning, and a deeper understanding, of the leadership practiced by female executives.

**Sample Selection**

The population for the study consisted of more than 500 nonprofit human service organizations most of which were listed in the 1993 edition of CALLVAC's *Directory of Human Services for Columbus and Franklin County*. My familiarity with human service organizations in the community was beneficial in making decisions concerning inclusion and exclusion. Agencies identified as affiliates of the United Way system were automatically excluded. Membership in such a federation assures organizations of legitimacy and also a base income.

Sixteen organizations were selected from the directory for further consideration. Each organization was called and
inquiries made as to the organization's age and the employment status of the director. The basic criteria were that the director be employed full-time and that the organizations be operating for a minimum of three years, not to exceed a maximum of 15 years. Some organizations were disqualified at this point because they exceeded the maximum limit. Others were eliminated because of time commitments of the executives. An interesting note is that involvement in proposal deadlines or other types of fund development activity were barriers to participation for several executives. Site visits were made to a few locations and conversations held with the executives to determine the final content of the sample.

Provisions were made in the sampling strategy to handle any participants who self-selected out of the study or who terminated for other reasons. In the instance of termination following the first interview, the data were to be analyzed and evaluated as to its contribution to the study. However, all participants completed the study.

All except one of the women lived and worked within the greater Columbus area. One executive commuted from the northern part of the state about twice weekly.

Education beyond the secondary level was common for the women, and several executives held advanced degrees.

The ages of the women spanned three decades, from the late thirties through the mid fifties.
Entering the Field

Entering the field to begin an investigation is the first hurdle all qualitative researchers must clear. Project success may depend on how well issues of access and cooperation have been negotiated between researcher and participant. Entry can be achieved through formal or informal channels, yet either way involves legal and ethical concerns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition to determining who is to be contacted, how contact will be sustained, and over what time period, the researcher must also be creative, flexible and if necessary, persistent.

The following entry procedures were followed for this research project. After identifying executives for participation, each was contacted by phone and a typed telephone script was used. During the conversation, I identified myself, the purpose of the call, and gave a brief explanation of the research project. An exchange of dialogue was the result, and before concluding the conversation, a request for an interview was made.

Those who consented to an interview were sent, prior to the scheduled appointment, two copies of a letter detailing the project, issues of confidentiality, and their level of participation (see Appendix A). As the interviewing progressed, I developed a habit of calling the executive's office the day prior to our scheduled appointment to confirm the time. On more than a few occasions, we rescheduled to
accommodate the executive's schedule. I believe my flexibility in rescheduling demonstrated to the executives that I was sensitive to their demanding work load and time commitments. The subsequent interview session usually began with the offer of an apology and a thank you. I benefited in that the executives were more open and responsive to my questions.

**Data Collection**

Called "scoring the facts" by Kirk and Miller (1988), data collection is the essence of field work, and an activity which depends not on method or strategy but on the quality of the instrument—the researcher. This study made prominent use of the human instrument as the primary data gathering tool.

Data Collection procedures used for this study consisted of key person interviews with female executives. Written organizational documents were also perused for additional sources of data.

**Data Collection: The Interview Sessions**

All interview sessions, except two, were conducted in the offices of the executives. Two meetings, because of extenuating circumstances, were held in the homes of the respective women. Each session proceeded from a set of scheduled questions (see Appendix B) asked of all participants and proceeded to questions which came from
analysis of texts from previous interviews. Use of the semi-structured interview schedule helped minimize one of the weaknesses of an interview guide approach—the inability to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the questions were written (Patton, 1990). This format allowed for subtle follow-up questions to probe further the responses from participants.

Queries posed advanced from those of a general demographic nature to specific inquiries about the executive and the organization. The open-ended structure of most of the questions enabled the participants to elaborate personal vignettes and experiences which gave texture, breadth and depth to their responses. The tape recorder when used to capture dialogue can be an intimidating tool. All the executives except one consented to tape recorded interviews. During the non-taped sessions, traditional note taking was used. The volume of data from those encounters, even though rough shorthand was used, was considerably less than what was obtained in the taped interviews. Notes were reviewed and augmented with mental memoranda as soon after the interview as possible.

A minimum of three meetings per executive, each lasting one hour, was the interview goal in terms of frequency and duration. The interviews were appropriately spaced so that transcription and reflection on data and the interview context could occur.
Data Collection: Other Sources

Also tapped as additional reservoirs of data were organization documents, such as mission statements, executive's job description, and brochures. These documents provided information as to organization philosophy, purpose, and structure.

Methodological Issues

Instrumentation and Researcher Bias

Social scientists supporting qualitative methods readily agree that the positivist concern for conducting value-free research is a dead issue. Yet the subject of researcher bias in the form of one's subjectivity causes much discussion. My personal experience as a female executive director had the potential to enable and/or disable me in terms of what I saw and the interpretations I derived. The challenge was to temper any prominent subjective issues, which naturally attracted my focus, and view them as "situational." To do this meant being mindful that personal feelings, thoughts, etc., would emerge when encountering particular persons, at particular times and places (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). A personal directive taken at the suggestion of Glesne and Peshkin was to become well acquainted by my subjectivity and whip it into shape so that the enabling benefits of introspection would neither be overpowered nor hindered.

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Maintaining a reflexive journal was a valuable aid in monitoring my subjectivity and pursuing the above. The journal was structured according to the model suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). One section documented logistical data relative to interview appointments. Another section recorded my thoughts in diary fashion about interviews, reflections on data, and methodological concerns. Peer debriefers and the dissertation committee members also served as additional safeguards against researcher bias.

**Validity**

Early researchers operating in the qualitative genre were prone to dismiss issues of validity as positivist reifications. This slighting of what some feel to be a critical argument in judging the acceptability of an investigation, gave qualitative methodology the reputation of being "unscientific." However, today a growing number of social scientists are addressing the issue of validity in qualitative research.

Those researchers who are predisposed to qualitative methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Kvale, 1989; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) have given much thought and text coverage to the argument of data credibility.

Lather (1991) notes that the question of validity in qualitative social research is in a state of flux and that
there are no sure formulas to follow. She advises that, "The best tactic is to construct research designs that demand vigorous self-reflexivity" (p. 68). Lincoln and Guba's (1985) well used suggestions for establishing validity are criticized by some as offering mere analogues to the validation traditions in the positivist paradigm. Their recent work (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) breaks new ground by promoting "authenticity criteria" which they believe is inherent in the nature of the hermeneutic process.

Kvale (1989) offers a different response to the challenge of establishing truth. His theme, of "To validate is to question," proposes new approaches to validity. Kvale agrees with Guba and Lincoln (1989) that the construction of grounded theory or constructivism has a built-in validation process which includes ongoing checks of the trustworthiness of the data collecting, coding, analyzing and presenting strategies. Emphasis is placed on the truth of knowledge claims, determining the "strength" of the evidence generated and the "plausibility" of the interpretations. Guba and Lincoln (1989) admit that these implicit processes may not be sufficiently compelling to satisfy those who need and desire to see more explicit methods.

Schurich (1992), an observer of the validity debate rather than a contributor of solutions, comments that, despite the paradigm, validity retains its consistency in that the controversy centers around producing credible data.
Kvale (1989) cautions that a zealous emphasis on validity issues may foster an emphasis on the process of verification rather than on the more important task of generating new knowledge.

For my part, I had two goals in establishing trustworthiness of this research project. First, I wanted my committee to be assured that a methodology was in place which would result in a rigorous investigation. Second, I wanted to operate with some level of comfort and believed that the well traveled road of confirming parallel criteria would provide such.

In their path-breaking publication detailing the methods and philosophy of naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) put forward a set of criteria which they believe parallel the conventional requisites for judging worth and quality of research. The truth standards of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity which are inherent in the positivist paradigm, are matched in the constructivist model with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility**

**Prolonged Engagement.**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer this technique as one of five suggested for establishing trustworthiness and building credibility. My experience in leadership involves more than
fifteen years as a mid-level manager and chief administrator, three years as a doctoral student in Social Work administration and also as a graduate administrative assistant at a large state university. While serving in leadership positions, I had numerous opportunities to interact with and observe individuals at every level of leadership. As a graduate student, I was introduced to formal leadership theories and was able to compare and contrast them with my extensive practical knowledge. These experiences I believe allowed me to be more than sufficiently oriented to the process and concept of leadership.

Prolonged engagement also involves time spent with participants to establish and maintain a level of trust. I felt that I had gained the respect and trust of my co-researchers--the participants--by the depth of information they shared with me. Often I marveled at their revelations and wondered if I would be so forthcoming were I in their place. Designated interviews occupied a total of about three hours over a period of time. There were also unscheduled phone contacts and impromptu meetings.

Immersion in the everyday lives of the participants, would have been inconvenient for the executives and also intrusive. Engagement between the participants can best be described as intermittently intense (WoodBrooks, 1991).
Triangulation.

The purpose of data triangulation was to gain differing perceptions on the phenomenon of leadership experienced by the participants. Several modes of triangulation were used in this study. The most significant was the use of multiple sources. The sources included eight female executives who had either founded or rescued the organizations they currently headed. Other sources were interviews with executives from the philanthropic community and text data such as brochures and organization documents. Observation was another mode of triangulation used. However, the latter two activities did not yield the data expected or desired and were discontinued.

Peer Debriefing.

Two female doctoral students who were detached from the research, yet acquainted with qualitative methodology, served as peer debriefers. An important purpose of peer involvement was to stimulate thought and discussion regarding decisions and practices implemented during the phases of data analysis, findings, and conclusions. Because of their willingness to serve as detached process observers, the debriefers were also a source of support and a means of relieving my personal anxiety and stress.

A total of two debriefing sessions were held. The first meeting was held at the conclusion of phase one data collection and analysis. Prior to our scheduled meeting,
Debriefers were given transcripts of two executives to peruse. During the two-hour session, comments generated focused on categories, themes, and textual comparison of events and individuals described in the data. The second peer debriefing session was scheduled following completion of a rough draft of research findings.

**Member Checking.**

As an additional measure in strengthening credibility, member checking, which is called "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 239) was used. Member checking assures that the multiple constructions presented by the researcher are indeed those of persons interviewed, because the interviewees have verified the text as being representative of their experience.

Round one of member checking also coincided with the end of phase one interviewing. An analysis of all interviews conducted to that point, along with preliminary findings, was written, typed, and distributed to participants for their review and comments. I questioned the executives as to how well they felt my descriptions represented their reality. Feedback from the executives was shared during the next scheduled interview. The general consensus was that what they read was "on target." In many
instances, the comment was made that they, the executives, were glad to know that they were not alone in their struggles.

The second segment of member checking was conducted with a slight variation on the first. After each interview, a summary of the session was prepared which focused on identified categories. For example, under the category background leadership, the responses pertaining to that heading were described. The executives were given a typed copy of the summary and the format described above was followed.

**Transferability**

Confirming transferability is similar to establishing generalizability. However, in the interpretive paradigm, the burden of proof is on the receiver or reader of the text. Transferability is usually gained through what is called a thick description. Yet there are no guidelines as to how dense a description must be in order to be adequate. To facilitate favorable judgments of transferability from those who may read or wish to replicate this study, the widest possible range of information through description of time, place, context, individuals, and experience was provided.


**Dependability and Confirmability**

These two processes mirror traditional reliability and objectivity respectively. The former involves the stability of data over time and the latter is concerned with whether the results of the inquiry are grounded in the contexts and participants. The check for dependability is concerned with the quality and appropriateness of the research process. Inspection for confirmability includes tracing data to its original sources and the process by which they were converted to form credible, confirmable conclusions. The dissertation committee oversaw of the research process to ensure the above criteria were met. Also, triangulation as a method of cross-checking specific data items was used in addition to a reflexive journal mentioned earlier.

**Data Analysis**

The interpretive paradigm is void of any absolute rules for data analysis. The researcher is then faced with the challenge of selecting and using the best analytical process for the purpose of producing credible findings. A foray into qualitative methodology means that the researcher has the arduous task of making sense out of intimidating stacks of data, reducing the data, identifying significant patterns, and selecting a presentation mode for communicating the information revealed.
Since the goal of this project was to develop a grounded theory of executive leadership as practiced by female executives in their particular setting, the procedures and techniques recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990) were followed. The following description gives an account of the procedures used in open, axial, and selective coding.

The interview sessions were tape recorded and a typed transcription was made of each. The date, place, and individual interviewed were noted on all transcribed copies and each was filed in a separate folder labeled with the executive's name.

The transcribed data were displayed on pages in columns of type approximately four inches wide. This format left wide margins on both sides for coding notations and comments.

**Open Coding.** Through the "open coding" process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), the apparent order of the text data was disrupted, reorganized, conceptualized and rearranged in new ways. Open coding is the foundational course in constructing a grounded theory. At this level the researcher begins examining, comparing, and conceptualizing the data in order to develop categories.

In working through the first transcript, reading each line to capture the entirety of the conversation, certain events or observations were given conceptual labels. At
times I asked questions of the data such as, what is this (event)? At other times, hand and pencil moved quickly to script an obvious term.

After coding the first transcript, a code book was begun to document established interpretations and their meanings. I also initiated the practice of listing the codes and arranging them in compatible groups as a preamble to categorizing.

One of the objects of open coding is to emerge from the process with groupings of concepts appropriately represented by a label which is more abstract than the names below it. Strauss and Corbin (1990) call such an activity categorizing. Their advice and that of peer debriefers and committee members was followed. The result was five categories under which were subsumed similar, but more concrete, concepts identified as subcategories. The five categories were executive leadership, governance, resources, survival, and spirituality. With these in hand, the stage was set for the development of each category in terms of its properties and dimensions.

**Axial Coding.** Axial Coding is a complex process that is useful in linking and developing categories identified, through open coding. In fact, where open coding fractures the data, axial coding is a critical step in achieving synthesis and developing grounded theory. In following the system suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990),
categories were identified, then each was analyzed to discover important properties or characteristics. These properties became subcategories. The key activity in axial coding related subcategories to their major heading. In this case, linked executive performance as a subcategory to executive leadership.

Through the use of "The Paradigm Model" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I was challenged to think systematically about the data, to relate hypothetically subcategories to categories through the use of relational statements, verify my hypotheses against actual text data, continue the development of categories and their sub-parts, and be alert to variations discovered by comparing dimensional locations of instances of data. To continue the example from above, the subcategory executive performance is a phenomenon or event which is the result of precipitating or causal conditions. A visual representation of the process appears below:

**The Paradigm Model**

(A) Causal Conditions --> (B) Phenomenon --> (C) Context --> (D) Intervening Conditions --> (E) Action/Interaction Strategies --> (F) Consequences

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 99)

After identifying causal conditions leading to the phenomenon, it was then easier to specify the context within which it occurred. The context would then provide clues as to the action/interaction strategies taken to manage or
respond to the particular phenomenon. Action/interactional strategies are purposeful or reflexive acts which are directed toward managing, handling, carrying out or responding to the phenomenon. The data then becomes a source for identifying strategies, intervening conditions, and consequences.

My experience with the logic diagrams recommended by Strauss and Corbin indicated that they were valuable tools in stimulating the back-and-forth process of inductive/deductive thinking, and also in discovering the sometimes hidden treasures in data analysis.

The third and final type of analysis used was that of selective coding. The purpose here was to develop a clear story line which would translate into an analytic tale describing the phenomenon. During the selective coding phase, a core category was chosen. The core category is one that seems to contain the essence of the study. The task then was to relate all the other categories to the core and to each other. Again the data becomes a validating source for verifying relationships among the categories.

I devoted close attention to the total data analysis process to make certain that the identified categories and their relationships to each other were supported by factual accounts in working towards a grounded theory.
Protection of Participants

Implicit in the qualitative method is the collaboration between researcher and participant as they engage in mutual social construction.

Provisions were made to fully inform participants of the ensuing encounter through use of an introductory script (see Appendix A). The same document also served as an informed consent form. One signed copy was retained for my files and the other given to the participant. Participants were also aware that this study had met the requirements of the human subjects committee of the university.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of the qualitative methodology employed during this investigation permitted the inner views of participants, which represent the multiple realities of their lived experiences, to be captured. Through the interactive dialogic process of interviewing, there existed freedom to negotiate meaning and quickly clarify ambiguities which led to expeditious feedback and data summary. Each individual construction made an important contribution to creating a greater understanding of the phenomenon of executive leadership.

Another advantage of qualitative methods is the flexibility in obtaining data. The natural setting proved
ideal for identifying sense data and especially for gathering information which is gained through feeling, expression and intuition. The use of multiple data sources, the emerging nature of the design, and the intended thick description all contributed to explaining the knowledge base of Social Work Administration and providing a foundation from which other research can be launched.

In terms of limitations, the small, nonrandom sample used in this study restricts the generalizability of the findings. Also, qualitative studies are not easily replicated and the results some claim to be ideographic. These facts, judged by some to be frailties of alternative research, do not impair the strength and usefulness of qualitative methodology.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The findings reported here are the outcome of tape recorded interviews with eight female executives, four African Americans and four Caucasians, who headed small nonprofit human service organizations. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to the procedures described above.

The results presented here are not solely the constructions of the investigator but also represent the interactions and transactions between researcher and participants. What follows is more than a presentation of data. Through the findings, we gain a measure of knowledge about and an understanding of, the human affairs of eight individuals. Through the women’s shared personal histories, we gain a perspective of how these particular women thought, acted, and lived the complex reality of female executives in the nonprofit sector. Through their voices we can glimpse the settings and situations which affected their lives and also the behaviors they exhibited.
To facilitate reporting of the findings, this chapter introduces the executives through brief individual characterizations. The executives are referred to by first name; however, their names and circumstances have been fictionalized for reasons of confidentiality.

Following the introduction of the executives, general descriptions of their organizations are presented. To facilitate presentation of the organizational findings, concepts familiar from the literature are used. The nature and structure of the executives' organizations are depicted through their complexity, formalization, and centralization. Organizational size, technology, and financial resources are also described. The chapter ends with findings relative to the locations and populations served by the organizations.
Background of Executives

The common thread uniting the participants, in addition to gender, is that they head small nonprofit human service organizations. All the women except one have been or are working mothers and wives. The participants arrived at their executive positions from backgrounds which span the career spectrum. Some came to their managerial rank via the homemaker and community volunteer route. Others arrived as veterans of the so-called blue collar work force, and still others traveled the professional path to become chief administrators. Among them, the women represented a total of 82 years of on-the-job administrative experience with an average of nearly eight years each.

In regard to education, the respondents comprised a fairly well educated group. All had been enrolled in or completed some form of post secondary schooling. One woman was within a few quarters of completing a degree in Social Work. Table 1 gives further detail about the characteristics of the executives.
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>N=4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Service Experience</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization Founder</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Time as Director (years)</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age of Organization (years)</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Organization Budget</td>
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<td>$282,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Based Organization</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served Large Minority Population</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Federation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *One executive is classed as founder/rescuer
- = none in this category
org. = Organization
yrs. = Years

Table 4.1: Characteristics of Female Executives

70
All of the women had rich histories of service in voluntary organizations where they had opportunities to display commitment, dedication, and determination. Woven throughout the women's experience, were critical personal events which attuned them to their need and desire to give and their sense of connectedness with others. Important in the backgrounds of many of the women was a sense of spirituality which stemmed from a religious base.

In reflecting on what led them to their leadership positions, none of the women claimed that being a chief executive was the end goal of her efforts. Leadership roles seemed to emerge as part of a natural process as steps were taken to provide necessary services to meet perceived needs. One executive stated:

I went to the State Department of Education to ask how do you start a school. I was gathering information for others whom I felt were in a position to start a school. Nobody was willing to take the risk or make the economic sacrifice, and it seemed to all evolve.

Another executive told how she wanted to provide needed service but without the traditional trappings of organization structure:

I did not want to be a director or executive director. Founder and coordinator were my first titles. When we started applying for grants, I had to make myself executive director or there would have been some problems. Still, I had to think long and hard about it.
Of the eight female executives, six were identified as organization founders. Of the two remaining executives, one can be classed as both founder and rescuer. The other executive is identified as a rescuer. The term rescuer is used because through their actions, the women were able to revitalize organizations whose survival was questionable. The latter two executives moved to administrative status after serving on their organizations' board of directors. The founder/rescuer describes herself as a "founding mother" along with eight other females. She was asked to assume the leadership role of executive director during the sixth year of the organization's operation after board members became dissatisfied with the performance of the previous director. The other female rescuer assumed her position as the organization's first executive following two years of service as board president.

All the women except one have the distinction of being their organization's first executive director. A vignette of each executive follows.

