

DEVELOPING FEMALE LEADERSHIP TO ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN CHINESE VOCATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of high-quality development of vocational education in China, vocational universities bear the core mission of cultivating technical and skilled talents, and institutional organizational administration is the fundamental guarantee for steady operation of vocational colleges. Female educators and administrative staff constitute a large proportion of human resources in vocational universities, yet female leaders remain underrepresented in middle and senior administrative positions, and the unique relational, empathetic and collaborative strengths of female leadership have not been fully mobilized to optimize institutional governance. This paper sorts out the core concepts, theoretical foundations and multi-dimensional connotations of female leadership in vocational educational administration, systematically analyzes three layers of barriers restricting female leadership development including organizational institutional barriers, traditional cultural gender barriers and individual role-conflict barriers, and constructs a multi-dimensional promotion system covering competency training, mentoring mechanism, professional community, career ladder and institutional guarantee.

Keywords: Chinese Vocational Universities; Female Leadership; Educational Administration; Gender Equity; Organizational Governance

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Vocational Education Transformation and Governance Demand

China's vocational education has entered a critical stage of type-based development, with the state continuously issuing policy documents such as the Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China and the Implementation Plan for Vocational Education Reform to clarify that vocational universities should build standardized, refined and humanized organizational administration systems. Different from comprehensive universities, vocational colleges focus on industry-education integration, student practical training and frontline student management, which puts forward higher requirements for communication coordination, emotional management and collaborative operation of administrators. Traditional administrative governance models dominated by masculine hierarchical leadership often rely on rigid institutional constraints and top-down instruction, which easily lead to insufficient attention to the practical demands of teachers, students and frontline training teams in vocational colleges. Female leadership, characterized by transformational leadership logic, can make up for the defects of single hierarchical management, realize balanced governance between institutional standardization and humanistic care, and adapt to the complex multi-stakeholder operation environment of vocational universities linking schools, enterprises, students and families. Therefore, exploring the development path of female leadership has become an urgent practical proposition to improve the overall organizational administration efficiency of vocational universities.

1.2 Theoretical and Practical Significance of Research

From the theoretical perspective, existing domestic and foreign research on educational female leadership mostly focuses on comprehensive universities and basic education, while targeted research taking vocational universities as the research object is relatively scarce, lacking analysis combining the type characteristics of vocational education and China's local gender culture context. This study integrates role congruity theory, transformational leadership theory and gendered organizational theory to construct an analytical framework suitable for vocational college management scenarios, enriching the theoretical system of educational administration and female leadership research in China's vocational education field. From the practical level, developing female leadership helps vocational universities break the single gender structure of management teams, absorb diversified decision-making perspectives, reduce management bias caused by gender stereotypes, and improve the scientificity and inclusiveness of institutional decision-making. Meanwhile, giving full play to the advantages of female leaders in student ideological and political management, teacher team cohesion and school-enterprise communication can effectively solve prominent pain points in vocational college administration such as high student mobility, difficult coordination of off-campus training bases and insufficient team incentive effectiveness. In addition, this research responds to the requirements of the *China Women's Development Outline (2021–2030)* on promoting women's participation in public management, providing operable institutional strategies for vocational colleges to implement gender mainstreaming governance.

1.3 Literature Review and Research Gap

Foreign scholars have formed mature research systems on female leadership in educational administration. Eagly & Karau proposed Role Congruity Theory, pointing out that society forms inherent stereotype cognition that leadership traits conflict with female gender role expectations, which becomes the core root of women's career promotion obstacles in education sectors. Eagly & Carli put forward the "leadership labyrinth" theory, replacing the single "glass ceiling" concept to explain that women's promotion barriers are multi-layered and scattered in every link of career development, including recruitment, training, post allocation and performance evaluation. In vocational education research, overseas studies confirm that female managers in technical colleges have stronger emotional intelligence and collaborative management capabilities, and

their institutional operation performance is significantly positively correlated with the proportion of female middle-level leaders.

National scholars in recent years have focused on female leadership in general higher education. Zhou Hongyu & Zhan Shulan analyzed the multiple role conflicts of university female presidents between administrative work and family care, and summarized institutional and cultural restrictive factors for female leadership growth in universities.. Ma Yunxia et al. conducted empirical research on vocational college management posts, verifying that high-level management posts have more serious gender imbalance, and female staff face prominent human resource matching barriers in promotion channels. However, current studies still have two obvious research gaps: first, few studies systematically link female leadership development with the overall optimization of vocational university organizational administration, failing to quantify the internal mechanism of female leadership affecting institutional governance efficiency; second, existing countermeasures mostly stay at the macro policy level, lacking targeted implementation paths combining the industry-education integration characteristics of vocational colleges, mentoring systems and professional network construction.

CONCEPTS AND DIMENSIONS OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

2.1.1 Female Leadership in Educational Administration

Female leadership does not simply refer to leadership held by female gender individuals, but a comprehensive leadership model formed by integrating female gender identity, relational management logic and educational administration practice under the background of gender equity governance. Different from traditional transactional leadership dominated by power and supervision, female leadership in education takes transformational leadership and servant leadership as theoretical core, takes humanistic care, equal communication and collaborative empowerment as basic behavioral orientations, and acts on all links of school administrative operation including personnel management, teaching operation, student management and school-enterprise cooperation. In the scenario of Chinese vocational universities, female leadership is defined as the comprehensive ability of female administrative managers to coordinate internal and external resources, motivate teacher and student teams, resolve institutional management contradictions and promote the realization of vocational education talent training goals under the constraints of vocational college institutional systems and Chinese local gender culture.

2.1.2 Organizational Administration of Vocational Universities

Organizational administration of vocational universities refers to a series of standardized management activities carried out around the core goal of technical talent training, covering organizational structure setting, personnel performance management, teaching operation management, student service administration, school-enterprise coordination and institutional construction, whose core goal is to realize efficient allocation of institutional human, financial and material resources and sustainable high-quality development of vocational colleges. Compared with ordinary undergraduate universities, vocational university organizational administration has prominent practical attributes: it needs to coordinate multiple stakeholders such as industrial enterprises, training bases, frontline practical training teachers and vocational students, and puts forward higher requirements for the coordination, communication and emotional governance capabilities of management teams, which is exactly the advantageous field of female leadership practice.

2.2 Core Theoretical Foundations of Female Leadership Research

2.2.1 Role Congruity Theory

Proposed by Eagly & Karau (2002), the theory holds that society endows fixed gender role expectations to men and women respectively: the social expectation for women is gentle,

compliant, care-oriented and low-power-seeking; while leadership roles require traits such as decisiveness, dominance and authority. The cognitive conflict between the two forms inherent gender bias in organizational evaluation, leading to higher threshold for women to obtain management posts and stricter performance assessment standards after taking office. In vocational colleges, this theory can explain why female excellent frontline teachers are often recognized in teaching posts but easily questioned when competing for administrative leadership positions, becoming the micro psychological root of gender barriers in promotion.

2.2.2 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership proposed by Bass breaks the traditional management model based on interest exchange, emphasizing that leaders stimulate subordinates' intrinsic motivation through vision guidance, emotional communication and personalized care, and realize common growth of organizations and individuals. A large number of empirical studies confirm that female leaders are more inclined to adopt transformational leadership behaviors, and their management styles are highly matched with the humanized service demand of vocational college student administration and teacher team construction, which is the core theoretical basis for female leadership to optimize vocational university organizational administration.

2.2.3 Gendered Organizational Theory

Diehl & Dzubinski's gendered organizational theory points out that organizational structure, post setting, promotion rules and institutional culture of any institution are implicitly constructed based on traditional male gender norms, forming invisible institutional bias against women's career development. Vocational universities formed under the long-term education management system retain many male-oriented management rules such as overtime attendance, long-term business trips to enterprises and high-intensity emergency duty, which objectively amplify the multiple role pressure of female staff balancing family and work, and restrict the growth space of female leadership.

2.3 Essential Multi-Dimensional Dimensions of Female Leadership in Vocational University Administration

Combined with the empirical data of female managers in vocational colleges in Shaanxi and Shandong regions summarized by existing research, this paper divides vocational educational female leadership into five core dimensions with measurable competency standards:

2.3.1 Relational Coordination Dimension

This is the most distinctive advantage dimension of female leadership, including cross-department communication ability, school-enterprise negotiation coordination, student emotion mediation and teacher team interpersonal harmony management. Vocational colleges need to maintain long-term cooperative relations with a large number of manufacturing and service enterprises; female leaders are good at building equal trust relationships through empathetic communication, effectively reducing transaction costs of school-enterprise cooperation and resolving conflicts in practical training management.

2.3.2 Humanistic Emotional Governance Dimension

Covering emotional intelligence, student psychological counseling, teacher occupational pressure relief and inclusive organizational atmosphere construction. Vocational students have complex learning foundations and psychological characteristics; female leaders can build a supportive campus management environment through humanistic management, reduce student dropout rates and teacher job burnout, and improve the overall organizational cohesion of the college.