**Beth (founder):** Four years ago Beth, a Caucasian, received a bachelors degree in education. She decided to act on her desire to develop a basic skills program which would help move adults from dependency to self-sufficiency.
Drawing on years of experience in political campaigns, Beth, with the help of friends, began a community learning center in an inner-city neighborhood.

Beth sees her organization as filling a gap in the education system. The first facility for the agency was in an apartment within a public housing project. For the last two years the organization has rented the upper floor of a duplex near it’s original site. What she lacked in experience, Beth made up for with enthusiasm and determination. She said of her early days:

I just had to keep going. Now, I’m all the more determined to make this program succeed.

Despite skirmishes with personal feelings of failure, insecurity, and financial difficulties, after three years Beth’s assessment was:

It’s just now getting to where there’s some relief and not every week is an uphill battle.

**Carla (founder)** After receiving her masters degree in education, and working briefly as a public school teacher, Carla felt compelled to start a Christian-based school. An African American, Carla has designed a curriculum to meet the special needs of children of her race. However, the school is open to all. She confides that for her, employment in a traditional school setting was not an option.
Trial and error have been Carla’s best teachers in addition to her intensive training in education. She commented:

You get in the real world—things that sound good on paper are not always practical. My training for school administration was for a public setting. Somebody was going to make sure I had a secretary or custodian in the building. I’m not part of a bureaucratic institution so I’m the somebody who covers all the bases.

I think that what my scholastic training did was make me believe I could do it [be a school administrator] because the degree said I could.

Connie (rescuer)  An active volunteer, Connie moved from the ranks of home manager and PTA president to act as paid coordinator for a local arts group. Eventually, she became board president of a statewide family intervention program and entered the executive ranks as the organization’s first director. Connie is Caucasian and described herself as moderately middle class. Connie’s belief in the importance of building and maintaining strong family units was the force behind her acceptance, as a new member, of a board presidency which was uncontested. About this bold step she said:

I’ve always been a person willing to take the leadership role, work very hard at whatever task, and do a good job in whatever I’ve been involved in.

I felt confident that my strong belief in families was the greatest thing that I had. I also knew from tackling other things that I knew nothing about, that I could acquire the knowledge I needed to perform the task. I wasn’t afraid to try new things and take risks.
Deann (founder)  As founder and executive director of Career Concepts, a vocational education program for adults, Deann fulfills her desire to, "Give something back." Deann founded her organization eight years ago and has been a full-time executive for the past five. She was employed for 18 years as an executive secretary by a major food conglomerate. Deann is African American and has grown to espouse and embrace the philosophy that success is possible. She recounts from her experience:

I didn't know I had ability until someone else saw it in me. I had a bad attitude, a drinking problem, and I realized that I was self-destructive and needed a change. I joined a support group to boost my self-esteem and became involved in volunteer activities.

I always wanted to give something back, to let others know they can achieve. That is my total goal.

Elayne (founder)  As a community activist, Elayne spent four years as chairperson of a neighborhood commission. Seeing the need to develop her community from a holistic perspective, she parlayed her volunteer experiences into a funded position as executive of a new community assistance organization. Elayne is Caucasian, and credited her non co-ed education as the main reason for her confident attitude.

It may be different today, but 20 years ago in that context (a women's college) the maturing process--coming to know who you are--was much easier. There was an atmosphere in which I did
not hesitate to speak up because I was a woman. We were all women and we were the norm. It was natural for me to express my ideas and opinions.

Iris (founder) With more than 15 years in higher education as a professor and administrator, Iris resigned her position to found and direct a community-based non-traditional literacy program. Iris is an African American, and approaches teaching from an Africentric perspective. She structures her organization along those philosophical and cultural beliefs. Iris said:

I know as a Black woman what I'm going to be up against with Black men on the board or whoever I work with. Understanding systems and organizations has helped a lot in terms of how to be more confident about a structure that is not a traditional structure. I'm very comfortable.

Martha (rescuer) Martha, who is Caucasian, drew on her skills in office management. Applying knowledge gained through years of treatment in drug recovery programs, she helped co-found a rehabilitation program for women with children. As a former board member of her organization and an employee of other intervention programs for women, Martha's skills emerged as she sought to help others. In her current position, Martha is the second female director of the agency.

I took this job as a short term assignment. They were trying to get certified by the state, and I knew how to do that because I had done it twice before on other jobs.
Now, in terms of where we've come in four years, we're probably the second or first in the state in the number of housing units we have for clients, and that's pretty extraordinary.

**Nyda (founder):** Forced to abandon the goal of completing her college education, Nyda, as an African American teenager, became a sales clerk. She later traded that position for one of higher pay in a factory. Sixteen years later Nyda is founder and administrator of an organization involved in drug rehabilitation and prevention. Nyda's program is structured specifically for the African American community. She commented on important background experiences.

As far as corporate experience, my score is zero. Basically, my administrative skills developed from involvement with various church projects. I also gained basic people skills from those experiences and from my previous jobs.

The above brief sketches give some insight into the complex and creative individuals who have launched careers as human service administrators. Regardless of their background and education, it is evident that each woman had previously developed and exercised leadership abilities and skills in volunteer and/or work situations. Each of the women came to her executive role boldly yet naively, expecting and experiencing difficulty, uncertainty, and a measure of success. Through the findings, generated by the research questions, the realities of the executive females materialize as a textured, colorful, and intricate weave of individuality, affinity, and difference.

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The Nature and Structure
of the Executives' Organizations

When applied to organizations, the terms nature and structure are familiar concepts used to indicate how parts or units of an organization are joined together to create a functioning entity.

"It was the worst of times, it was the best of times," might be an apt phrase to describe the context within which the executives' organizations came to exist. Seven of the organizations were founded during the 1980's, when federal funding cuts by the Reagan administration drastically trimmed the budgets of social service agencies. The eighth organization, established in the early 1990's, was founded when society was experiencing social deterioration due largely to cutbacks in or elimination of poverty programs (McNeely, 1992). Most of the organizations were initiated solely by female executives-to-be while others were established by groups of males and females. All of the organizations were founded through entrepreneurial action and designated as charitable nonprofit entities in the human service field.

While a majority of the executives expressed preference for structures which were less bureaucratic, those who had organizational charts depicted their agency in the traditional executive line and staff manner.

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Complexity of Organizations

For the most part, organizations formed by the executives began as very simple structures. Where division of labor usually leads to levels of hierarchy, the configurations of the new entities were low to flat with little to no horizontal differentiation. In many cases, the executives began with a single employee—themselves. As the organizations developed and human resources increased, inter-agency controls and coordination were added. Currently, the organizations present a variety of arrangements from low complexity to complex.

Formalization of Organizations

Mission

As a group, the organizations are aligned with values that reflect commitment and dedication to improving the quality of life of people in need. Some organizations had written mission statements and others had statements of purpose. The mission statements were largely problem-focused and tended to limit organization boundaries to the Franklin County area. Regardless of the title given, all executives were clear and articulate about their reasons for organizational founding, and continuance. Table 4.2 gives a brief description of the organizational missions.
Written Policies

With reasons for an organization's existence clearly stated, written organizational policies, as guides for action, should follow. Basic rules and written procedures such as by-laws and other formalities necessary to comply with legal requirements were in place. Older and high budget organizations were more up to date with written policies mainly because of stipulations from funding sources. The newer organizations however, tended toward the practice of executive discretion in determining courses of action. Rules were usually formulated as events required and only later committed to paper.

One exception to the above was Carla's organization. In order to be chartered by the state, the school had to meet a number of regulations and requirements prior to serving students. Carla's organization began with formalized procedures in place before the doors opened.

As other positions were added within the organizations, the executives developed job descriptions which explained the duties, functions, and responsibilities of employees. In regards to their own positions, five of the women have formal job descriptions detailing their executive responsibilities. Where job performance is concerned, only one executive reported receiving formal evaluations from her
<table>
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<td>Women &amp; Children</td>
<td>Fed./St. Govmt.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyda</td>
<td>Drug Rehab Prevention</td>
<td>African American Women &amp; Children</td>
<td>St. Govmt.</td>
<td>1.6M</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.**  
Bd. Mem = Board members  
Devlmnt. = Development  
Ed. = Education  
Exec. = Executive  
Fed. = Federal  
Govmt. = Government  
K = Thousand  
K-8 = Kindergarten through 8th grade  
M = Million  
N.hood. = Neighborhood  
Org. = Organization  
Rehab = Rehabilitation  
St. = State

Table 4.2: Selected Organizational Characteristics
board of directors. Informal verbal comments from board members gave the other executives some feedback on how their performance was being perceived.

Centralization of Organizations

Decision Making

The decision-making mode observed in the organizations of the females was one of centralized activity--decisions largely controlled by the executives. Decentralization, decision-making pushed down into the agency, was a rarity not because executives were reluctant to include others in the process, but because many times there were few others to include. Although all the organizations structurally were formed with governing boards, the members in most cases did not function as true policy setting groups. Rather than the boards setting policy and procedure, it was more common for the women to inform their boards as to the course and direction their organizations would take.

Boards of Directors

In regard to the overall makeup of the boards, Carla had the smallest with three members while Connie's organization was steered by a group of 26. The average board composition was around 10 members per organization. While board rosters initially reflected friends and associates of the executives, their composition quickly
changed to include a greater cross section of the community—especially individuals from the corporate sector. A common occurrence was the formation of ad hoc committees. Such groups allowed influential individuals from the business community to be involved in particular organizations without incurring the responsibilities of board membership.

Size, Technology, and Financial Resources of Organizations

Size

Using the number of employees within each organization as an indicator of size, all can be listed as small. The total number of employees per organization varies from two to twenty-two with eight being the average. As expected, the organizations with more tenure, have the most employees.

Physical capacity is another aspect of size, and the organizations run the gamut. Connie’s organization is housed in a large room of a building owned by another nonprofit organization. Currently, no rent is being charged for the space; however, this situation is likely to change in the future.

Minor facility renovation might be considered a sideline for Elayne since her organization has moved from pillar to post within her community. Elayne’s goal is to secure a neighborhood location which would also provide
space for other community groups. Carla owns her campus facility which is a far cry from her humble rental beginnings. Headquarters for Nyda and Iris is a business incubator located in the community of their target populations. Nyda’s organization has grown to the extent that there are several service delivery sites. Beth and Martha have offices in transformed residential abodes. Martha is currently working with an architect on the redesign of a facility which would bring all administrative offices and some program services under one roof. From a Sunday school room in a community church to a suite of offices is the route Deann took. However, she too has further plans for changing her location.

**Technology**

The organizations formed by the female executives were designed to deliver services through high touch (human) rather than high tech (mechanical). Service delivery hinged upon methods of prevention or intervention which would change, constrain, and/or support the behavior of designated individuals or specific groups. The eight organizations could be classed as offering developmental services which involved education, economic, social, and/or human improvement.

A specific technology used by Iris’ organization was the Africentric approach. Such a strategy promotes an
African world view as an alternative to the traditional western or European paradigm, is culturally based, and targeted for African Americans (see Table 4.2).

**Financial Resources**

The fact that the organizations have been able to garner resources, especially financial support from their environment, is an indication of their acceptance as legitimate entities.

The median organizational budget of $413,500 gives a deceptive picture for the group (see Table 2). Those organizations at the high end have watched their budgets soar within the last four years. Martha and Nyda's organizations also receive funding from some of the same government sources. Organization budgets and ranges are given in Table 2.

Regarding sources of income, the government, whether federal, state or local is the leading resource. Government funding was totally rejected by Beth's board which opted for support from the private sector and foundations. Tuition generates the revenue for Carla's operation. Iris' goal is that 80 percent of her funding come from the African American community. However, she recently submitted and received a grant from a local foundation. Nearly all of the organizations have received funding from the same foundation.
Raising dollars beyond budget demands is a concern of each executive. However, none had what she considered to be formalized fund development plans. About half of the executives are involved in private fundraising activities.

Location and Populations Served

The geographic boundaries of the organizations ranged from specific local neighborhoods to including the entire state. Elayne and Beth were concerned with conditions within certain communities and limited their operations to those areas. The mission of Connie’s organization includes service throughout the state. For the others, their target areas were city wide.

Minority populations were served by a majority of the organizations. Iris has dedicated her literacy organization to serve and draw sustenance from African Americans. Also, Carla’s school and Nyda’s drug rehabilitation program are both structured to meet the special needs of African Americans. Beth and Martha design their programs to meet the needs of the clientele requiring their services; however, African Americans are the predominant recipients. Working in community development, Elayne’s organization serves a mixed group of individuals who reside in the neighborhood.
Connie's organization, with a statewide focus, is most likely to interact with service providers, the large majority of whom are White (see Table 2).

The above presentation of the executives and their organizations concludes Chapter 4. The purpose of the preceding information was to provide a contextual backdrop for the following findings.
CHAPTER 5

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES

Chapter 5 presents the multiple constructions of the respondents, the eight female executives, involved in this study. Extensive quotations from the executives are used to give them voice concerning their reality and also recognition as co-producers of knowledge (Lincoln, 1995).

This chapter is arranged so that the presentation of data facilitates answering the research questions. The questions and briefly stated findings are presented, in outline form, prior to the detailed results. This step was taken because of the length and detail of this particular chapter. The following is more than the results of a detailed investigation. The findings represent an undertaking to gain knowledge about the diverse phenomenon of executive leadership and the women who have experienced it.
CHAPTER 5

I. Personal Strategies
   A. Hat sense
   B. Ethics
   C. Vision

II. Interpersonal Strategies
   A. Networking
   B. Relating to board and staff members

2. What are the self-perceptions of the female executives as they fulfill their duties and responsibilities as leaders?

   I. I'm pretty good
      A. Identified accomplishments and strengths
      B. Realized their centrality and importance to organization.
      C. Not doing a job

3. How have female executives constructed their knowledge base for successful performance at the executive level?

   I. Learning at the Top
      A. Self discipline to gain new skills
      B. Observation
      C. Experience
         1. led to new actions
      D. Recognized areas of deficiency
         1. made corrections
      E. Difficult task
         1. proposal writing

4. What motivated the female executives to risk organization start-up and continuance?

   I. Reasons
      A. Work they liked to do
      B. Inner drive led to motive
      C. Experiences led to motive
      D. Enjoyed work
         1. satisfaction from work
      E. Felt work important
      F. Community welfare, concern for others
         1. Executive leadership not goal
      G. Motives sometimes questioned by others

II. Special Challenges
   A. Money re funding
   B. People problem

III. Responding to a Higher Power
   A. Belief in destiny
      1. Divine guidance
   B. Responding to purpose
   C. Prepared for their work

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4. (cont.)

5. How were the personal lives of the female executives affected by their leadership roles?

IV. Blessings

I. Family Sacrifice
   A. Assuming debt for org.
   B. Deferring dreams
   C. Husbands supportive
      1. provide income for family
      2. Suggested strategies

II. Personal Sacrifice
   A. Self as primary resource
   B. Postponed or denied salary, other benefits
   C. Volunteered time
   D. Committed

III. Being Exec. and Female
   A. Tend to put self last
   B. Woman get things done
      1. creative
      2. survival instinct
      3. nurturing
   C. Gender barrier
      1. Aggressive or assertive
      2. Less capable
      3. A threat
   D. Adopting men’s ways?
      1. competitive women
      2. system encourages
   E. Need for support

6. How have the female executives managed available resources to ensure organization maintenance and survival?

I. Boards of Directors
   A. Good relations with
   B. Formation of boards
      1. friends & acquaintances
      2. Some traditional some grassroots
   C. Restructuring of
      1. New blood
      2. people with contacts, money, experience
      3. Representative of larger community
      4. Rare Jewels
6. (continued)

D. Volunteer or Board Member
   1. No concept of board procedure
   2. Relied on Exec. for leadership

E. Board Members & Bucks
   1. Most did little fundraising
   2. One org. involved heavy hitters
   3. Most had no fundraisers

II. Human Resources
   A. Dedication of staff
   B. Building Teammates
      1. Respect & dignity
      2. Empowering staff

III. Financial Resources
   A. From nothing to something
      1. Start-up dollars few
      2. Philosophy driven
   B. Staying Alive
      1. No precise plans
      2. Ideas of for-profit venture
      3. Fundraising ideas
      4. Goal displacement
   C. Begging or fundraising
      1. Disliked by most
      2. Devised plans for income
Leadership Strategies

Leadership strategies are identified as either personal actions, those things done individually by the executive, or interpersonal actions, things done in relation to others for the purpose of organizational growth and survival. Personal and interpersonal actions are purposeful behaviors which result in consequences either positive or negative. The personal leadership actions of the female executives are introduced first with interpersonal strategies following.

Personal Strategies

Behaviors and practices identified as personal strategies were those which the women adopted and adapted as they worked solo, relying on themselves as their most able resource.

Hat Sense

The context for leadership strategies began when the women accepted a role which moved them into the realm of chief executive. As head administrators new to the requirements and demands of their jobs, the women were faced with establishing legitimacy and stability for their organizations.

Quickly the executives adapted to doing what had to be done whenever it needed to be done. They became immersed in activities which carried high risks for error, taxed their
creativity and problem-solving abilities, and moved them in and out of management crises.

Without exception, each executive shared instances where she "had done it all" to keep the organization stable and moving forward. In describing their many and varied actions, some of the women used the metaphor of wearing several hats. As they moved in and out of multiple roles and responsibilities, the executives acquired an uncultivated expertise—hat sense—which grew and developed out of necessity. It seemed to be something that was just there—perhaps intrinsic to the nature of women. As Elayne voiced:

**Elayne:** [It’s] something you don’t know you can’t do so you just go and try.

As the women talked about the myriad duties they performed, hat sense seemed more than switching caps. Blended in was a "just do it!" aura combined with large doses of common sense and instinct.

**Martha** I never really realized I did this until we had a federal technical audit. They asked me how do you do your planning and I went (she shrugs her shoulders). It was kind of amusing because I didn’t realize that I always think in large future. A lot of it was instinct. I didn’t think about it to know that you just do some things and it’s like oh! Ah!

What may be considered instinct for one executive, another related as a gut level sense of "just knowing"—which guided her in performing her duties.
Connie I just knew what needed to be done as far as I thought. I just kind of winged it through. Also, I was operating under a lack of resources, and often I’d say if I just had another Connie, maybe I could do it all.

Sometimes the executives found themselves doing "at least two things at once." On other occasions, they were switching hats rapidly to don the right head covering for the right occasion.

Deanne To do the things I want to do, I’m triple doing them. It's like I’m wearing about 25 hats and I would like to only wear one.

The circumstances of these female leaders required that hat sense be used often and over long periods of time. Although the women presided as chief administrators, their professional lives bore scant resemblance to their counterparts in corporate America. There were no executive suites nor a retinue of staff to whom one could delegate "other duties as assigned."

Martha I worked alone for almost the first year. Two of us for almost the next year—year and a half, and it went to three then to five, and that’s been real difficult.

Pressing responsibilities encountered by the executives often seemed to be a swirl of administrative, professional, and clerical duties all arising from a shortage of personnel resources.

Martha For so long I had twelve hats. I was doing fundraising, the clinical direction, some of the counseling, quality assurance, all of that.

Connie When I came on as board president, we didn’t have an executive director. We had an office administrator who worked five hours a week.
I didn’t know until much later that as board
president, I was performing many of the functions
that an executive director would be doing.

Elayne It’s primarily myself and the
administrative assistant (after seven years).
Really, we’re both kind of part-time. I do about
30 hours a week and Jan does about 20 hours a
week.

One might expect that as an organization matures, that
sense would become an act of the past. However, on the day
of our interview, Carla, whose organization has been in
operation for 13 years, apologized for her lateness as she
rushed in from fixing a sink in the boys bathroom. Her
custodian was off ill and there was no one else to do the
job. To compound matters, she had a sick child at home and
needed to move our meeting to her residence located across
the school parking lot. She recalled:

Carla That first year I had two other
teachers. I was full time and they were full
time. I taught first and second grade, but I had
to be the accountant, the secretary, the nurse. I
drove the school bus. After school we cleaned
toilets, we vacuumed, we did all the custodial
work. I took care of paying bills. I did it
all. I spent 12-14 hour days.

Out of need, participants of this study had to take on
a variety of essential jobs within the organization.
Although the women became aficionados at hat sense, the act
was not without an exacting cost.

On the professional side, usually the sacrifice was
taking time necessary for complex administrative tasks and
exchanging that for labor intensive chores of a more
immediate nature. Such trade-offs created tension between

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the women's role as an executive and the need to perform other organizational duties. Little time was left for the mental activity of forging strategies and crafting plans. It was not unusual to hear comments on how other responsibilities diverted time and energies from tackling more involved administrative tasks.

Elayne Actually, I'm ready to be more of an administrator if I had more staff. But I end up doing every day little minutiae kinds of things because there just isn't personnel and staff. It's hard to be here figuring things out and budgeting and getting dollars. I'm going to go out tomorrow and deliver newsletters door to door which is fine. It is time taken away from other things but it has to be done.

On the personal side, competing role demands meant that in many instances, the private lives of the executives revolved around professional demands. Admitting that her perspective on personal and work priorities has been, at times, very narrow, Nyda commented:

Nyda I often get caught up with meeting expectations, deadlines, etc. After a while you start thinking that the agency revolves around you. I need to remember that I have a family.

Ethics

While the word ethics did not crop up during any of the conversations with the executives, it was clear that the foundation for their practice was and is a solid bedrock of high moral conduct. Even though necessity may have presented immediate and critical needs, they were met with
principled actions emanating from beliefs and behaviors formed over the years and practiced many times in a variety of circumstances.

Nyda decided early on that she would operate on the premise of being honest about what she knew and what she didn't know. In the early days of her organization’s operation, common sense bookkeeping was used to track dollars. She relates the following conversation with a newly hired fiscal manager.

Nyda: I told him that you may find some things out of place or not filed correctly, but you won't find any mismanagement of money.

A sense of ethical practice was also evident in the careful steps the women took to conform to standards and regulations set by government and funding entities. Also, each executive consciously established multiple interagency relationships and collaborative arrangements with well-known and established institutions. Through their personal presentation and actions within the community, the executives gained and maintained legitimacy for their organizations.

Vision

Vision usually refers to the ability to see with the eye. However, in regard to the female executives, vision referred to their ability, through mental acuteness or keen foresight, to perceive things not actually visible. Neither quest for high position nor desire for power were the
driving aims which led these women to imagine optimistic futures, regardless of current conditions or circumstances. Vision is what moved them to and kept them in their executive roles.

Each woman was stirred by a personal vision and a desire to improve the current social order by providing a needed service to a segment of society. One might think that the executives were guided by a clear vision in establishing and maintaining their organizations. Connie began with a general idea which became more precise with time.

Connie: I didn’t really have a real clear picture about all the things that a state organization would be doing. I knew we needed to get off the ground. I just saw us becoming the cheer-leaders, the advocates of the local programs at the state level.

Often when imaging their organization’s future, the executives used phrases such as "I see," "I want to," "I would like to," and "my hope is." Such expressions were indications that the executives not only had vision coupled with belief but also a strong desire to bring about certain realities. As I listened to these statements, I had the sense that even as the women were speaking and hearing their words, they were reinforcing their resolve to do the things uttered. Taking stock of the organization’s current status usually caused the executives to think about future prospects. The phrases, while personal, were always inclusive of the organization.
Beth I want to see this program become an established part of the community. I want to see it have a reputation of being very successful for providing absolutely quality education.

Elayne I would like to see us (her organization) involved in both economic and neighborhood development. I would like to be able to create that situation to show people that it can be done.

Nyda realized that while being a visionary is a good and necessary characteristic for leadership, one can become misdirected. To stay on track she devised the following plan.

Nyda Periodically I would question myself as to is this what I’m to do? Is this my purpose? I’m very clear that everything is not for us to do. That helps keep me directed.

Two of the women, Iris and Carla, who are African American, are very clear as to their purpose for organizational existence. They were prompted to start their organizations because of visions focused toward providing a needed service to their people. Their reasoning was and is that African Americans, because of their minority status within the larger social system, have different yet vital needs which are not addressed by main stream institutions. Their vision refined, formed the framework for the mission of their organizations.

Initially, Carla was determined to have an integrated school. However, as time, events, and organizational growth were blended, the product was a very clear mission to serve African American children. Carla bats not an eyelash in
saying that her goal is to be the premier school for African American students. She sees the school as filling a void some Black parents have overlooked or feel ill-equipped to fill.

**Carla** We have a mission for African American children because our needs are special. We live in a dual society, and our children have to learn how to live in both worlds. There is no way that a person who is not familiar with that duality can teach a child to live in both worlds.

What has happened is that a lot of our parents missed the days when things were segregated. So, they think things are comfortable. Some of us are getting rude awakenings and don’t know how to cope. We have to teach our children how to live in a dual society and how to be able to meet the challenges and succeed in this society. That’s why we need an African American school.

Carla does not reject integration and believes there is a need for it. She was educated in a mixed school, and asserts that some children can handle an integrated school setting. However, her school exists for those children who need and those parents who desire an alternative.

At the outset, Iris designed her program for African Americans and people of color. Drawing from their urban community, historical roots, and cultural norms, she promotes her non-traditional literacy program as a tool for liberation and decolonization. Admittedly leaning toward socialism, Iris has a passion for social change which transcends the boundary of her organization and directs her focus toward ways of empowering her people.
Iris. The vision is getting people to realize their own power by believing in themselves so they can begin to make changes in the system. I share through my teaching.

Before formally incorporating as an organization, Iris had a vague notion of doing something that would benefit her community. As a professional in developmental education, she had numerous opportunities to test various personal theories about literacy and critical thinking. Arriving at the right combination, Iris knew when she was ready to present her offering. She explains that, "My people deserve the very best."

While images of their organization's future state may have begun as general thoughts, the executives had methods for sharpening their focus. Many of them fine tuned their vision through sharing their dreams, hopes, and plans with others. In this way, they gained support and useful feedback.

Through her interaction with government officials, Elayne developed a method of sharing her vision and gaining feedback which worked effectively for her. She used the framework of a concept paper to express her ideas.

Elayne. Well, what I have done is, I have put together a paper called the Northside Initiative which I have given to the city trying to encourage them to think holistically about community development and the northside.

Writing was a valuable tool for Elayne which helped to crystalize her vision as she worked to change the mind-set
which guided local policies. Having a written concept of her ideas also gave the government staffers something to respond to.

Almost all the executives was that of getting out of the office and away from administrative responsibilities in order to further their vision. Virtually in echo fashion, the women explained how a lack of resources, particularly human, prevented them from pursuing their ideas as they would like.

**Martha** In terms of the vision part, I think I’m only doing that on a small scale. Hopefully, in the next two years I will be more involved in being out in the community.

**Deann** In the future, I will hire an executive director and get out of here. I will be the one who goes around and promotes the business. That’s where I’ve been stagnant. I have only me to blame, except I had no choice. I had to be here [in the office].

**Carla** My vision is to get it [the school] established really good so I can get out. I do want it to be a very strong entity so that it can survive.

**Interpersonal Strategies**

**Networking**

Excellent interpersonal, oral and written communication skills have come to be known as basic leadership requirements. The executives who definitely had these skills in hand spoke with enthusiasm about networking, building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships with
others. Networking was frequently mentioned as an important strategy which yielded rewarding dividends.

Connie    Networking is a tremendous resource. Involving other people, their knowledge, and expertise in what you’re doing is so important in this kind of position.

You never know what you’re going to find out and how it might increase your resources and open up doors of opportunity.

Networking was not new to Connie, and as a self-described extrovert she "never met a stranger." As an executive, she found herself operating on a different plane which put her in touch with key decision makers. Making the most of her opportunities and resources, Connie acted on advice from a new contact and landed an influential board member.

Connie    The governor had been elected but not sworn in yet. A friend encouraged me to think big and go after Mrs. Voinovich. I wrote her a letter.

Our office administrator suggested that perhaps our Cleveland contact knew Mrs. Voinovich and wouldn’t mind approaching her. I called our contact and proposed the idea. She said, ‘Well, I don’t know her. I’ve met her a couple of times but not well enough to get on the phone and call.’ I asked if she could write a letter. This she was willing to do.

Well, Mrs. Voinovich responded immediately to my letter saying she was sorry but the governor and she had decided not to sit on any boards.

A couple of days later I received a call from Mrs. Voinovich’s secretary saying that they had a letter from our Cleveland contact and Mrs. Voinovich understood more about the situation, and that she has reconsidered and will be on our board.

The whole point in all of this is that I received so much from other people. That’s why I love to talk to people.
In her networking, Iris drew on the fact that she had formed friendships in locales where she once lived. Using this network as a base, Iris had constructed a specific appeal for her organization.

Iris  Now I'm calling friends that I know across the country. A friend in Tucson, I asked her for help. She gave me names of a couple people. I just wrote a man in Charleston who owns a radio station. His name was given to me. I am networking with Blacks and my plea is from a Black perspective.

Nyda's network included professionals experienced and skilled in prevention procedures. Their assistance in program development netted a grant which brought initial funding dollars for her organization.

Networking for the executives also involved the art of selling the benefits and advantages of their services. Carla explains this important concept.

Carla  Unlike the public schools we are not guaranteed a population. We have to sell our product and a lot of it is word of mouth. We produce quality students. When parents see our students being successful in the program then they are pleased. They usually tell their friends and their relatives. We have a lot of families here and a lot of people belong to the same church.

Relating to Board and Staff Members

When the executives spoke of networking, they, in most instances, were referring to making contacts with persons outside their organizations. Interactions within the organization were with board members and staff. In talking
about both groups, the executives expressed that relations were in general, better than good. Of her staff, Carla says with a smile:

Carla Everyone’s down to earth. They call me boss lady because they know I don’t like it. But it’s just a wholesome environment.

Board and executive relations were on a high cooperative level; however, the executives expressed concern in regards to power issues within the organization. Because circumstances required the women to assume many responsibilities beyond their executive role, a potential for them to assume absolute power and control existed. Yet having such a tight hold on the reins of power was not what the executives wanted. More than once, comments indicated that the opinions, suggestions, and input from others was highly desired, valued, and sought after.

Elayne I have a real concern in that most of what we do is kind of—it comes from me.

Martha It really has been a one woman show. I told my board two years ago, that can’t be. This organization cannot stay this way.

As the women discussed their organizations, an unmistakable sense of pride came through not only in words stated but also in facial expressions and tone of voice. Deann, in responding to queries pertaining to the lack of oversight and direction from others in regards to the organization’s state of affairs exclaimed:

Deann This is my baby (the organization) and I’m not about to mess up my baby!
The executives placed emphasis on building the skills and abilities of board members and staff to enhance their development as individuals and as contributors to the organization. More detailed findings about the boards of directors and personnel are given under Managing Organizational Resources.

**Summary**

In response to question number one, the data show that the leadership strategies practiced by the female executives can be divided into personal and interpersonal strategies.

Personal strategies were tasks which the executives did mostly alone, and which required them to be adaptable, honest, and far-sighted. Hat sense, ethical practice, and vision were executed mainly by relying on intuition and common sense. Hat sense allowed the executives to tackle multiple labor intensive tasks within the organization, but at the expense of sacrificing time for reflection and planning. Ethical practice served as a philosophical and moral boundary for the executives as they juggled competing demands and tried to maintain a semblance of balance in their lives.

Vision was an important leadership quality which the executives recognized and used. Vision inspired the executives to "see" the desired future state of their organization. The executives clarified their vision through revision, periodically questioning their purposes, and
communicating their concepts to others. Vision produced organization mission, was the underlying stimulus for service delivery—empowerment of people, and directed interpersonal activity beyond agency boundaries. Scarce human resources were barriers to implementing vision and caused executives to move forward at a slower pace than desired.

Interactions included networking and relating to board and staff persons. Executives viewed networking as an important and rewarding strategy. Their web of influence was broad and lofty as they connected locally and nationally with government officials, business professionals, friends, and acquaintances.

Another tactic of the executives was to create a work environment where employees felt free to relate, share, and contribute to the organization. A strategy which did not operate as the executives would have liked concerned the sharing of power between the executives and their boards.

It should not be concluded that the above strategies encompass all the plans used by the female executives to grow and manage their organizations. The above represent broad divisions of strategies. As the remaining questions are answered and a more detailed description of the executive women is presented, it will be evident how a number of creative and innovative strategies have been used to bring about resolution of issues and problems.
Executives' Self Perceptions

I'm Pretty Good

In assessing their administrative skills, the executives speak candidly about their current abilities, especially in comparison to their starting point.

Elayne I think I'm pretty good. I don't always get things done that I want to. I think I've gotten a pretty good handle on doing budgets. A pretty good handle on trying to look for direction. I think I'm good with people--either staff or interns.

I don't think I am an ego-maniac, which I think helps. I don't think I'm necessarily right. I think I understand people. I think I'm basically pretty good with what we have here.

Connie I'm most proud of being able to cut through bureaucracy and being able to get to the top people in power in our state which brought our organization into the limelight and gave us increased visibility. Now I know it's possible.

Martha I think I've always had some organizational skills. I'm an organized person. I don't find grant writing difficult at all. If you know how to do research, you can write a grant.

The fiscal pieces I don't have much trouble with because most of it is just straight line item budgets.

In discussing their positions, the women not only gave insight as to how they viewed their leadership role but also on how they believed their performance affected the organization.

Carla It's not just a decision making position. Being the director transcends the desk, the telephone, the pen and the pad. It's the attitude you take in the job. The determination to rally your people to perform.
My attitude determines the atmosphere. If I have a down day, I can’t necessarily share that with my staff. Sometimes I share, because they need to see that I’m very human and very real. But there are a lot of things I can’t share with them. I’ve got to show we can do it.

Martha uses an analogy to describe her role:

**Martha** I look at it (my position) in terms of being the heart and the staff are the hands. It’s something I struggle with because I really am in full control of what happens here.

The executives admit there are times when it’s difficult to see the forest for the trees. However, they all confess that in those moments when they catch a glimpse of what their leadership actions have wrought, the payment proves to be more than sufficient for their labors.

**Carla** The reward is to know that it’s working and all the hours and agony have not been in vain. Sometimes it’s hard to see when you’re right there in the trenches. Everybody else can see it. Everybody else has accolades and you’re saying, "what?" Because you’re in the trenches and you don’t see all that glory. Often times, you really don’t see it.

**Summary**

Through reflective self-appraisal, the executives critiqued their performance and were able to identify both positive and not so positive aspects of their tenure. They spoke with pride about accomplishing tasks which had previously been foreign to them.

In assessing her fit with the organization, each executive knew that she was vital to its maintenance and continuance. The women were also aware of how their actions
affected staff and made conscious efforts to project positive attitudes. Yet, despite the tests and trials the executives encountered, there was not a hint of regret for the road they had taken. All would agree with Deann’s testimony:

\textbf{Deann} I could not go back to a regular job. This is not a job really. I consider it a blessing. I enjoy it and I’m happy. I feed off this and I’m fulfilled. I don’t look at my clock. If I have to do something, I go ahead and do it. When you look at the clock, that’s when it becomes a job.

\textbf{Knowledge Building}

\textbf{Learning at the Top}

Scrutiny of the information shared by the women made it clear that learning was very much a part of their executive leadership experience. In their role as executive, the women were ready and eager to learn and seized knowledge whenever, wherever, and from whomever they could. Some occasions for learning emerged while others were consciously sought after and the results eagerly applied. In every instance, learning meant acquiring new habits and rethinking old methods of operation.

\textbf{Nyda} I’ve had to discipline myself to learn how to write. I observed how others did it. I went to grant training sessions, the library, I called people.
Also included in Nyda's new regimen was burning a lot of midnight oil while doing her "homework."

As the women related their personal episodes of knowledge building, it became evident that certain causal conditions preceded their major enlightening events. Usually a situation went contrary to plans, creating a problem. After living through the dilemma, the executive, through reflection, then decided whether she had or had not gleaned some wisdom from the situation. Carla's ordeal with initiating a high school component at the urging of parents, typifies a learning by experience.

Carla  When we carried high school, we could never maintain enough children to pay for it. We had so many financial problems off of that until we had to pull back. We couldn't afford it any longer.

Since then, I've had parents crying for the high school, but I've told them I can't conduct a high school for a few parents. We have to have a significant number of students to run a high school.

Learning from an experience invariably led to new and specific actions. Carla dismantled the high school component and later initiated a pre-school for which there was and is high demand.

Recognition of personal knowledge gaps also led to opportunities for learning—usually through self instruction. To compensate for their deficiency in certain areas, the women read books on a variety of topics, talked with persons in similar positions, employed learning by
doing, observed experts, drew from past recollections, took
classes, and muddled through using trial and error.

Connie  I started reading about boards and
anything I could get my hands on. I talked with
state directors to find out where they got their
resources and what they were doing. I actually
had a survey form which I sent to my counterparts
in other states.

Carla   The strategies they come the hard way.
Basically from trial and error. Something that's
proven to work, we do it. I do go to some
training sessions for school administrators.
Generally, those sessions are geared to people in
different situations than mine—those in
bureaucratic institutions.

The executives also spoke specifically about what they
had learned. Nearly all the women commented on how they
wrestled with the task of writing their first proposal.

Martha, who was a few quarters from completing her
undergraduate education, describes her encounter as a "trial
by fire" even though the outcome was rewarding.

Martha   We decided to go after a grant with the
Columbus Foundation. We were like stupid, you
know you walk in—'Hey, we need some money!' We
just did it. Over time we got involved in block
grant set-aside funding. They provide a lot of
technical assistance, and we just went and asked a
lot of questions.

Nyda smiled and then chuckled at the remembrance of her
first response to a request for proposal (RFP). Significant
to her is the fact that the RFP was four pages long, and
while she provided all the necessary information, all the
pages were not filled. Close at hand in Nyda's office is a
thin black bound copy of her first proposal. She keeps it
as a reminder of her humble beginnings.
Deann’s account of proposal pressure has a similar refrain yet a distinctive twist. Before receiving a major contract, Deann provided her services on a volunteer basis. She profited from her actions and learned that what others know about you and who you know can be equally as important, if not more so, than what you know.

**Deann** I had to write a proposal. I was freshly new at that. I wrote a complete book. I gave them every little thing I had about what we were going to do. It was so shabby—I’ve got the first one. I really didn’t have a lot of things in there. It wasn’t like this one (she displays a current document of which she is proud).

I didn’t do a budget well at all. I had to compete against other agencies, and one agency was really going out for it, but they didn’t get it even though they had a good program. Because the institution knew what I had been doing there, they felt she’s done this; let’s give it to her. They knew me so it’s [getting funded] on who you know.

Only a few executives mentioned the word "mentor" in regards to their learning process. However, from the phrases used, such as "I asked questions," "people were willing to share," the distinct implication was that indeed there were others who came alongside the executives to lend support and assistance.

**Deann** I learned in the corporate sector how to communicate with people. My former boss was my mentor. I listened to him talk and learned from him.

**Martha** I learned as I went along most definitely. I had people who were willing to teach me—a lot of women, a lot of networking, and people of like philosophies. I was willing to ask for help when I didn’t know something.
With years of seasoned administrative practice to their credit, the executives could analytically view past practices and relate how seemingly small bits of information have been synthesized into valuable new knowledge. Connie who admittedly tends to be accommodating and easy to get along with, gave the following commentary on her learning in the school of experience.

**Connie** Through all of this, I’ve become a more bold person than I was. If I were to go into this same kind of position again, I would be very guarded about projects and any kind of special events. I would look for the most profitable special events with the least amount of staff time. That’s priority. I don’t care how worthwhile the project is, if we don’t have the staff and resources, I’d speak up and say so.

Elayne operates on important information garnered from her early days in community organizing.

**Elayne** To get anything done you just have to have some basic needs covered. It’s hard to organize around someone’s kitchen table. You need a location and phones and other kinds of things. Even if it’s just one small room. You have to have a place where people can come and get information. I personally think it’s really, really critical.

Martha learned that the limits of ability were not negative boundaries, but gateways to new frontiers.

**Martha** The fiscal management had become totally out of my range of capability because we had to adapt to our major funder’s fiscal package. I must have gone to 50 trainings. I still could not do it. I was very blessed to get a fiscal person two years ago, otherwise I would have been done. I mean give me a good ole line item budget. I can do anything with that sucker.
Summary

Through their learning experiences, the women came to know what to do and how to do it as they performed their executive functions. Learning for them was inevitable and occurred with and without conscious effort and through formal and informal means. At one time or another, each executive was as a student in the school of hard knocks where she learned through self-discipline, observing others, attending training sessions, and experimenting through trial and error. There were common junctures of learning, especially in program planning and proposal development, as the women unearthed hidden abilities, talents, and tapped unused yet rich deposits of potential.

Self-instruction and tutelage from others played an important part in the learning of the executives as they asked questions, observed, and were mentored by others. The executives’ discovery process had rewarding consequences such as adopting new behaviors, formulating new strategies, increasing self-confidence, and increasing task proficiency. The women also learned that as they explored uncharted paths, gained new skills, and ventured into risk-taking, lessons from the past were a rich resource from which they could draw to fulfill current needs.
Motivation

It's Work I Like To Do

The thinnest of lines, if a line can be discerned, exists between vision and motivation. Whether one precedes the other is debatable. What was evident in observing the women was that if vision existed, motivation was also present and vice versa.

Feelings aroused by the awareness of certain needs and/or the realization of the importance of doing a particular activity seemed to be the precursors of motivation. Just as the executives did when discussing vision, they used intangible phrases such as "I felt" and "I knew" when discussing motives for action. Decisions became deliberate choices, actions were born from resolute determination, and reticence gave way to overt advocacy as executives brought their dreams to reality.

A strong sense of community welfare rather than personal gain took priority as a motivating factor for the executives. Elayne’s involvement in community development led to the creation of an organization designed to be responsive to needs of a changing neighborhood. As to why she chose her particular course, Elayne offers.

Elayne It's work I like to do. I think it's the best job in the world, and I just thought it real important to get it done.
Martha has difficulty in articulating her reason for doing what she does. Declaring herself a feminist, she speaks of empowering women for change and believes that through the programs and services offered by her organization, a difference is being made which is just enough to keep her moving forward.

Martha  I don't know why I do it. I've had the real joy of seeing people get well and make a difference in their lives and in the lives of their children.

An early experience in her professional career provided the impetus for Carla's motivation.

Carla  When I was in public schools, I was so disheartened and grieved by what I saw. A lot of special education classes were full of Black children. I knew from working with the students, Black and white, those were disproportionate ratios. But I didn't know what to do about it. The other thing that was so pressing to me was that God was not in the picture anywhere. He was not allowed. He was not welcomed.

I began talking to pastors around the city saying we need to do something for our children. My motivation was just the children and realizing what they have to face and what we as a people have to face. That's my motivation now. It's not finances or prestige or any of that. It's just seeing the children and loving them and wanting the best for them.

Connie's frame of reference was first hand volunteer service. Her work with families and the beneficial changes she witnessed supplied the boost she needed to shape her organization into one which could help more families throughout the state. Her motive for action was a desire, "to do the best job that I could do in all areas."
Knowing the demographics and resources of the area she serves, gave Beth confidence that she is moving in the right direction. With an 85 to 95 percent drop out rate among adults in the community, she believed that through the services provided by her organization, “we are filling a niche that needs to be filled.” When asked her motivation for pursuing an executive role, the response was:

Beth Oh well, it’s probably not my goal to pursue an administrative career. I mean I’m an administrator because that’s what I have to do make this program happen. My goal is to develop a pilot program than can be duplicated with other populations similar to this one. So in that sense, my goal is not to be an administrator. This happens to be the avenue I must pursue now.

While motivation and vision stoke the humanitarian fires of the female executives, opposition is a constant threat to douse these flames. The executives’ dusubcebtuvse ranged from lack of support—moral and financial, lack of control over organizational environment, social and/or political opposition, losing site of one’s vision, and conflict between personal and professional responsibilities.

Several of the white female executives, who serve largely African American populations, explained that while they know their intentions were honorable and worthy, they have, at times, been challenged by others as to their motives.
Beth, whose organization is based in a predominately African American community, finds herself in a position of defending her motives for providing services to residents. She explains:

Beth I have had members of the Black leadership here say that somebody Black should be here [doing what she’s doing] because it’s a Black population.

This venture was not designed to create a salary, employment opportunity, or anything. This program was to come in and provide a needed service to residents, and because we aren’t part of that so-called political structure that operates here, we wanted to make sure that nothing could ever be said that our motives were not for the right reason.

To me, when you say that only one race or one color can come in here [the community] you are segregating again—you’re constantly segregating.

Martha also has found herself justifying her organizational response to community needs.

Martha If you’re white and you’re running an agency that has a number of African American clients—I have been accused of, ‘Well, how can you deal with African Americans, you’re white?’

I would rather celebrate our differences. There’s still a lot of meanness out there and that’s what’s wrong with the world.

Special Challenges. Challenges and leadership are an inseparable and expected combination. Without exception the executives in this study were quick to identify their most taxing issues. Consensus formed around the word spelled m-o-n-e-y and evoked the following:

Beth The most challenging part of my job is fundraising. I would say right now I’m probably putting 75 percent of my time into fundraising, and that will probably go for the next three months at least.
Deann  My biggest problem has been funding—the cash flow in this organization. It's a challenge to organize a program to keep it running when you don't have money and you're working on a shoestring budget.

Martha  For me it's keeping the money coming in. Grant writing is what keeps us alive and it allows me to add to the staff so that we're not always behind the eight ball.

A different perspective was voiced by Carla:

Carla  I'll tell anybody that people problems wear me out. But that's what I have most every day, people problems. It's a real challenge to pull it all and keep all of it together. Keeping the teachers going in the right direction, keeping the children on task, and helping parents understand that they've got to get involved in the educational process.

A Higher Power Within

Delving deeper into why the executives are involved in the human service profession, five of the women expressed the belief that they were fulfilling their destiny which they believed to be ordained by a higher power whom they identified as God. All four of the African American women expressed a strong spiritual awareness and sense of divine guidance which they credited with influencing their choice of actions.

Iris is certain that she is about her life's work and presses on because, "I just believe in it so much, and now more people are beginning to believe in it." Deann affirmed that she has been commissioned by God to perform her duties. She gives ownership of the program to him and
views herself as a willing instrument. This perspective guides and orders her actions because she says, "I have to live with my conscience and with my God."

Nyda, who describes herself as a fourth generation Church of God member, gained valuable leadership experience by chairing and administering various church projects and programs. However, when asked how she acquired the skills which guided her young organization to a 1.6 million dollar budget within six years, Nyda humbly responded, "It was God given." Of her first grant award, Nyda explains with certainty, "I know it was God," who took her best meager efforts and produced a favorable outcome. In explaining her role of service as an executive director Nyda says:

Nyda I understand that I am not my own and there is a power within me that exceeds my limitations, and this is empowering.

Martha was the only white female who made deliberate mention of divine intervention as an explanation for how things happened relative to her personal and organizational growth. On one occasion, she referred to having rug burns on her knees from thanking God for the quality staff she has gained over the years.

In explaining how they came to their leadership role in a helping profession, the executives spoke of divine guidance operating in their lives. Martha, who three times
rejected offers to head her organization, and finally accepted after, "a lot of discernment and prayer," reflects on her successively upward career moves:

**Martha**  
It's been being in the right place at the right time. What I really believe today is that it's the hand of God because where I started (in the helping profession) was a very spiritual place with a wonderful group of people who were totally committed to what they were doing.  
When we left there for St. Marks, we brought that same spirit with us, and when I came over here (her current position), it's like the same thing keeps following me.

Martha consciously attempts to bring people of like character into her organization and bases this action on a fundamental belief.

**Martha**  
I was taught that spirituality is the quality of relationships and that's with you, with my board, my spouse—and that's what's wrong. You just don't find many situations where employees are of like mind and have a common bond. However, by sometime next month, most of the people who have worked for me, going back to when I was at CARE, have either worked here or are now working here again. What we had was so good that we're recreating it.

Explaining why she selected a conservative town as home base for her non-traditional organization, Iris says:

**Iris**  
I prayed about it a lot and for whatever reason, I knew that this was the place. I believe that this is what I'm to do. If I had no money, I'd say, 'Creator, you've led me this far, and I know that things will work out.'

Iris gained a different perspective on her purpose in life after reading about Rebecca Cox Jackson, a Black woman born in the late 1700's who learned to read and write from God.
Iris  I came to know that the reason for me reading this book was to know that spirituality is knowledge. It is becoming the best we can be. I began to see that the work I was doing had nothing to do with me as a person, but it has more to do with God leading me.

The heavenly, unseen guidance which some of the executives referred to, manifested itself in unconventional ways and at seemingly inopportune times. Nyda was at a grant writing workshop when she decided to take, "A step of faith," and resign her job of 21 years so that she could move into her calling. Deann accepted her "commission" following a potentially fatal auto accident. She sees her program as, "His [God's] program," and herself as, "His [God's] instrument." Carla considers her preparation for leadership within the context of divine direction:

Carla  God knows what he is doing because he prepares us for a work--our special mission.

I think an undertaking like starting something from the wall, you know that you don’t have the inner strength of your own accord to go through. You know that there are times regardless of how good the husband is or how close the mother is or the sister, or even the children, there comes times when no one can really solve problems for you but God, and he’s the only resource you have.

Having to rely on God is a real good thing. It’s humbling, it teaches patience, and then if you have patience in that area, you have patience in other areas too.

One of the biggest downfalls for people is that they get so tied up and elated in what they’ve done and so satisfied with what they’ve done, they lose sight of what their real mission and aim are about.
Blessings

Often while retelling certain incidents relating to their organizations, the executives would speak of being blessed. The phrase "I was blessed" was used to explain events which were perceived to be outside the expected range of normalcy and also difficult to rationally and articulately account for.

Martha struggled a long time without a financial person. When she was finally able to hire one, she described herself as being "Very blessed." Carla wasn’t absolutely certain how her organization had managed to survive for 12 years. Her answer was that, "God’s just been blessing us to be sustained on what we have." When pressed to describe what a blessing is, Carla gave the following as an example:

Carla Just to give you some examples of how the Lord just blesses, he just sends help. I don’t how he does it. Often times I’ll get in a real jam and I don’t know how to get out of it and I’ll say, Lord I’m anxious to see how you’re going to handle this one. And he really does. He sends the right people the right things. He takes care of us.

Carla tells of how the school was able to acquire needed space by building a wing on the existing facility. The project, estimated at $200,000 and completed for about $75,000, was not possible through conventional means of bank loans. However, it was accomplished through the fortune of divine blessing:

Carla Our school was adopted by Orient Institution and what they do is, they send their
honcr prisoners to our facility to do different projects.

One of the workers was leaving the institution to go to a half-way house to serve the remaining six months of his sentence. One of the conditions was that he be employed. He asked if there was anything that we needed done around the school, and I said yes, we need to start this building project. Do you have any skills? Well, he used to be a contractor with his own company. He came in with some of his friends and some other men from the institution who were also on furlough.

The labor costs were low because while on furlough he could only receive $5 an hour. By the time the job was finished, he was making about $10 an hour which we really couldn’t pay him until he left the institution. However, we made up his time from the beginning, and even with that the rate was still tremendously low. Those men built the addition for us. Of course we had to have provisional contractors to do other things like heating and cooling, but the basic work was done. God just blessed us.

For those executives who expressed reliance on the hand of God, and who explained seemingly impossible and improbable situations as acts of divine blessing, a strong belief system in an all powerful God was in place.

The women willingly and lavishly gave credit to a spiritual being greater than themselves when instant answers were illusive. Carla’s method was to look within and seek the help and guidance of God. Deann’s mode of operation was letting go of things she couldn’t control and letting God do the work:

**Deann**  We continue to forget who we are and where we come from. We’ve got to stop thinking we can do it on our own. We cannot. We’ve got to put it in His hands. I’m telling you everything that has happened to me, I have placed it in His hands.
I tell you I'm human. I've sat here in this office and just cried, and I said, God I cannot do it. I don't know what...what am I doing wrong? I don't have money God you know I don't. You're going to have to help. Every time we get into a financial crunch, something has always come through and he has just kept us. We've got to keep putting him in the center of it. You let him out of what you're doing, you'll never make it.

Summary

Motivation proved to be a vital ingredient in the performance of executive leadership. Starting an organization was merely an outcome of some inner drive which provided the force for action. The women spoke of feeling and knowing in regards to expressing their reasons for doing. High on the list of why the executives pursued their particular career was an affinity for the type of work, belief in the importance of their specific service, a desire to help, and empowerment of people for positive change. Seeing change in others or in situations helped sustain the motivation of the executives in the face of challenges.

Threats to motivation were lack of moral and or financial support, lack of control over the organization's environment, loss of personal vision, social and/or political controversy and conflicts between the executives' personal and professional lives, and challenges to their motives for doing what they did.

Motivation for many of the executives had its roots in personal beliefs that they were fulfilling a predestined
spiritual course of action. As the executives followed their destined paths, certain encounters also had motivational impact on their leadership actions. The executives were also inspired and motivated by a relationship with God. Through their spiritual encounters they derived a sense of empowerment, purposeful direction, stability, and balance. These particular executives believed they were blessed.

**Personal Impact of Leadership**

The word survivor can be applied to each female executive. They refused to be held hostage by adverse circumstances. Out of seeming chaos they wrested advantages which propelled them forward. Most of the executives stepped into the nonprofit arena with little experience. Being apt students, they quickly learned and applied their knowledge, skills, and wisdom to the task of staying alive in the business world. The personal impact of leadership reveals the sacrifices and concessions made by the women and also their families so that their organizations could survive and thrive.
Family Sacrifice

Sustaining an organization in its early developmental stage, particularly one dedicated to the delivery of human services, is no small feat. Also, take into account the fact that only a couple of the executives had previous administrative experience, and none had formal training in human service delivery. Most of the women were fresh to the field of human services, and initially their financial base rested on small sums of money with an uncertain future. One wonders how did these women manage to keep their organizations alive? Extraordinary sacrifice is the answer. One also might expect a single female executive to relate accounts of forgone pleasures and other burdens borne for the sake of reaching the goal. She in most cases would be free from child care and responsibilities to a significant other. However, as I listened to the married executives describe their experiences, each one told of instances of extraordinary sacrifice involving themselves and their families. A tuition cash flow precipitated a crisis for Carla.

Carla There was a summer five or six years ago when we just ran out of money and it was pay week. Also, I was about two weeks away from delivering my middle child. We couldn’t get money from the bank because the organization was such a high risk at that time.

My husband and I bailed the school out by making personal loans totalling about six to eight thousand dollars to pull us through that period. We did that for about two summers.
We were over $25,000 in debt. I would just call the people and tell them we are working on it. Gradually we came out of it. But I don’t ever want to jeopardize my family like that again.

Carla concedes that there are those who would say she has risked family financial stability to further her organization. As the school grew and needed to find a facility of its own, Carla and her husband continued to make sacrifices for the survival of the organization. Carla might be a ready witness to answer Langston Hughes’ time honored question of, "What happens to a dream deferred?"

Carla The Catholic school would not sell this site (the school campus) to the school because we were in such financial straights. They sold it to my husband and I. But we had found a house in a nice neighborhood, and we had put money down on it. We had to get out of our contract for our dream house, buy this property with the profit from the sale of our home, and we moved into the rectory.

It’s a nice house, but it’s not the house we wanted. It’s too close to the school. You really can’t escape. We find ourselves taking escape trips on the weekend.

The support Carla had from her husband was the norm for the married executives rather than the extreme. The husbands have been and are staunch supporters of their executive wives. To say there were no disagreements over their wives’ new and taxing endeavors would be stretching things just a tad. One executive shared how her husband complained about the clutter in the kitchen cupboards and also how entertaining dinner guests was a fond memory of bygone days. Yet he gave encouragement and tangible support during an extremely rough period.
Both Nyda and Deann held down other full time jobs in the early days of their organizations. In addition, Nyda and her husband, who was later employed by the organization, went for one year without health coverage.

Working husbands also absorbed the financial brunt of their wives' entrepreneurial activities. After Deann fell asleep at the wheel while returning home from a workshop, her husband said it was time to quit her regular job. For three to four years he worked two jobs so that she could devote full attention to the organization. Money earned from the second job took up the slack remaining from Deann's resignation, and also helped finance the organization during initial start-up.

Beth and Elayne comment about their husbands and families:

**Beth** My family gives up quite a bit so that we can go with this (the school). I could be making much more which would help them. It's really been a commitment of my husband and son to not have mom bring in that $30,000 or whatever because we're not in an income bracket where, say, $15,000 wouldn't make a difference. So in that sense my husband does make a sacrifice.

**Elayne** Fortunately, I have a husband who is employed and so it's not like the difference between eating. It is the difference in when my son's tuition gets paid and how late I can put that off.

Realizing that sacrifice has been and is a major part of her executive role, Carla gives a clear picture of what
any woman with a family, entering leadership as an organizational founder or rescuer, should expect to encounter.

Carla I think that any female executive would find there comes a time when she needs to go beyond just a personal physical sacrifice. She should keep in mind that it's very probable that sacrifices affecting the family will have to be made.

I'm not just talking about family time. I'm talking about financial sacrifices. Really rough, hard, tough sacrifices have to be made that will affect her family. I think that's the hardest sacrifice. You don't mind the hours you put in individually, but when it comes to affecting the family, when that happened to me and my family had to feel the brunt of the sacrifice, it really hurt me.

I felt like haven't I given enough. But, in retrospect I should have known that it might come to that. I was not mentally ready for that kind of sacrifice. But, I think it's something that may have to be reckoned with. If an administrator can pull through it, I think the rewards on the other side will suffice. But getting there might take a while.

Personal Sacrifice

In performing their duties as executives all the women spoke of times when they went beyond the boundaries of their designated role, especially during their organization's start-up phase. Many volunteered time, made other concessions, or did both.

Because their husbands served as a monetary safety net for their personal lives, the married executives had considerably more leeway in executing organizational financial maneuvers. Personal salary was a line item which could be manipulated even to the point of elimination. Some of the
women contributed salary or delayed being paid so that vital business matters could be taken care of. Elayne shares how during budget crunches, she manipulated her salary.

**Elayne** Often times when I do a financial statement for a month, we will have a negative balance, and it’s not because we have sent out bad checks. I pay the bills which I have to do. I write my check, but I don’t cash my check. Sometimes it’s a month before I can cash it. When it’s really not good is when it’s two months before I can cash a check because dollars have not come back in on reimbursement.

Some organizations will go to a credit card or something else. We’ll use the less sophisticated method of waiting to cash a check.

So that obligations could be met, Elayne had also made personal loans to the organization, in addition to salary, for which she was reimbursed.

When her organization was financially stressed, the suggestion to donate her salary to the cause came from Connie’s husband.

**Connie** He knew the strain I was under and that I had invested so much of myself in this organization as board president then as executive director, trying to do a top notch job.

I just could not bear to see us (the organization) not have enough money to make it through the end of the year.

I knew that if I contributed my salary, it would be close, but it would be enough—we could make it.

While it may sound drastic, giving up one’s salary to make ends meet was a frequently used tactic. Carla went without a salary during her first two years of operation but received payment for gas and other incidentals. Beth says that she doesn’t think of herself as being employed but more
like a volunteer. When cash trickles rather than flows or
she
needs other things to happen, there is no hesitation--Beth
cuts her salary. Deann gives insight to the emotional side
of making the decision to give up or give back earned wages.

Deann  It hurts so much sometimes when I have
to turn my check back to the company to make the
payroll. Sometimes I want to get my hair done,
but I just can't see paying myself and letting
everything [the organization] go to pot.

Personal concessions were also made by the single
executives. In the early days, Iris opted to go from full-
time to part-time in her contract teaching position so that
she could devote more time to growing her organization. She
took 60 percent of her salary and kept full benefits.
Later, she resigned her position and relied mainly on
personal savings. Iris was fully prepared and committed to
surviving with less income; however, she was and is equally
determined to maintain the integrity of her values, in order
to retain organizational autonomy and keep creative energies
flowing. She gives her observation of what happens when
organizations begin to grow and flourish.

Iris  You start out with strong, good grass
roots organizations that are very creative and
poor but very effective. Then all of a sudden,
they start getting a lot of money. They grow in
their nice facilities with computers and every-
thing, but they have lost that ingenious edge.
They can't write they can't be that creative any-
more. Their management style begins to look like
all the other styles. That's what I'm fighting
against. I say I fight it with my very life.
I say up to that point because it's more than
management style to me. It's something that I
feel the system does to you to get you to conform so that you can’t be as effective as you really want to be.

All of the executives, and particularly those with smaller budgets, found themselves caught in a cycle of crisis management where intervening, uncontrollable circumstances caused them to initiate actions which, for the most part, were unplanned. Being forced to respond to events because of need, put the executives in a reactive rather than an active mode. Carla shared her opinion:

Carla What I don’t feel comfortable about is being so reactive. I would like to be more...I would like to be in front and give more direction to the way things happen. But right now, it seems that as things happen, we act. I’d like for that to change.

**Being An Executive and Female**

Not only were the executives aware of special issues affecting nonprofits, but they also commented on how sexual identity and accompanying stereotypes affected them in the conduct of their business. Elayne noted how the tendency for women to make great sacrifices might be to their detriment.

Elayne I think maybe one drawback is that women will tend to put themselves last and do the mission first, and that might hold us back some.

Giving balance to her comments, Elayne was more affirming and to the point in her views on the capabilities of women in leadership.

Elayne I think the thing about women is that they figure out how to get things done. If they’re committed to an organization or something, then that comes before they do. Also, women have
a very deep survival instinct and a carrying life
on instinct. Women are great!

Because of her gender, Deann explained that she be-
lieved some people, especially men, tried to take advantage
of her so-called weaker status. The outcome of one such
situation resulted in a bold fundraising philosophy founded
on organizational self-sufficiency. Deann vowed that a
majority of her dollars will come from contracting for
services.

Elayne reflected on how being aggressive or assertive
is a given with men, yet for women and especially for her,
there is a hard thin line to walk between being assertive
and feeling comfortable being known as an outspoken
individual.

Elayne  It’s hard to be assertive knowing a
lot of men out there are turning you off because
they don’t want a woman to tell them what needs to
be done.

I think there are some men who are mature
enough that they can accept women who express
their needs and ideas. But there are a whole lot
of men out there who don’t take you seriously or
only take you seriously when you are agreeing with
them and smiling and being very polite.

Sometimes you have to almost play a game of
having people help you get resources when you
could get them on your own. But somehow it seems
appropriate for the guy to do it. There’s still a
lot of that out there. My hope is that it becomes
less as there are more women in positions.

There are still many times when I’ve attended
a meeting and I’ve said something and I go home
and I feel miserable about it because I might have
hurt somebody’s feelings or I think I’m perceived
as the woman who’s always bitching about
something.

I don’t think men react like that. I’m not
sure they have those feeling of reexamination--
saying something to people where they think, gee, I've hurt somebody's feelings.

Elayne also commented on the combination of gender and age and how the two might influence the actions or reactions of others.

Elayne: Even people my age or close to my age, and I'm 47, think that as a female executive you're seen as more of a threat or competition to men. They think there are areas that women can be successful in and there are taboo fields where success by a woman makes a man less manly. I find this type of thinking less in younger men than in men my age or older, and I think that's a good thing. I think it's slowly changing.

Elayne's comments gave insight into her perception of relationships between male and female executives. Martha believes that all is not well with women in leadership positions and their interactions with each other. In pursuit of success, she sees some women adopting competitive personas and so-called male behaviors in order to advance and survive in the business world.

Martha: I think there are some women who are, shall we say, trying to get through the glass ceiling by operating like men, and I don't think we [women] can do that.

I firmly believe that women still have to learn to work together for the common good. We're not doing that. We compete with each other. We look at differences rather than sameness.

I don't think we help each other. We haven't learned to play by the rules that the boys play by. A guy would never stab another guy in the back because he may need him someday. We stab each other in the heart all the time. Not willing to help each other. I still see that quite a bit with women and especially in the nonprofit arena because some of us are competing for the same dollars, and it's a very small pot.
Despite her negative observations, Martha has hopes that her wayward female cohorts will get smart and recognize the tactics of the current system.

Martha  The system divides and conquers and will continue to do so until we take the power away. We [women] are the majority of the population. If we work together, we could run the world. I personally believe women are the last great hope of this nation. The political will is going to come from the women, and I’m talking social change.

While Martha’s comments were analytical and philosophical, Carla verbalized an important ingredient in her survival kit, a need for support from other women, especially African American women, in like positions.

Carla  I wish there were a network of some type for Black women who are heading institutions. It’s so good to talk to a sister who has similar experiences, but they’re hard to find.

I’d like to ask how do you get home in time to feed the kids and work with them on homework? How do you manage the laundry on the week days when you know you need to write this paper before tomorrow, or you need to answer some correspondence? How do you make it all work? I’m talking about personal life now. It’s just hard to find. You know men are everywhere, and you have to deal with them all the time, but having that support system would be a tremendous help.

Martha had the same need as Carla and handled it by forming her own support group. Although she derives strength and energy from her circle of friends, Martha dreams of putting together a multicultural women’s group for those who really want to come to the table and talk about some of the issues and their possible solutions. She says, "I think it’s important."
Summary

For the women of this study, the impact of leadership had consequences for their families as well as themselves. The cost of executive leadership was paid by the women with emotional pain from decision making, with commitment to their cause, and with sacrifices of financial solvency, delayed needs, and deferred dreams.

The female executives always looked to themselves as their major resource. The personal concessions they made, though difficult, were more easily made than those which involved family. Recognizing that commitment was a double-edged sword, they postponed or went without pay, endured personal slights of gender bias, and struggled to find comfort levels of assertiveness which blended with their leadership styles.

Husbands were a source of strength and support for their executive wives. In many instances, the husbands absorbed the financial costs of their wives' leadership pursuits.

The women did not pursue what was perceived to be a male model of leadership behavior but recognized their special expertise such as the ability to get things done and sensitivity to the needs of others. What the women did seek was a relationship with and support from other women in similar circumstances.
Just as a stream is forever changed by a single ripple, the families of the executives were touched and affected by the demands of leadership.

Managing Organizational Resources

**Boards of Directors**

Nonprofits by their nature must interact with a variety of constituents who are vital to their existence. Attention to the establishment and maintenance of key organizational alliances is a major responsibility of nonprofit executives. Of prime importance is the relationship between the executive and the board of directors (Drucker, 1990).

The women of this study reported strong, effective relations with their boards. It was not unusual to hear the possessive "my" in discussions about boards, and the pride this particular subject brought, without exception, to the voices of the participants was unmistakable. Nyda declares that she would not take, "A million dollars or a pay raise for my board." Of her all male board Beth says, "It's a very close knit group." Harmonious relations were important for Elayne's board, which she described as liking to work cooperatively.

**Pulling It Together.** Cultivating and selecting board members was a task each executive knew had to be done,
and each had a distinctive approach. Deann started with a 15 member board composed of people she knew who, "had the same belief that I had."

While involving a few residents from the community, Beth also used a circle of friends in pulling her board together. Her activity in the political scene netted a board where most of the members belonged to the same party. In fact, the organization's co-founder, who served as board president, was at the time of founding, employed as an assistant to a local U. S. Congressman whose office informally adopted the organization as a project. Since that time, the co-founder and president has gone on to become a State Representative. His influence and political standing have been a tremendous benefit to Beth's organization. The all male board itself would be the envy of any nonprofit organization and would receive more than a cursory glance from the private sector.

Iris intentionally set about to form a small grassroots "in-house community board" which was more involved in programming. Initially she was not concerned with the board's ability to raise dollars but with their commitment to the organization's mission. Because of the culturally relevant techniques used in training, derived from an Africentric philosophy, Iris believed that supportive board members were absolutely essential.
Iris: The hardest thing I have to do is get across our philosophy which is africentric but also attempts to be liberating.

Not wanting to pattern after traditional hierarchical structures, Iris has educated her board to operate in what is called a circle of culture.

Iris: We meet once a month, have a basic agenda, but it’s not like a regular board meeting. We’ll sit down in a circle and discuss in that context. We call it Gia—pathway. Following an agenda is not in my nature, but we end up getting everything done.

The decision-making structure of Iris’s organization represents what some might call an application of feminist principles to the internal organization (Schwartz, Gottesman, & Perlmutter, 1988). Admittedly the transition has challenged board members to shed their orthodox orientation for one Iris defends as more empowering. She stated with an even, determined voice:

Iris: If our organization is to be about liberation it cannot use methods that are used in traditional organizations.

New Blood: A striking similarity among all the boards is that in their initial stages, the level of professionalism among members—career-wise—was not high. Most of the boards lacked diversity in terms of representation from a cross section of the larger community. Martha’s all female board was composed of "housewives and working mothers" who were for the most part persons in recovery who wanted to help others.
In most cases, influential well connected board members were a rarity. What was needed, in Iris' words, were "board members who can pick up the phone and say the right words to the right people." As the executives recognized limitations in their governing bodies, all launched board reorganization campaigns.

Connie's organization was nearly defunct when she took over the board presidency. One of her first tasks was to inject "new blood" into the organization. Connie invited representatives from the corporate for-profit sector to join the ranks composed predominately of social workers. Acting on what she termed "logical instinct," Connie recalls:

**Connie:** I didn't have board training, but I could see that they needed some new resources. They needed some people who had money or contacts. I talked to other board members who said we needed this person or that kind of person on the board.

I started reading about boards and I saw that you needed to have diversity and we didn't have that on our board. So I started moving in that direction. We had two vacant positions when I became president. Those were filled. Then we expanded the board from 15 members to 21.

For Beth and Nyda, board reorganization spawned entities designed to support the work of the board. Nyda formed an auxiliary board for persons lacking time for full board commitment. The committee meets twice yearly and lends expertise in various areas.

Specifically to address board recruitment, Nyda and her board put together a board recruitment day. Prior to this Saturday event, letters are sent and phone calls made to
prospective members. They are invited to attend a two and one-half hour gathering where potential members meet other candidates, current members, and clients. Each person is given a booklet about the organization and its program along with other pertinent information. Out of 20 invitees, 20 attended. Of those, 12 were winnowed out for consideration for five vacant positions.

An adjunct finance committee was added to Beth's board. It was hoped that the work of this committee would relieve some of the fundraising activities of the director who also has classroom duties. Committee membership also was seen as an alternative for persons who could not commit to regularly scheduled board meetings, but who wanted to be involved in the organization. In addition to bringing dollars into the organization, the finance committee also attracts prospective members through what Beth calls, "human nature." Because of the prominence of the committee members, they are known and know others in similar positions. Beth says, "At that level they all know each other and they are willing to talk about our organization to their friends." Of the carefully selected nine-member committee, Beth informs, "What they are lending us is their name and their ability to get the funding in. That's all we require of them."

Sometimes bringing new blood into the organization was something less than a rational, well planned process and more a hazzar occurrence which turned out well in spite of
initial circumstances. Connie found out that in order to accomplish some of her goals, she needed to have the "right people" on the board. One goal was to bring the organization into the technological age with the addition of computers. With very little in the treasury, donation of equipment was the only foreseeable solution.

Connie I originally just wanted a computer and found out that I needed to have someone on the board from TMI first in order to get that computer. Having a TMI employee come on board, we ended up getting free furniture, the computer, software, and lots of free technical assistance.

Rare Jewels. In addition to transfusing new vitality into their boards, several executives also mentioned recruiting at least one member whose presence and outstanding performance wrought substantial benefits for the organization. Connie called her discovery "a jewel," because his connections netted the organization, "unbelievable resources,—financial and in-kind." Martha's gem came through the suggestion of a staff person. The energy and enthusiasm exuded by this one individual had a snowball effect on board recruitment and resource generation. Of her invaluable find Martha says:

Martha He's an attorney who turned out to be very interested and very committed to what we are doing. He's probably my biggest advocate in the community. He's everywhere telling people about us. He in turn recruited another attorney who also recruited a friend who became our vice president.
Members with prior board experience were also considered to be assets in terms of getting less seasoned members to recognize the importance of ongoing board development, fund raising, and policy-setting activities.

While the female executives began their board development with friends and associates who were in agreement with their focus and direction, they soon realized the need to diversify membership. Ideal targets were individuals with corporate connections who could bring depth of experience as well as money, in-kind contributions, and knowledge. A satisfying exchange relationship took place between board members and the organization as each supplied the other with desirable benefits.

**Volunteer or Board Member.** A common concern voiced by many of the executives was that they encountered resistance when trying to enlighten board members about their function. The issue of board functioning did not stem from lack of commitment or interest but from not knowing board procedure and protocol. Both Elayne and Martha at one time were struggling with certain factions on their boards which wanted to be involved in every aspect of decision-making. Members were inclined to see themselves as participants of a volunteer group rather than persons empowered by the state with fiduciary responsibilities.
Elayne. Most of our folks come from the community. The role of policy-setting and money-raising is kind of difficult for them. We seem to be in a volunteer mode rather than the board setting policy and moving with it.

Even though Martha stressed activities such as board development as necessary ongoing functions, she admits to not being able to shift the board from a volunteer mode into one of leadership.

The executives reported that gradual change came about with the involvement of persons better versed in the operations of governing bodies.

Board Members and Bucks. For a majority of the executives, assistance from the board in raising funds was an exception. However, for board members, fundraising was the area where most showed the least interest. Considering the low level of trustee experience on many of the boards, such a circumstance was not surprising.

As board president, Connie actively and successfully raised funds for the organization. She relates what happened when she stepped down as president and moved into the role of executive.

Connie. I thought the board would step in and raise a certain amount of money. I did that as president of the board. I thought that members would roll up their sleeves and help me in that area. I thought well, they know what needs to be done. By the time I realized that they weren’t going to move out and have a big thrust, we had a minor crisis. We had $180,000 in grant monies but, we were worrying about the telephone because we didn’t have the extra cash that was needed.
To prod her board into decisive action on bringing in needed dollars, Connie tells the following story.

**Connie**  
When I became executive director, I expected the new president to be as active in fundraising as I had been. A little too late I found out that she was not a hands-on type worker. When the organization came under serious financial pressure, I did the only think I could think of.  
I read a letter in a board meeting saying I'd be donating may salary until the financial status of the organization changed. That had a very profound effect on several board members. I could see it in their faces.

They did get on the ball and started a membership drive. Some members approached friends. Hundreds of dollars were raised. The important thing was that things started going the other way.

Beth and Iris held different of their boards in regard to fundraising. Iris recognized that her board did very little to promote income. However, she was quick to point out that, "I haven’t picked a board that would do that kind of thing at first." Iris could count on board members to participate in activities such as manning booths at community fairs and selling T-shirts.

Deciding that fundraising would mainly be by corporate solicitation, Beth’s board packed its auxiliary finance committee with “heavy hitters” who have high name recognition and influence in the business community. Beth describes how she makes use of her board member resources.

**Beth**  
We work very very close together. Many times they’ll (members of finance committee) either get me in the door (of the organization) or their names are very useful in backing me up as far as credibility. Sometimes they’ll actually make the call themselves or, after I speak to the
potential funder, a committee member will call later as a follow up.

We could not raise money unless we had the strong support of this committee. Because of their contacts, they determine mainly who will be solicited. It's not so much that everybody sits down and says well, we can only hit these people. It's mainly an ongoing process with people they know and come across.

Beth's board was by far the most active in the area of generating dollars. Although across the organizations board member interest ran high, endeavors at fundraising were few to none. Generally, members as individuals and collectively had little knowledge of their responsibilities as a legally empowered group accountable for actions of governance.

**Rubber Stamps.** In a majority of cases, the board members were hand-picked by the executives to serve as allies in structuring the growth and development of their organizations. Such a selection process usually led to good chemistry between the boards and the executives.

The downside of such a selection process is that in most instances, and especially if the executive is founder of the organization, board members tend to use rubber stamp decision-making in setting policy. Several executives mentioned this predicament is discussing involvement with their boards. Martha, who inherited her board, noted that over time, what has now evolved is a board essentially dependent on her.

**Martha** They have such trust in me that now what I have is a rubber stamp—which I don't want. I wind up making decisions in relative isolation,
and with a million dollar budget, I'm not willing
to do that anymore. If I make a mistake, I'm the
one hanging out there.

Deann and Carla articulated similar situations with
their boards.

**Deann** I realized I needed help. I wasn't
getting any direction. I was giving my own
direction and that's not healthy.

**Carla** Because I started things, they (the
board) tend to lean on me rather than question how
things are running. They lean on me for
information—even for scope of direction.

As a rationale for the role reversal between the boards
and executives, Elayne offers the following:

**Elayne** There is a certain sense of me
directing the board on where we as an organization
need to go. I think that's probably because I was
the originator of the concept, and we're still in
that volunteer mode.

Just as board members were prone to defer to the
executives in matters of policy, they also took the less
traditional, less formal route in performance evaluations.
Only two of the eight female executives, Martha and Nyda,
received formal performance reviews. The organizations
headed by these two women also have budgets of at least one
million dollars annually, funded largely by government. In
other instances, tabs were kept on the executives'
activities through monthly reports and board member queries.
Also, board members gave casual feedback to the executives
relative to their accomplishments.

If there are times when some chemical agents fail to
form a desirable bond, the same can be said of some board
members and the executive. Deann who is consciously rebuilding her board, developed and followed a personal formula for ridding her governing body of inactive members.

Deann I started off selecting people I knew. They had the same belief I had so they volunteered. But as time went by, I found that all they wanted was the name of board member but weren't willing to put in the time.

I need a board to help me with raising some money or getting some people to help build the program.

I wrote them all a letter saying I can no longer use you (she laughs). I did it that way, and they knew why—they weren't doing anything. They'd never come to board meetings. How can you have a meeting if half the members don't come?

Having been through the process of choosing board members, Deann offers the following advice.

Deann You've got to get people on the board who can give you enlightenment on what areas you need to cover. It's a different ball park than pulling a housewife. You've got to have more than that in this business. I want a well rounded board that will help me in the justice system.

Generally the tie which binds board members and executives is one of accord and harmony. Carla's assessment of her board serves as a point of agreement for the other female executives and their boards.

Carla As I hear other people talk about their boards, I'm really blessed in that area. We don't have any real disagreements. We seem to be on one accord. We get along really well.

Human Resources

Human resources are vital links in creating organizational stability; commitment on the part of executive and
staff is vital. Commitment is the bond which unites Carla and her staff to provide quality education for African American children.

Carla I have teachers from the public schools who are willing to take a decrease in salary, and I mean a decrease in salary because they are convinced that the only way to salvage our people is that we do it ourselves.

They see the need. They see what has to be done, and they want to be a part of it. It's an excellent working environment because people are here because they want to be here.

Hiring employees was a new experience for most of the female executives. Many had to start from scratch with part-time staffing. Connie started with an administrative coordinator who worked five hours weekly and creatively expanded her staff.

Connie The first thing I had to do was to hire someone to coordinate things in the Columbus office. After that, we received grants that enabled us to bring in more people. I hired an information specialist on the spot because she said, 'I love to write grants.' I know that's not the way you're supposed to do it, but she was hired! Before I left, we had 12 people on staff due to a VISTA grant.

Iris heard that the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) would pay wages, up to 20 hours weekly, to senior citizens who were interested in working in nonprofit organizations. Following up on the information netted Iris an able receptionist.

Although in theory volunteers were welcomed by the executives, time constraints led to a different reality. Few organizations, especially the smaller ones, were orga-
nized to the point were volunteers could be adequately trained and supervised. Such a task became just one more thing for the executives to do.

Iris, however, relies heavily on a core group of volunteers called the "Literacy Brigade." Composed of people interested in the services offered, the group is "supervised" by literacy coordinators who are paid as their services are given.

With staff on board, the executives then faced concerns of molding them into a cohesive, effective unit.

Building Teammates. In nature the female of a species is usually the primary nurturer of offspring. The maternal characteristics of nurturer were evident as the women of this study talked about their organizations. Recall how earlier Deann used the metaphor of mother and child in expressing feelings about her organization. In describing staff relations the same sense of caring was expressed. Many of the executives’ standards for employer-employee relationships were molded from prior experiences in the work world.

Martha I really believe in treating people with dignity and respect. I’ve worked in corporate America and I hated it because of the politics and other things that went on.

Empowering employees made a neat fit with the executives’ desire to serve others. Cultivating leadership ability and skills among their staff was an important goal for the executives.
Deann
My role for staff is to see them grow and develop into individuals who can assume a leadership role. I believe in giving them advice and helping them move along. I share my knowledge. I push them so they can learn how to do things. I don’t mind them making errors. That’s how you learn. You make mistakes—you’re human.

For a few of the executives, their gentle nudging of staff toward increased responsibilities was met with some resistance. Martha, who is "Desperately trying to create a management team," mentions this phenomenon and a possible explanation.

Martha
Even when I try to delegate something, they don’t quite want to take it [authority]. They still come to me.

And I tell you something very honestly, I have a really good friend who suggested that because of everything that’s happened here, I could present myself to the staff as larger than life, and they may feel that they can’t measure up.

Now I don’t create that intentionally, but I thought she had a very valid point. I have been so successful here in the last four years.

The reasoning behind building leadership within the organization is that the executives realize they are, "far too involved in the day-to-day," operations of their organizations. Quite clearly they are swamped and recognize their need for help.

Carla
I’m working with staff people now. They are very timid about being in the position of authority, but I can see it developing in a couple of them. I’ve said to my board that we need to hire a person to take on administration responsibilities.

We’ve got a plan to at least relieve a staff person for a half day to handle certain aspects of administration. We’ve grown in number to the point that I need help in management.
The women executives of this study are not necessarily accomplices in maintaining the hierarchical status quo of line and staff. They actively seek those who can be developed to assume leadership responsibility. Working with the resources at hand, human and otherwise, the executives search for ways to counter the condition of being bound to the office. The perception is that being in the office precludes developing those critical external relationships which can be profitable for the organization. As Martha puts it, "My goal is to get out of this office and out into the community because it's time."

While they may not be able to offer employees top dollar for services rendered, the female executives strive to create an environment where staff needs are also met.

Martha: In this field, they (staff) are grossly underpaid, and the stress is very high so I do whatever I can. Like taking the staff out of the office for a day on quarterly retreats. I feed them and we laugh.

I fought for two weeks vacation after a year then it goes to three weeks very quickly because of the stress in this type of profession. And I don't make staff wait until their anniversary to take vacation.

I don't like watching women who have children worry if their child is sick and they need to take a day off, or if you want a mental health day and you have to lie. I said I would never operate that way. So if you're sick, go home!

What's been happening in the last 8 to 9 months, a lot of the good people in town are sending me their resumes wanting to come here. I think people understand how we treat people here plus I think they really believe in what we're doing.
Independence is an important job attribute especially for professional employees. The female executives were willing if not eager to take the risk of, "giving someone the ball and letting them run with it."

Elayne I think I understand that people do things in different ways and that if you have somebody who really wants to do a good job, if you give them some freedom, they will do a good job.

Carla's teachers knew she was seriously looking for a way to increase their salary.

Carla The teachers started a latch key program because they saw a need. Now because of the involvement in latch key, some of their pay checks are bigger than mine. But still, that doesn't say a whole lot because mine isn't a lot. But it's more than what they would have been getting. I want to see my staff paid better.

Financial Resources

Financial resources describes the endeavors of the female executives to generate financial support for their organizations. The following gives an account of how the executives acquired funds for initial start-up and the steps they took to maintain fiscal stability.

From Nothing To Something. The organizations headed by the executives of this study did not spring up overnight. They began as small seeds planted and nourished in the fertile mind of each woman. Taking sustenance from increasing interest and desire to meet perceived needs, and flourishing on strong doses of commitment and conviction that something could be done, each woman moved forward with
deliberate action. Three of the women began their organizations through a combination of donations, gift contributions, and small grants which netted them less than $5,000 each.

Carla started talking to various pastors about her dream and received support in the form of prayerful backing. From these experiences she says, "I knew this was something I couldn't approach the church about." She did, however, work with a small group of friends who pooled their thoughts and meager resources to finance the school.

Carla: We didn't have anything of substance to start the school. One of the board members said, "Let's have a banquet and tell the community what we want to do." We did and just a handful of people came, but they generated $500. That's all we had to start. Then somebody referred us to a church that had some classroom space. We talked to them. They were interested and let us come in for a lease of $1.00 a year. That was for legal purposes. We started there with about 45 students.

Start-up dollars for Deann also came from a cadre of backers.

Deann: I built the organization through money from grants and foundations. I had no fundraisers. I didn't have time. I didn't have any money to start and I knew I couldn't get a loan. I figured the best way was to go nonprofit and just get donations.

I received money from former employers. I gave them a two weeks notice, and they in turn planned a surprise party for me. Each executive who came gave a check. The total contributions were over $2,000.

During the time I was employed, I became acquainted with the director of a local foundation. After resigning my job, I contacted that director and was awarded $2,000. This sum plus the money from my former employers, formed the
financial base of my organization. The money from the foundation was for rent only. The other dollars were for general operating expenses, so I actually had only that plus money out of my pocket. That's how we started.

Iris' organization was underwritten by personal dollars and support from family and friends. Her commitment to delivery of culturally specific services also influences her views on gaining financial support.

Iris It's important that we (African Americans) and others understand that we have to have our own economic base and funding in order to do the things that we have defined for us. If somebody gives you a whole lot of money, they want to dictate what you should do. Eighty percent of our funding should come from the Black community. If I seek funding from traditional sources, I plan that it will be a one-time thing.

In contrast to Iris' philosophy, Deann who is also African American, offers a different reality concerning Black economic support.

Deann I can't count on my people (African Americans) for much of our financial support. That fact has been a disappointment. I think sometimes as Blacks we get too petty. On Martin Luther King day we are one. The next day we're back to stabbing each other in the back.

I can't count on the church. From them I got, 'We're praying for you sister Deann, and we can give you something just as soon as revival is over.' I get most of my help from the white man.

For other female executives, initial financial support came from more conventional origins such as philanthropic, local, state, or federal government sources.

A local foundation helped launch Beth's organization with a $20,000 seed grant. The same number of dollars, but
from a government source, put Nyda's service plans in ac-
tion. A sizeable in-kind contribution helped Martha's
organization to open its doors. One of the founding mothers
inherited a house which became the organization's first
single family unit.

Elayne "convinced" city government to set aside funds
for neighborhood economic development and received $12,000
to launch her organization. Her actions created a line item
in the city's budget so that other community organizations
could apply for funds and do similar kinds of community
development activities.

Trying to Stay Alive. While finding financing to
start their organizations may have been a challenging task,
the women soon found that maintaining a sufficient flow of
operating dollars was equally, if not more demanding.

Whatever the basis for support, supplemental fundrais-
ing was a fact of life for nearly all the executives. Those
for whom raising additional dollars was not a possibility,
decisions had been made to pursue such a course.

Nyda and her board anticipate reductions in funding
over the next three to five years and are faced with the
trial of maintaining stability while seeking self-sufficien-
cy. She said:

Nyda We currently receive support from two
sources. However, we need to identify resources
that will allow us greater flexibility. We are
committed to doing fundraising although, at this
time, we don't have a precise plan. We will investigate endowments, fee for services, and possible speaking engagements.

Martha keeps a keen eye on issues such as health care reform which might affect the flow of financial resources to her agency. Such concerns help shape her opinions about fundraising and nonprofit organizations.

Martha Anybody who's running a nonprofit needs to be smart enough or have the resources to create a for-profit support. I would also like an endowment. That would sustain us so we're not always dependent on government dollars.

Establishing a for-profit support entity was also mentioned by Elayne. She too voiced the need for developing a, "real fundraising strategy," which could be implemented on a yearly basis.

Fundraising for Beth is distinguished by corporate solicitations or special-event activities. For corporate requests, she is likely to give a well-rehearsed presentation followed by impromptu questions. Such occasions unusually result in, "fairly large contributions," which ensure program continuance.

The special event activity is a yearly occurrence which is cleverly related to the organization's service of learning. An art sale and juried exhibition bring in extra dollars, and also increases public awareness.

Beth Our budget is zero if at all possible. The first year we did our fundraiser, we spent way too much. Our goal now is let's get everything donated, and last year we paid absolutely nothing! I think my husband came up with the idea [special event] because he likes art work. It
takes quite a bit of effort to put this thing on, but my husband and our treasurer have it just about down to a science.

We target two different types of markets. Those companies that want to get involved in the arts, and those that want to be involved in education. Companies which have supported us throughout the year with large contributions come free. That’s our way of saying thank you. Other companies can send multiple representatives for a lump-sum purchase, and individual tickets can be purchased.

What we have is a reception along with viewing the art which is also available for purchase. We give the artist 50 percent which is kind of unusual. I think the usual split is 60/40.

Funding stipulations require that Elayne raise at least ten percent of her budget from other sources. In actuality, the minimum level of needed dollars is exceeded because, as Elayne says, "there are a number of necessary items that are not covered by grant funds."

All the women recognized that they were active combatants in the battle for dollars, but did not necessarily see other female executives or organizations as adversaries. The women heading smaller organizations realized that theirs was a particularly challenging struggle because of organizational size. Elayne gave a clear summation of their plight.

**Elayne**

The hard thing is that a lot of the smaller organizations are simply under-funded. So you spend a tremendous amount of time just trying to stay alive.

Also, when you’re a nonprofit organization, there is a very real pull between what you think is needed and what is funded. For example, funding for a project is one thing and funding for administrative activity is something totally different. A lot of people, if you tell them specifically that you’re doing a project, that’s fine, but when you start talking about rent, electrici-
ty, and other types of overhead, those people are not as comfortable about giving dollars because the results aren’t visible.

In the kinds of things we’ve been doing, people don’t usually allow any type of administrative cost, especially in grants. They expect you to be putting that in and that becomes difficult. So basically, what you end up doing is juggling projects. You’re doing a whole lot more but the result is you’re doing more with the same amount. You’re taking on projects that are generating a product, but it’s not helping you stay alive.

So often people say, ‘Well, just get another grant.’ They don’t understand that grants don’t help you do what you normally do, they usually add another project on top of what you are doing already. All of us are just down to our nails holding on for funding just to do what you want to do, and to find time to do this other is not even easy.

While Elayne’s experience is that dollars are hard to come by when seeking coverage for administrative costs, Beth’s reality presents a different perspective. Her private funders know their dollars support administrative expenses. Beth also took a dim view of nonprofits who, in her opinion, seek grant dollars which may take them to the left or right of their mission.

Beth A lot of organizations ask, well, how can we get money? I really hate to say this but I think a lot of organizations cover their administrative costs by developing programs. We do not want to get into a process of writing and developing programs just to get federal money. The organizations that do may be paying salaries, but they’re writing grant money to get it.

We’re up front with our funders. There is no expansion or something new. No bells or whistles added to come up with a gift of money. We say this is what we’re doing and this is why we need the money. You’re paying the rent, you’re keeping the lights on, you’re paying the staff.
**Begging or Fundraising.** While fundraising is a fact of life for some of the executives, it is not high on most of the executive's "like to do" list. Elaine is fortunate in that community service groups and area merchants are consistent in supporting her activities. Yet because their numbers are few, she dislikes having to make repeated solicitations for budgetary needs. With each year the demand to secure additional dollars becomes a steeper uphill battle. Fundraising is the one flaw in her perfect job.

**Elayne** If I didn't have to fundraise, I'd be in heaven. I don't care to fundraise. So often you have to feel as if you're begging and you go back to the same people over and over again and it's hard.

It seems like the dollars coming into the organization are not being directed by the community. They're being directed by somebody else, so it's kind of like, "We know what's good for you and we'll give you some dollars to work with!" So you feel like you're on the receiving end with the begging bowl in hand rather than you providing a service to your community. Social services should be seen in a more professional light.

These comments echo Iris' statement regarding who really has control of dollars coming into the agency.

Elayne is not alone in her aversion to fundraising. Nyda views it as a "necessary evil," and as a task oriented person, she takes it in stride.

Pride, a spirit of independence, and just plain not liking to "Go out there and beg or ask," has forced Deann to revise her thoughts and actions where fundraising is concerned. She shares very strong opinions on the subject.
Deann: I want to tell you when you’re in a nonprofit agency, and I’ve heard this from other people and I tend to believe it—you have the tendency to prostitute your organization. When you’re seeking money, you’re out there pulling all the ropes and strings to say the right thing to get in there with people who can help you get your money. And you’ve got to do a lot of communicating. I’m not in for all that type of thing.

I almost got caught up in it. People would say “Deann you’ve got to go here and talk to this person or that person.” It was wearing me down trying to please everybody. Then, once they get you in, you’re hooked. They have you by the strings and you can’t do anything.

I’m determined that this program is not going to be based on someone’s dangling. You either know that I do a program, I’m going to submit it, and you take me on what I have—not on me dropping to my knees to ask you to help me. And I felt that I was doing that. I’m not doing that (begging) anymore period!

Deann has not ruled out fundraising, but has come up with some creative solutions. She continues to seek support from previous supporters, some speaking engagements bring profitable results, but basically she is involved in contracting for services.

Deann: I call people on the phone, or they’ll hear about me through someone and call me. I go in and talk to them and say we will do a six week program for X number of dollars. This program will consist of three modules, etc. Then the question becomes do you want the program or not; I’m ready to discuss it.

It’s on my terms now. Not on their terms. Now if you like the program, if you want to see us in action, that’s fine. You can see us in action. I have contracted with other human service agencies who need programming.
Moving to contracting for services is also a strategy which Iris hopes will bring dollars into her organization. Her sights are set toward conducting trainings on a national level.

While fundraising may not be at the top of any of the executives’ list, some did express more positive sentiments on the subject. Beth invests a majority of her time in fundraising and, of the eight executives, has the most consistent approach to this aspect of resource development. Working with her board and an adjunct group of high level executives, Beth has successfully added a number of well known corporate organizations to her list of financial backers. Beth’s motto might well be her statement “Once you hook one (a solid financial supporter), you can hook another easily.” She shares the following vignette of a top-level CEO who became a contributor to and a solicitor for her organization.

Beth I called his office on the advice of someone who had heard that he was interested in inner city education programs. He knew that I was associated with John Kasich and some other mutual associates, so I had that advantage.

When I called, his secretary said, "oh this sounds like something he would love to hear about," and she set up a luncheon appointment. He believed in the program so much that I walked out of his office with a $5,000 check before he even visited our site. It was like a dream. I was sitting in his office and he said, "Well here, this should help," and he handed me the check! Since then, not only does he generously support us financially, he is actively soliciting for us right now. So it was just as easy as that.
Things were a little more complicated for Connie. Being the persistent type, she refused to take no for an answer concerning organizational support. She explains how she succeeded in gaining free hotel and dinner accommodations for one night each month of the year:

**Connie**  Sometimes I would ask for something and there would be a negative. For instance in the case of the hotel room. Knowing that I had to travel to Cleveland frequently, I had to cut my personal costs. The first manager I asked couldn't do it, but after I asked three or four, one did work out. So sometimes asking for a contribution worked out immediately. Other times, I just kept knocking on doors--moving down the list. In most cases, fundraising was another ball to juggle or one more hat to doff and don. None of the executives operated from formalized development plans and most tackled the job with little support from board members or staff.

**Martha**  I'm planning a big celebration this summer and I'm hoping to actively involve my board--give them some responsibility on what they need to do. We're trying to use our 10th anniversary as a way to kick-off some kind of fundraising plan for next year. At the moment, nobody's working with me on that.

Despite her dislike for fundraising, Elayne worked virtually alone to successfully wangle support from the city and a local bank to underwrite construction of new housing. She explains:

**Elayne**  I started by going out to the banks saying, "look, we really want to build a new house." They give you the usual story about what kind of collateral do you have or what capital do you have to put into that. I say I don't have any. They kind of look at you and make this big play about well, you don't have anything to put into it...
Fortunately, I talked to a gentleman from Country Bank. I said the house will probably take about $82,000 to build. We’d like to sell it for $50,000. Now $50,000 is nothing to this bank. So we came to an agreement at this point that they will become joint partners with us. They will provide their half and loan us our half. It’s just a matter of me getting my act together to make this happen.

Carla’s organization, which relies on tuition for a majority of its funding, is approaching fundraising concerns by forming a committee. Composed of staff who have skills or interests in fundraising, the committee’s purpose is to secure applications and other information for grants or corporate donations. Carla also plans to keep watch on legislation involving school choice because vouchers would significantly enhance their financial situation.

The shared stories about financial resources may give the impression that the female executives are hanging on by a thin thread; however, such is not the case. True, the smaller organizations have a more difficult time of achieving and maintaining financial stability, but they, as well as the larger agencies, have been able to counter turbulent times with creative and effective tactics. Martha makes the following comment about the status of her organization.

Martha

Financially, we’re in an excellent place to leverage other dollars. By getting the HUD grant we now have a tremendous bargaining chip. I can say I have 1.4 million dollars over the next five years. If you don’t give me operating dollars, we have to send it back and that means we lose.

As we’ve come along, we got federal money, then leveraged local money. Then that leveraged Ohio Department of Development money so it’s like
one thing leads to another. As you build your reputation in the community as a stable agency, one dollar leverages another. That seems to be what has happened to us.

Summary

The board of directors, human and financial resources were the three main concerns which commanded most of the executives' attention in regard to the management of resources.

Boards of Directors. The executives had strong attachments to their boards. Supportive friends and acquaintances were selected as initial governing members. The type of boards ranged from grass roots to a gathering of top flight business persons. Early on the executives realized a weakness in the boards: they lacked diversity in representing a cross section of the community. To correct this flaw, each executive became involved in board restructuring. Ideal characteristics of board members were commitment to cause, connections with wealthy corporations, and previous board experience. Also, to accommodate busy board members, the female executives in some cases, formed auxiliary or adjunct components to their boards. Because many early board members were unaccustomed to board protocol, they did not fulfill their authorized function or meet some of the expectations of the executives. To counter this, some executives introduced new styles of working together to their boards.
Common issues voiced by a majority of the executives included the lack of board involvement in decision-making and fundraising. Several executives were also concerned that they received little feedback from their boards and that their governing bodies were merely "rubber stamps." One explanation for this was that as organization founders or rescuers, the women were trusted by the board to do the right thing.

Nearly all of the executives could identify at least one board member whose contributions to the organization were outstanding. These "rare jewels" not only brought resources into the organization, but motivated other members and served as visible representatives of the organization to the larger community. In general the female executives reported excellent to good working relationships with their boards.

**Human Relations.** Hiring staff, a new responsibility for many of the executives, meant that they could relinquish some of their duties and take on the broader task of supervision.

Executives were creative in filling their staff needs. Part-time employment, VISTA volunteers, proposals to expand services, retired individuals, and payment per services rendered were some of the solutions used to bring staff on board. All executives agreed that the use of volunteers
was a lovely idea. However, for those executives heading smaller organizations, supervision was problematic because of time requirements.

Once staff was hired, building an effective team was important to the women. Commitment to cause was a common bond between executives and their staffs. The women demonstrated concern for employees by empowering them to assume leadership roles, scheduling quarterly retreats, increasing vacation time, encouraging that sick and mental health days be taken when needed and by giving employees freedom to take risks in doing their jobs. The executives also searched for ways to increase the salaries of their employees.

**Financial Resources.** In starting their organizations, the female executives began with nothing more than an idea which they shared with others. From nothing they moved to something--support from friends, family, other well wishers. Foundations, government funding, personal contributions, and gifts from supporters provided seed money for the organizations. Self-sufficiency was a common organization goal; however, formalized plans detailing future fiscal directions were rare.

Realizing that funding dollars were scarce, the women did not view other organizations as competition. They understood that: 1) Their dilemma was complicated by organization size and the traditional underfunding within human services. 2) Tension existed between what the organization
needed and what was funded. 3) Grant awards added another menu item to an already full plate. 4) Grant awards have the potential to take organizations to the left or right of their mission.

The attitudes of most of the executives toward fundraising was less than enthusiastic. Many felt they were begging. Alternatives to fundraising were contracting for services, fee for services, conducting training sessions, and scheduling speaking engagements. The executives also mentioned the creation of for-profit entities.

Most executives received little support from their boards in the area of fundraising. The executives who excelled in this area, advise that one not be afraid to ask, be persistent, keep moving down the list, involve interested staff on committees, and use current funds as leverage to secure other dollars.

**Concluding Summary**

The preceding findings represent more than investiga-
tive information about female executives who head small nonprofit human service organizations. Through their expe-
riences we have an in depth and personal guided tour of their distinctive leadership practices.

Most of the women stepped into the leadership arena with little formal preparation or practical experience. Their basic leadership strategies involved what they could
do themselves—personal acts—and interpersonal acts. Practicing self-reliance, the executives used that sense to meet multiple demands, were guided by ethical standards, and followed their personal vision to move their organizations forward. Networking was a highly regarded interpersonal skill which the executives practiced within and outside the organization.

The self-perceptions of the executives were positive. They viewed themselves as doing a credible job and were able to cite a list of accomplishments achieved using their broad leadership skills. The women were also aware of their centrality to the functioning of their organizations and the importance their attitude and demeanor played in shaping staff performance.

Knowledge building called for decisive and quick action from the executives. Methods of filling their knowledge gaps involved self-discipline, observing others, attending trainings, being mentored, and exercising trial and error approaches to problem-solving. Lessons learned were spring boards to new leadership strategies and increased perception of ability and confidence.

Motivation for the executives was closely connected with vision which was identified as a broad leadership strategy. Experiences which exposed an unmet need, a desire to empower people for positive change, belief in the impor-
tance of their particular causes, and a natural affinity for the type of work were reasons given by the executives for being involved in human services in a leadership capacity.

Stepping into executive leadership had an impact on the personal lives of the executives. Not only did executives experience pain from decision-making and grief over sacrifices, but their families did also. Husbands supported their wives and cushioned, as best they could, the financial repercussions of executive leadership. As the executives continued in their roles, they recognized and appreciated unique abilities and advantages they enjoyed as women--commitment and the mastery of circumstances to get things done. The executives demonstrated that connecting with other women in like positions was important and beneficial to them.

Managing available resources involved the executives with their board of directors, their staffs--human resources, and their families.

The women had many common experiences in organizing their boards of directors. Initially composed of friends and acquaintances, the boards were reorganized to included experienced members who were more representative of the larger community. Many of the executives were faced with boards which were reluctant to carry out their policy setting functions. They looked to the female executives for leadership.
Committed staff were an invaluable resource for the executives who used a variety of creative methods to fill and augment their staffing needs. The executives all expended a great deal of energy and time in building effective work teams.

Handling financial resources was a growing and learning experience for the executives. They soon found that the feat of initial funding brought on the task of trying to stay alive by generating ongoing funding. A majority of the executives viewed fundraising as the least pleasant part of their job. Alternatives to fundraising and the means to self-sufficiency were investigated and applied.

To end this study at this point would mean that nothing more has been done than providing an adequate "thick description" of a phenomenon. However, the rigors of qualitative methodology demand that a search for meaning ensue. The next chapter presents a discussion focused on building an understanding of what behaviors were enacted and what meaning they held for the actors.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Chapter 6 of the dissertation calls for a presentation of the researcher's interpretation of the findings presented in the previous chapter.

Because of the naturalistic nature of this study, meaning is not derived solely from the researcher but also through the interactive dialogic processes which occurred between researcher and participants.

It is also important to note that the explanations introduced here have significance for the time and context within which they occurred. Generalizability of results over time to a large population, is not the desired intent nor outcome of this study. What has been key from the outset is that a grounded theory or a significant concept would be developed which explained executive leadership as practiced by women who head small nonprofit human service organizations. To do so, the discussion now moves beyond a description of executive leadership to the discussion and interpretation of concepts which are the building blocks of theory.
Toward A Grounded Theory of Executive Leadership

Earlier, reference was made to a paradigm model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and the use of such during analysis. Application of that model served two purposes. One, it was helpful in systematically linking the data to derive concepts which would ultimately lead to a precise and dense theory. Two, the model provided an orderly way of approaching a complex process. The model consists of:

(A) Causal Conditions -> (B) Phenomenon (central concept) -> (C) Context -> (D) Intervening conditions -> (E) Action/Interaction Strategies -> and (F) Consequences.

Below, each component of the paradigm is presented and the related abstractions which help explain the concept of executive leadership are discussed. It is important to remember that the relationships presented are hypothesized being grounded in observational data which was inductively analyzed.

Causal Conditions

The causal conditions, the circumstances, situations and events leading to executive leadership, were uncovered in the histories of the women. The findings gave evidence that three important experiences of critical incident, volunteerism, and stage setting were encountered
by the women as they progressed toward their executive leadership role. The above recurring experiences were not sequential in every case; however, instances of the three experiences were present in every case.

1. Involvement in a critical sensitizing incident which brought about an emotional responses of caring and concern. Both Deann and Martha who were dealing with personal tragedy and alcohol addiction respectively, turned from self destructive habits to practices which evidenced a greater concern for themselves and for others. Carla witnessed and was distressed by the miseducation of minority and disadvantaged children.

Stimulated by events which increased their awareness and intensified their emotions, the women were moved to actions aimed at alleviating distressing conditions in the lives of others. Just as the executives interviewed by Kouzes and Posner (1987) wanted to do something significant, so also did the executive females.

Bargal (1992) noted in his case studies of the formation of self-help groups that exposure to an acute crisis--critical incident--was the first step in organization formation.

2. Volunteerism was an activity in which all the women were involved. Each women related involvements, prior to or after their critical incident, with school activities, church, PTA, or community work which gave them opportunities
for leadership development. Being thrust into leadership situations as a child gave Carla the impression that, as the oldest grandchild, she was special and looked upon to do great things. Beth and her husband invested hours as volunteers to acquaint themselves with community needs. Nyda was seen as a leader among her church congregation.

Two of the women were professionally involved in their areas of future leadership. Still, volunteerism was a factor for them in that as executives, compensation for their time was inconsistent.

The purposes for the women's involvement were to be of help, to meet a felt need, and/or to bring about a perceived change in particular situations. These reasons for participation in human service type work are consistent with those given in the literature (Hooymann, Fredriksen, & Perlmutter, 1988; Meinert, Ginsberg, & Keys, 1993; Vickers, 1990).

Following their critical incident experience, the women became more focused in their volunteer efforts. As they followed their personal beliefs and pursued their desires, the women also made steady advances in their leadership development.

3. The executive females consciously and/or unconsciously set the stage for their role as executive leaders. Compelling sentiments for their cause led the women to develop or identify and then promote a solution for their particular concern.
Iris spent years of testing and refining her methods for teaching literacy and "knew" when she was ready to start her organization. Elayne worked tirelessly to convince government officials to commit money and resources to a new form of community organizing. Carla began laying the groundwork for a school which would meet the special needs of African American children.

The findings also show that the women were already invested in their future areas of leadership. Moving into the role of executive appeared to be a sequential process for them.

Another important aspect of stage setting was the development of competencies and skills which later became transferrable to the executive arena. The pre-executive experiences of the women--their jobs, volunteer activities, life events--were opportunities where they developed practices which enhanced their self-perceptions and confidence in their abilities. Helgesen (1995) poses that initially, core leadership resources for women were composed of skills honed in the domestic arena. While this is most likely true for the executive women, the data indicate that experiences outside the home had more importance as pre-conditions for leadership.

Transferrable skills became an invaluable reservoir of experiential knowledge from which the women drew. Statements such as "I've always had organizational skills," or "I
knew I could do it because...,” indicated that the women were drawing from past experiences as they operated in their new role.

In summary, the following statements concerning causal conditions for executive leadership can be made:

- Critical incidents in the lives of the women increased their sensitivity to the needs of others and intensified the women’s willingness to advocate change.

- Volunteerism both before and prior to the women’s critical incident, helped fulfill their personal needs and intensified desires for advocacy.

- The women consciously or unconsciously set the stage for their executive level of leadership. They developed, identified, and/or promoted solutions for their concerns. Previous involvements provided opportunities to develop transferrable skills.

**The Central Concept**

The central phenomena around which these data revolved was "strength of will in executive leadership." This concept was selected because it was the unspoken yet clear message derived from the actions of female executives. As women fulfilled their role as executive leaders, they demonstrated the following:

- That strength of will was intense.
- That the intensity of strength of will in executive leadership lead to new and productive behavior patterns.

Bennis (1991) who interviewed a number of highly accomplished leaders concluded that developing one's leadership potential is the ultimate act of free will. He viewed the act of will as being essential to that of making a way--as in overcoming obstacles and difficulties.

The findings suggest that examples of making a way, overcoming obstacles, were founding or rescuing an organization with limited and inconsistent resources, sacrificing personal gain, risking financial stability, and operating on faith, all for the sake of the cause.

It can be argued that strength of will and willpower are the same. I suggest, based on the findings, that strength of will appears to be more intense than basic willpower possessed by all humans. In the case of the female executives, strength of will moved them beyond the normal boundaries of willpower and familiar methods of operation. Several of the executives described themselves and said they were described by others, at some point, as being out of control--a phrase which succinctly depicts behavior beyond their norm. What this meant is that the women responded differently to stimuli which once kept them within certain boundaries and limits. In fact, the women were attuned to new stimuli which initiated new behaviors and which pushed
their boundaries into uncharted new territory. Given that the women were operating as executives, it follows that new behaviors would develop.

Acting on strength of will, the women instinctively, combined previous experiences, new learning, common sense, intuition, emotions, and faith. Martha never reflected on how she did planning, but it had to be done, she was the only one to do it, and she did it well. Connie had no board development experience, but she read books on the subject and asked others for advice. Most of the women were unfamiliar with proposal preparation and program planning, but that did not keep them from submitting requests for funding. The findings gave many examples of how the women's "just do it" attitude resulted in extraordinary accomplishments.

Bennis (1991), noted the empowering effect of will on individuals was that they became more productive and efficient. The findings of this study indicate that strength of will empowered the women in their current roles and was demonstrated through actions, attitudes, and decisions.

The Context

The context component of the model is where description of circumstances, settings, relationships and other important conditions, as they stimulate strength of will in executive leadership, are explained.
For discussion purposes, the context of the female executives is divided into two categories of personal and environmental influences. The personal influences include values of balance, vision, family, qualities of feminine nature, and spirituality. The influences of the environment are of a professional, social, and economic nature. Within each category, the mediating and constraining effects of the contextual elements are explained.

**Personal Influences.**

**Balance.** Highly esteemed among the executives was the value of maintaining balance. The goal was to achieve the right blend of work, family, and other responsibilities to obtain a stable existence. In the case of the married executives, as they experienced their new reality, these women saw themselves as both private and professional persons rather than wife/mother or executive. Regardless of the sphere they were operating in, the women sought to create a level existence. Carla was nurse to her sick child while she managed necessary administrative duties.

Balance in the lives of the executives meant wholeness, unity, and peace. This important value also affected other personal influences. To be sure, there were occasions and periods when the organization seemed to intrude on and overwhelm the women in their relations with others. During such times the women said they initiated family retreats,
withdrew inward for personal moments of contemplation, and used humor to regain focus and purpose for their lives.

Some researchers consider balance an attribute of females in general. Sally Helgesen (1990) who detailed the lives of four high profile executive females, noted how they successfully balanced their lives and paced themselves to meet demanding schedules. Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) cited the need for balance and its pursuit as a key characteristic of the modern working woman. They shared vignettes of top female executives who gained equilibrium in their lives by refusing to work weekends or past certain hours during the week in order to have quality family time.

For the female executives, balance was a way of exerting some measure of control over their circumstances.

Vision. Having a vision—a positive mental image of the future state of their organization and their place in it was important to the leadership performance of the women. Vision linked with experiences, strength of will, and other personal influences helped the women make the leadership stretch to their executive roles.

In the leadership literature, vision is a key concept which is given considerable attention. Bennis and Nanus (1985) cite vision as the most important of four leadership strategies. Kouzes and Posner (1987) note that intuitive vision is commonplace among executives. In later studies, Bennis (1991) and Knauf, Berger, and Gray (1991) commented
that an overarching vision was the pivotal characteristic of the successful leaders they studied.

As the female executives developed, so did their visions. The women indicated that while their central concept remained the same, the effects of time and various circumstances led them to clarify and revise their visions. This finding supports Peters (1987) who concluded that vision was relatively stable and yet dynamic.

Even though many of the executives felt that they were not implementing their vision as they desired, speaking or thinking about future plans helped them devise strategies for the present which they believed would lead to their hoped for future. Drucker (1990) referred to such attention to reality as the first duty of a leader. An example of attending to the present was a familiar practice among the executives of encouraging certain staff along the leadership path in hopes of eventually shifting some administrative duties to them.

The findings give evidence that as the female executives shared their vision, they allowed others to fill in the details (Nutt & Backoff 1992). Staff and board members acted, within the context of the executive's vision, to bring about positive organizational change. Because of the women's affinity for networking and interacting with others, communicating and sharing their vision seemed to be a natural process.
Family. The findings revealed that executives encountered stress and tension at work and at home. Family relationships were challenged, changed, but yet strengthened as husbands and children made difficult and demanding lifestyle adjustments so that wives and mothers could continue to maintain and grow their organizations and in the process, mature to their fullness.

An unexpected finding was the type and level of support the married executives received from their husbands. In an age where the norm is that two incomes are needed to meet family needs, husbands were the economic stalwarts. Many executives, six of the eight, credited their husbands income as the reason they could manipulate their earnings for the benefit of the organization. Husbands also contributed advice and suggestions. One husband eventually became a paid member of the organization headed by his wife.

Feminine Nature. Another important factor in how personal influences affected strength of will in executive leadership was the way in which the women made use of the intrinsic aspects of their feminine nature. The qualities of caring, nurturing, emoting, and intuiting were instinctively a part of the women's leadership practices. Organizational policies established by women, especially those involving personnel practices, reflected their values.
Helgesen (1990) also noticed feminine characteristics of leadership in the women she studied and suggested they were advantages of being female.

Some researchers (Huber & Orlando, 1995; Hyde, 1995) have identified these qualities as feminist principles. While probably unaware of the existence of a feminist model for macro-practice (Hyde 1995), the executives resembled women who had made conscious decisions to integrate feminine attributes with rational practice. Such principles are changing the concept of power in the workplace to that of empowerment, inclusiveness and consensual agreement (Aburdene and Naisbitt, 1992; Peters, 1986). The women were automatically cast in the role of change agent because they were operating as chief executives in their chosen field. Hyde (1995) notes that working for social change and justice is often linked with the social and emotional roles held by women.

As the executives infused feminine qualities and characteristics into their leadership roles, they forged personal strengths of dedication, determination, desire to achieve, perseverance, and a strong work ethic. Aguilar and Williams (1993) made similar comments in their study of success factors of minority women.

**Spirituality.** Also, like the women of Aguilar and Williams’ study, five of the eight executive women acknowledged their spiritual connection with a divine God. From
such a relationship, the women said they gained direction, reassurance, support, a strong sense of purpose and destiny for their actions. According to the executives who expressed such opinions, survival of their organizations had a direct relationship to their level of and operation of their faith. Faith in God was not only a source of personal strength but also a strong cultural element, especially for the African American executives, several of whom traced their spiritual roots back to childhood.

Another of the surprising elements of this study was that the women spoke of their spirituality as an aspect of leadership. No question was consciously structured to elicit such responses yet spirituality was a recurring topic during the interviews.

The concept of spirituality, connecting with one's higher or inner-self, is receiving increasing attention in the literature. Some researchers approach the subject from an intuitive or "trust your feeling" type of management style (Bennis, 1991; Goldberg, 1983). Others mention spirit as promoting a sense of unity among employees within the organization (Chappell, 1993). However, Hawley (1993) directly asserts that all leadership is spiritual. He and others who promote the spiritual genre make a clear distinction between their topic and religion. However, for the executives who acknowledged spirituality, there was no such separation. The findings suggest that spirituality

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emanated from the women's religious base, and they were executing "His program," "doing His will," and receiving "His blessings."

**Environmental Influences.**

Environmental influences shift the focus to a broad perspective of contextual issues which bear on the strength of will exhibited by the women in leadership practices. Discussed below are influences of the human services profession, the social system, and the economy.

**Professional Influences.** The nonprofit sector, with its propensity for reform, has historically welcomed and accepted the presence of females (Odendahl, 1994). Particularly in the social and human services professions, women have been and are currently well represented (Lott, 1994). However, many of the chief executive positions were and are reserved for men. Female executives in small organizations, while becoming more visible, were believed to have lower status. Comments from several of the executive women gave significance to this statement. Hasenfeld's (1992) research supports the fact that the predominance of women in human services qualifies it as a gendered profession. According to Hasenfeld, the societal and political impact of such a distinction is that organizations experience difficulty in securing resources and in gaining legitimacy.

**Social Influences.** While starting or heading an organization was a personal decision for the women, social
conditions and events helped create an environment conducive
to and increasingly supportive of entrepreneurial women.
The women's liberation movement brought about significant
changes in the areas of economic security and economic
opportunities (Ehrenreich, 1985). The movement changed
public opinion regarding women in leadership positions.
Also, the push for affirmative action expanded education,
job training opportunities, and ushered in an era of pro-
gressiveness and receptiveness to demands and advances made
by minorities and women. Even though by the late 1980's and
early 1990's racial minorities were experiencing repercussions from affirmative action and civil rights gains, women
for the most part managed to hold their vantage.

**Economic Influences.** Operating in conjunction with
social influences, the concepts of a market economy and
privatization were touted by Republican administrations as
cures for meeting the social needs of disadvantaged individ-
uals. Social services experienced a reduction in government
funding. Despite economic downturns for social services,
conditions during the 1980's still supported the funding of
a number of new agencies and organizations (Reid, 1995).
Research by Lott (1994) documents that opportunities, within
the nonprofit sector, for women and people of color have
expanded. Entrepreneurial individuals, seven of the female
executives, formed organizations to serve people in need.
Small organizations, much like those started by and headed
by the female executives, with revenues below $25,000, dominate the sector. The findings of this study regarding period of organizational start up and initial funding, lend support the findings of Reid (1995) and Lott (1994).

The following statements summarize the context within which the female executives executed strength of will in executive leadership:

- Major contextual influences were of a personal and environmental nature.

- Personal influences involved values of balance, vision, and family, in addition to the qualities of feminine nature and spirituality.

- Family and spirituality were the strongest influences in the lives of the female executives.

- Husbands provided financial support and gave important feedback.

- A majority of the female executives attributed their purpose, direction, and success to their spiritual connection with a divine God.

- Environmental influences were of a professional, social, and economic nature. Conditions in all three areas had positive and negative effects for the executives.
Intervening Conditions and Action/Interaction Strategies

The next two sections of the paradigm model, intervening conditions and action/interaction strategies, are best presented by tracing an action—the search for financial resources—through a series of conditional levels. The intent is to show a broad range of conditions, their relationship to, and their effect on strength of will in executive leadership. Acquiring financial resources was selected because this action consumed a great deal of the executives’ time and other resources. Knauf, et al (1991) concluded that fundraising was a nonprofit executive’s major role and one which shouldn’t be delegated to a development person. Conditions at the national, community, organizational, sub-organizational, individual, and interational levels will be discussed.

National Level. Traditionally, the federal government has taken the lead role in meeting the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, even though it has simultaneously sustained and hindered the operation of human services. However, within the past two decades, federal policies have clearly indicated a reduced sensitivity to social issues. Through massive budget cuts the government has systematically reduced and restricted the flow of dollars earmarked for its disadvantaged citizens. Through what is called "new
federalism (Reid, 1995)," the federal government has greatly expanded the role of states in the parceling of federal aid for social welfare.

In light of budget cuts at the federal level, some of the executives have begun monitoring national funding trends, thinking about income alternatives, and positioning their agency for the future. Martha's organization, the only one to receive direct federal dollars, has already identified another area of federal funding for which her organization is eligible.

**Community Level.** Funding at the community level consists largely of state and local government dollars, corporate contributions, and grants from foundations. State funds allocated for social services have not increased significantly. What has increased is the state's options in allocating federal dollars. Small organizations are seldom in a position to compete with larger well established human service entities for such funds. The organizations headed by Nyda and Martha, which have the largest budgets, receive substantial funding from government sources. Nyda and her board are just beginning to grapple with the issue of alternative funding and the development of long term plans.

Nonprofit solicitations to corporations are up as organizations seek to offset cuts in government spending. One of the reasons the executives initiated board reorganization was to include members from the corporate sector who
would be influential in securing financial and other types of support. Beth's organization has managed to attract the support of a group of corporations and is entirely supported by their contributions. The fact that corporations are becoming more selective in awarding their philanthropic dollars, affects some of the executives' organizations. Deann realizes that her organization's services are not likely to be on a corporate concerns list. As an alternative move, she targets service organizations. The other executives view corporate funding as a small yet important part of their budget. When speaking of ways to increase their budgets, corporate contributions were mentioned as a prime resource.

The female executives are situated in an area where several large foundations are located. At least three of the executives have received funding from such sources. Knowing the criteria of a particular foundation, that they wanted to create a legacy to the future by promoting collaborative programming, resulted in an award for Elayne’s organization. However her experience has been that grants increase service offerings and work load, but do very little to help real budget needs. Hardina (1990), however found that for some organizations, particularly those that can raise funds from sources external to the community, foundation funding can enhance budgetary security.
Organizational Level. Human service organizations interact with people through an exchange of services based on ethical issues involving judgements and values. This aspect of operation places human services organizations within the context of moral work (Hasenfeld, 1992).

Decisions made by the female executives, especially those which pertained to organization mission, service delivery, and allocation of resources to clients, represent moral choices. Guiding the women in these decisions were philosophical and/or spiritual beliefs and personal standards of ethical practice.

Mentioned earlier was the fact that human services is viewed as a gendered work. The predominance of women in the work environment, according to Hasenfeld (1992), creates a tension between the values women bring to the workplace and the bureaucratic structure they encounter. The female executives while following a semblance of bureaucratic norms, generally favored less hierarchy and more expressions of cooperation, empowerment, empathy and nurturance.

Sub-organizational Level. Limited cash flow for operating dollars was an ongoing concern for the female executives and especially for those with small budgets. Charging fees for service was not a policy move of choice (but one which was being considered) since most of the organizations served disadvantaged or low income persons.
Carla's organization charged tuition, however costs had to be kept at a reasonable rate in order to fit their customer's ability to pay. Membership fees were a small supplement to Connie's budget.

Four of the executives expressed concern that their boards were not as involved in fundraising as they would have liked. Knauff, et al (1991) in their study of effective nonprofit organizations, observed that board involvement varied dramatically among nonprofits. Two major reasons which they cited for lack of board involvement in fundraising was "Failure to inform board members beforehand that they are expected to help raise money. Another [was] inappropriate recruiting of people who may be interested in fund raising but are ill prepared to do so" (p. 26). As a solution to their problems, the female executives tried board development and training, so that members could better understand and fulfill their governing responsibilities.

Infact, board development, transfusing "new blood" into the organization, was a method of revitalization used by all the executives. It was also an action which executives hoped would result in broadening their funding base through expanded corporate support and in increasing their representation within the community. Knauff, et al (1991) list a dynamic board as one of four important hallmarks of an effective organization.
The executives tapped other organizational resources--staff--in their search for financial support. In some cases, staff became members of fundraising committees, developed resources which augmented their salaries, and recommended individuals for board positions. Bargal and Schmid (1989) note that this type of participatory leadership is particularly useful when resources are scarce.

**Individual Level.** The personal orientation of the executives toward action and cause rather than toward professionalism and skill, allowed them to attack their problems in unique ways. Had Connie used the business model with its rational, efficient chain of command approach, she might not have secured the support of the governor and subsequent state funding. Had the executives viewed themselves as managers and administrators, it may not have occurred to them to give uncompensated time and make other personal concessions for their organizations.

The leadership actions of the female executives were consistent with four leadership themes identified by Bargal and Schmid (1989). The four thematic units are: 1) the leader as visionary; 2) creator of organization culture; 3) involved in leadership and followership; 4) implementer of transactional and transformational styles of leadership.
The female executives are more aligned with a transformational leadership style in that they sought to bring out the best in those with whom they worked and served.

**Interaction.** In addressing their financial resource needs, the executives worked with a number of groups: volunteers including board members, employees, foundation and corporate representatives, other nonprofit organizations, and their customers. Activities which augmented base funding were fundraisers, grants, monetary gifts, loans to the organization, in-kind contributions, memberships, and nominal facility lease arrangements.

The high levels of commitment and care demonstrated by the women in fundraising and in all phases of their operations suggest that through strength of will they were responding to a high calling to accomplish something that others had not yet achieved.

**Consequences**

The last component of the paradigm model is consequences which are the outcomes of the interactional strategies. Consequences may be either negative or positive and at a further point in time, become conditions of a intervening nature. Because the women exercised their strength of will as executive leaders, there were consequences which oc-
curred in their personal and professional lives, the social welfare of others, and in the larger environment, the economic system.

**Personal Consequences**

Predictable outcomes experienced by the women were self-discovery and increased self-esteem as they challenged themselves through various learning modes to develop leadership and management skills. The women also experienced a deeper commitment to their cause as they championed their vision and overcame odds (Fry, 1996), a broadened knowledge base grounded in intuitive knowledge, practice experience, formal learning, entrepreneurial behavior, and the ability to meet competing demands (Quinn, 1988).

Just as there are consequences from actions taken, the same is so for actions which failed to occur. The executives had little time to engage in quiet reflective thinking. Instead, much of their thought processes were dominated by reflection-in-action "A spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life [in which] we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way (Schon, 1983)." While the female executives relied heavily on and made good use of reflection-in-action, they also increased their potential for burnout (Hooymans, Fredricksen, & Perlmutter, 1988). A shortage of time also prevented many of the executives from taking full advantage of volunteers as a
valuable resource. Often, the personal cost to the executive for training and supervising non-staff personnel was too great.

The perception of failure to act or the fact that certain actions failed, often plagued the executives, at times, with self-doubt about their performance ability. Doubt then became a barrier which hindered the executives' strength of will and also affected their spontaneous and intuitive actions.

**Professional Consequences**

In their executive roles, the women developed and implemented their own models for administrative practice which, as stated earlier, were closely aligned with feminist principles. Decidedly feminine traits, with their cohorts of energy and creativity, are seen as a negative in the realm of rational management, and have been over looked as positive contributors to an effective management style. The executive females displayed their unique blend of innate qualities and traditional management approaches as they interacted with customers, staff, and stakeholders.

The impact of male dominance and its pervasive rule in the world of business also had an effect on how the women chose to interpret their use of power and performance. As leaders, the executives reconceptualized and enacted their definition of power. This, for the most part, was not a conscious act but one which was discernable in the egalitar-
ian and participatory nature of the executives' management style. Although, individual effort, out of necessity, was a large part of their performance style, the executives were inclined toward interactive means to empower leadership within their staff and also in those they served.

Where organizational mission was concerned, some executives realized the need to reexamine their statements so that they were operating from a clearly articulated goal. Lawry (1995) cautions that, and a few executives admitted that, distortion of the mission for the sake of entity maintenance or survival can and did happen.

Organizational consequences from the executives' strategies were: demonstration of leadership power, informal organization structure, organization restructuring, participatory leadership, new approaches to governance, mobilization of resources during periods of uncertainty, and organization growth (Gendron, 1996).

Through their actions, the female executives challenged the traditional and even some self-held beliefs of what they as females could do. They risked being vulnerable to the whims of the public and, most of all, to their own self-scrutiny, ridicule and opposition.

Social Consequences

By starting their own organizations and/or assuming leadership as executives, the women became social change
agents. Like their 19th century sisters who championed social welfare causes (Brandwein, 1981), the female executives were advocates for those they chose to serve. Chronicles of the social welfare movement support the notion that the pursuit of social change is an intrinsic part of the emotional and social roles held by women (Hyde, 1989).

As change agents, the consciousness of the women was raised as they became increasingly aware of gaps in available social service delivery and how they, through their organization, might fill the void.

Moved by an increased awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of others within their race, the African American female executives, in particular, consciously incorporated cultural values and norms into their practice by offering gender and ethnic centered services. The white females executives who served large number of African Americans, were cognizant of the social dynamics created by their leadership and ethnic orientation. They also made deliberate efforts to devise and deliver programming to meet the special needs and concerns of their multicultural, ethnically diverse customers.

Because the executives' organizations were not duplicating services but filling gaps in the local human service delivery system, that same system was enhanced and strengthened. Through board member participation, organizational membership, and various other means of support,
private citizens had opportunities to be involved in bringing about positive change in the lives of a few for the benefit of all.

**Economic Consequences**

The women, as organizational founders, became part of the fastest growing segment of our economy, the nonprofit sector (Reid, 1995). Their organizations contributed to the economy as consumers of material and human resources. Even though a common practice among the executives was to deny, delay, and/or take less payment for themselves, their staff were paid and they in turn became consumers contributing to the market economy.

Through their organizational existence and survival, the women were, in a sense, giving validity to the theory of supply side economics touted by Republicans during the Regan-Busch era--a time when many of the women launched their organizations. The philosophy driving supply side economics was that tax breaks given to big business and the wealthy would trickle down to stimulate investments and the growth of new businesses which would hire employees who would buy more goods and services. Knowing that many of the women started their organizations with grants received from large corporations and also foundations which also benefitted from corporate largess, it is possible that the theory in action served, to some extent, its intended purpose.
The executives, through their organizations, also contributed to the economy via their service technology and the human products produced. Clients who exhibited an improved quality of life because of the services they received, were more prepared to assume their role as self-supporting, responsible, and contributing members of the community.

Summary

Through use of the paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), a systematic construction of the concept strength of will in executive leadership was presented.

The history of the executives with its sensitizing incidents and opportunities for leadership, was recognized as the major causal condition leading to leadership development and also to the emergence, development, and execution of strength of will.

Strength of will was identified and presented as the central phenomenon which accounts for some of the leadership activities of the executive females. Differences between strength of will and will power were discussed. It was suggested that strength of will involves intuition, initiative, common sense, and creativity. Personal and environmental influences comprised the situational context. A range of conditions from a national to an individual perspective were given and their effects explained. Interaction strategies were cited and their effects examined.

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Finally, the consequences of the executives' leadership practices were discussed.

Having presented the above, the following can be said regarding strength of will in executive leadership: It is the central concept which helps us understand and explain some of the multiple and complex realities of the executive females; previous experiences and encounters in their lives nurture its development over time; it does not occur within a vacuum but is a contextual blend of personal and environmental forces; personal, interpersonal, environmental, and economic conditions, occurring on a number of levels, exert and act as intervening influences on its operation; the actions and interactions of the executive females are demonstrations of strength of will; the consequences of actions initiated out of strength of will are of a personal, professional, social, and economic nature; exercising strength of will has a price which is exacted in personal commitment, ability, and time.
CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The voices of the female executives involved in this study gave evidence that executive leadership is not the glitz and glamour one might see portrayed in the media, but is more likely to involve guts and gumption in a display of strength of will. As the women spoke in their own voices, we heard their histories, glimpsed their personalities, experienced their emotions and shared their trials and triumphs. We learned about their approach to life, their challenges of leadership, and the solutions they used to cope with the uncertainties of both. The portraits they presented allowed us to view the complex multifaceted reflections of their reality.

In Chapter 8, steps were taken which moved this research project beyond detailed analysis and into discussion. Data and description were synthesized to gain meaning from and give explanation to the experiences of the executive females. Moving toward a grounded theory, strength of will was proposed as the concept which illustrates the leadership actions of the executive females.
This chapter concludes this research project by presenting implications of the findings for social work research, policy, education and administration.

Implications for Social Work Research

Operating in what Mintzberg (1987) calls the "strategic apex" of the organization, female executives in small non-profit organizations have the difficult task of proving and maintaining organization effectiveness and, at the same time, building organizational legitimacy. This study has presented an in-depth examination of the experiences of eight such executives. Strength of will was offered as a concept which poses some explanation as to how the women approached and met the demands and challenges of their leadership experience. Would strength of will emerge in another context? Further research regarding the concept of strength of will could determine whether its concrete instances are unique and specific and/or related to executives, male and female in settings similar to that in this study.

A number of researchers believe that the practice of business as we know it is experiencing a paradigm shift (Ray, 1993). Some of the values and/or feminine principles displayed by and regarded by the female executives of this study are believed to be important tenets of the emerging business model. The new standard for business moves it
beyond rational management and embraces assumptions of spiritual values, process, and rational and intuitive behavior (Ferguson, 1993). As the new wave of business protocol produces different strategies for leadership and organization change, how will leaders respond to the new paradigm values? What effects will the new paradigm have on organizational development?

Further research is needed to gain more understanding of the feminine principles women use to guide them in their role as leaders. In particular, the use of these unique principles need to be studied as they are practiced in non-feminist settings (Hyde, 1989).

Although this study did not touch on it, the findings suggest that there may be ethnic differences in the leadership practices of female executives. All of the African American executives believed that divine guidance was responsible for their leadership success. Also, many of the African American executives sought support and sustenance from churches in their community. Why was this so? If there are ethnic differences, what type of actions and interactions are displayed? What are the circumstances which bring about culturally based responses? What are the consequences of those differences? Further study and documentation could shed light on how culture may influence the leadership practices of women.
Although some studies (Ezell, 1983; Powell, 1988), have found no great differences between men and women in the global dimensions of managerial behavior, others (Chernesky & Bombyk, 1988; Hayes, 1989) site nebulous to specific differences. Additional research is needed which investigates men and women administrators in different settings (Ezell, 1988), especially those of small organizations. Such a study would enliven the debate as to whether or not there are leadership differences between the genders.

An observation from this study was that women seemed to head small fledgling human service organizations while many of the older well established agencies were led by men. How is it that, in a field which historically and demographically belongs to women, they trail behind men in prominent executive leadership positions? Women are a major source of power in human services, and as they assume executive leadership roles, more research should focus on the wisdom, creativity, insight, distinctive skills, and perspectives they bring.

**Implications for Social Policy**

Social workers and others in human services have a long tradition of working to influence social policies which shape peoples' lives. Female executives and those who practice the values attributed to feminine principles of
leadership have an opportunity to work for policies within the organization designed to empower clients (Chapin, 1995) as well as employees in preserving their capacity, freedom, and dignity.

Individuals who serve on the boards of directors of small organizations must assume their responsibility as moral stewards of the organization. Herman and Heimovics (1991) assert that such behavior is likely if the executive helps the board understand and carry out its moral and legal responsibilities. The female executives have made many moves, in the area of board development, in the right direction. Their actions indicate that the traditional "the board sets policy and the executive carries out policy" arrangement left something to be desired. The executives instinctively have been doing and should continue to do what Herman and Heimovics (1991) call board-centered leadership. Such tactics allow the executive to take responsibility for developing and leading the board so that they are enabled to meet their responsibilities. Perlmutter (1994) sees strong board relations as being critical for leaders of small human service organizations.

To affect policy beyond the boundaries of their organization, executives in small agency settings will need to gain and exercise political savvy by becoming sensitive to the environmental influences which affect their internal decisions and policies (Heimovics, et al, 1995). One area
where particular attention should be directed is that of building alliances and networks with important stakeholders.

Several of the female executives have used the strategy of involving elected officials in board membership. Such practices may have positive and negative results. Herman and Heimovics (1991) cite a number of issues: 1) because of their busy schedule, what effect will minimal participation have on other members? 2) How will foundations and corporate donors perceive their addition? 3) Will the elected official's membership alienate supporters from alternative parties? 4) What can a nonprofit organization reasonably expect an official to do? Executives will need to weigh these and other concerns before deciding to involve other politically connected individuals in board membership.

As human service professionals go on to experience the impact of welfare reform, executives of small organizations will be challenged to keep agencies mission and client-centered. In such times, executives will need to revisit and draw on their original purpose for leadership action and also rely on their vision of what the organization could be and should be. Purpose combined with vision will keep executives committed to their goals and allow them to take from the traditional systems those things that are useful and channel them into innovative ways of providing services and maintaining organization viability.
Implications for Social Work Education

The study of administration is a relatively new area to the ranks of social welfare (Patti, 1987). Even so, academicians and practitioners have made significant contributions to the knowledge base and practices of the field. However, of concern to social work educators who teach administration is the fact that an increasing number of human service organizations are headed by persons who have not been trained in social work administration (Hoefer, 1993; Patti, 1987). The findings of this study lend support to this fact.

The findings also suggest that executives of small nonprofit organizations recognize their need for administrative training, but are hampered by costs and time commitments. Schools and colleges of social work might find this pool of executives as a ready resource for participants in continuing education courses designed around weekend commitments.

Also, social work educators need to think of expanding their outreach so that more persons at the grass roots level of human services can take advantage of social work's knowledge and skills. There are churches and other voluntary organizations whose members and staff could and do need to benefit from leadership training, program planning, and other aspects of organizational development. If supervisory requirements could be worked out, small organizations would
be ideal placement sites for undergraduate and graduate level students. Perhaps in exchange for field placement sites for social work interns, institutions could offer free or low cost in-service training to the organizations (Bocage, Homenoff, Riley, 1995).

Collaborative efforts between higher education institutions, government and human service organizations, and funding federations might be another way of reducing educational costs for executives of small organizations. The end result of such an approach could be certification for some participants and/or entry into a more structured degree granting program for others.

In regards to course content, the focus would be on helping women sharpen the skills they already possess such as leadership, decision making, and various forms of communication (Austin, 1983, Hoefer, 1993). The findings of this study also support the belief that feminine principles of leadership and the values of the social work profession share points of convergence (Hyde, 1989). If this is so, than social work has an opportunity to take the lead in developing new streams of leadership training. Within these new streams, there is a flow for including successful leaders who have come into human services via the non academic route. Stories of their experiences can serve as exemplars of the power of strength of will.
There is also a flow for considering spirituality, with its invigorating and empowering potential, as a facet of leadership. Spirituality is gaining notice within the social work profession (Morell, 1996; Sermabeikian, 1994; Smith, 1995) as a beneficial coping strategy for clients. In other disciplines, researchers have found that some executives engage in spiritual practices to cope with stress (Nelson, Quick, & Quick, 1989). New leadership offerings would also encourage and support the move past a concern for hierarchy and towards consideration for improving the quality of life for all persons (Martin & Chernesky, 1989).

**Implications for Social Work Administration**

If the business community is indeed experiencing a paradigm shift from economic concerns to inner concerns, then human service administrators have an opportunity to be the avant-garde. Many of the assumptions of the new paradigm, briefly stated above, are in accord with traditional social work values. The paradox has been that the traditional bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of most human service organizations, and the values of the social work profession have not made a good fit.

As administrators continue to meet the demands for accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness from their various stakeholders, they face the challenge of maintaining an environment where employees feel valued for their contri-
butions. By exploring other ways to structure their agencies, administrators are likely to increase employee participation, organization commitment, and build and strengthen collaborative departmental relationships, all of which would result in increased organizational functioning. The female executives of this study have made a good beginning toward the new paradigm.

Conclusion

This research study explored the leadership practices of eight females as they functioned as chief executives in small nonprofit human service organizations. The qualitative methods utilized in this study provided an in-depth picture of the women. The data indicate the complexity of their leadership experience. Through interpretations grounded in the data, strength of will was posited as an appropriate conceptual frame for explaining some of the leadership actions of the female executives.

Strength of will was a distinct quality which emerged and developed from the intrinsic will of the executives. Strength of will, is an innate quality and could only be disclosed in a naturalistic qualitative study of this type.

While the women of this study displayed many of the characteristics observed by others who have studied executives and leaders, these eight respondents have set themselves apart as researchers. To view the women of this
study as such is within reason (Schon, 1983) because through their leadership strategies, they have boldly constructed for themselves theories generated from the unique cases they encountered in their passion for organizational survival.
APPENDIX A
SOLICITATION and CONSENT LETTER
Thank you for agreeing to participate as a subject in the research study I will be doing. I look forward to our meeting on Monday, February 21, at 12:30 p.m. Your cooperation and involvement will make a significant contribution to the knowledge base of Social Work Administration. I will be working under the direction of Dr. Richard First of the Ohio State University.

For academic and personal reasons, I am interested in learning more about the experiences of human service administrators and the strategies they use to maintain and acquire financial resources. To gain this information, I will be interviewing you and other administrators. I will use some questions to guide the interviews, however it is my hope that you will be able to openly express your thoughts, feelings, and opinions on the key aspects of your own experience.

As a participant, I am asking that you commit to a minimum of three conversations each lasting about one hour. During our time together, I will tape record each session and take notes.

You should feel free to refuse to answer any questions which you find too sensitive or intrusive. Also, you are free to withdraw from participation in the study at any time. Toward the conclusion of this study, you will be asked to meet with me to review and discuss rough drafts of the outcome of our time together. This procedure will help ensure that the results give a true representation of your point of view.

All materials used in this study will be coded to protect your identity and kept in secure files. Only Dr. First and I will have access to these files. All audio
tapes and shared documents will be destroyed upon completion
of the study. Be assured that every effort will be made to
protect your identity and preserve your confidentiality.
The final written report will use pseudonyms to mask names
and other biographical or geographical data. Such changes
will be discussed and approved by you.

Should you desire any further information, feel free to
contact me at 276-3180.

Sincerely,

Annette E. Jefferson

-----------------------------Consent Form-----------------------------

I have read the above and understand the purpose and re-
quirements explained for participation in this research
project.

Signed........................................................................
participant

Signed........................................................................
Principal investigator or authorized representative

Date........................................................................
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE
Interview questions  (not necessarily asked in order)

**Standard Organization Questions**

Name
Title
Organization
Address
Phone

How long has this organization been established?
Is organization 501 C(3)?
Does your organization have a written mission statement?
How many people serve on your board of directors?
What is the name of your board president?

Does organization have one source which yearly supplies a large part of the organization budget?
What are some other sources of funding?
What is your agency’s approximate annual budget?
Is that an increase over the previous year?
How many persons are employed by this organization?
How many staff do you directly supervise?
How many volunteers do you have?
How long have you been in your executive position?

Now I’d like to hear about any previous leadership experience whether paid or volunteer?

Do you have a written job description

How does your board evaluate your performance.

What do you consider the most important part of your job?

How do you see your role as director of this organization?
Interview Questions (cont.)

What have been your tasks and challenges?

Why do you do what you do?

What is your vision for this organization?

What are you doing to achieve your vision?

How do you see your role in the future? What will be different, what will be the same?

Is there anything else I should know or that you want to share with me about your tenure as executive director?
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