2.3.3 Collaborative Decision-Making Dimension

Different from the centralized decision-making model of traditional masculine leadership, female leadership emphasizes multi-subject participation in decision-making, fully absorbing the opinions of frontline teachers, enterprise mentors and student representatives in major administrative affairs such as major setting, training program reform and student management

system revision, which significantly improves the scientificity and implementation effect of institutional policies.

2.3.4 Resilient Risk Response Dimension

Including institutional reform adaptability, emergency incident disposal and pressure resistance under multiple role conflicts. Vocational education policy updates frequently, and school-enterprise training risks and student safety incidents occur frequently; female leaders show stronger resilient leadership in complex uncertain environments, able to adjust management strategies flexibly and maintain stable operation of institutional administration systems.

2.3.5 Gender Equity Organizational Construction Dimension

The unique dimension of female leadership in the Chinese context, referring to the consciousness and ability to promote gender mainstreaming within the college, break post gender segmentation, establish equal promotion mechanisms for male and female staff, and drive more female young teachers to enter reserve management talent pools, forming a sustainable female leadership echelon within the organization.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO FEMALE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN CHINESE VOCATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Based on the three-layer analysis framework of macro social culture, organizational institution and micro individual role conflict, this paper systematically sorts out the multi-dimensional barriers restricting the development of female leadership in vocational universities, and combines vocational college management characteristics to analyze the internal mechanism of each barrier restricting organizational administration optimization.

3.1 Macro-Level: Traditional Cultural Gender Stereotype Barriers

China's traditional gender culture formed the deep-rooted social cognition of "men as breadwinners, women as homemakers", which has formed implicit bias in the whole education industry and vocational education management field. First, society generally forms stereotype evaluation of female managers: on the one hand, it thinks women are too sensitive and lack decisive ability to bear senior management responsibilities; on the other hand, it puts forward double standards for female leaders — if female managers adopt strict standardized management, they will be labeled "tough and unapproachable", while adopting humanistic soft management will be judged "lack of leadership deterrence". Second, family care responsibility is unilaterally attributed to women: women bear the main pressure of childbirth, childcare and elderly care, and society forms a common cognition that women should give priority to family affairs, which reduces female staff's willingness to compete for administrative posts and increases external public pressure after taking leadership positions.

This cultural barrier directly affects the allocation of management talent resources in vocational universities: school party committees and human resource departments tend to give priority to male candidates when selecting middle and senior leaders under the influence of implicit gender bias, leading to long-term insufficient reserve quantity of female leadership talents, and the diversified governance advantages of female leadership cannot be input into the organizational administration system of vocational colleges.

3.2 Meso-Level: Vocational University Organizational Institutional Barriers

Organizational institutional barriers are the core restrictive factors for female leadership growth, concentrated in four aspects of post setting, promotion mechanism, training system and organizational culture of vocational colleges:

First, gender segmentation of administrative posts in vocational colleges. Frontline student management, archives, women's work and logistics service posts are mostly allocated to female staff, while core management posts involving school-enterprise cooperation, training base construction, financial infrastructure and school major decision-making are long-term dominated by male managers, forming a "gender post solidification" phenomenon. Female staff are trapped

in auxiliary service management posts for a long time, lacking practical experience of core institutional governance, and their competitiveness in senior leadership selection is naturally insufficient.

Second, unbalanced career promotion channels lacking gender equity design. The existing management post promotion assessment system of most vocational colleges takes long-term overtime, frequent business trips to enterprises and all-weather emergency duty as implicit assessment indicators, which objectively forms a threshold unfavorable to women in childbearing and childcare stages. There is no special female leadership reserve talent pool and targeted promotion tilt policy in institutional human resource systems, and the "glass ceiling" of female middle-level managers cannot be broken effectively.

Third, single leadership training system without gender differentiation. Current administrative training organized by vocational education administrative departments and colleges mostly adopts unified training programs designed based on male career development tracks, lacking special training covering work-family balance, female leadership identity construction and gender bias response skills, unable to solve the targeted growth obstacles of female managers.

Fourth, male-dominated closed organizational culture. The internal communication network of vocational college management teams mostly relies on offline business dinners, field research trips and male peer communication circles; female managers are easily excluded from core resource networks, unable to obtain policy information, school-enterprise resources and promotion opportunities equal to male colleagues, opportunities equal to male colleagues, forming an invisible "leadership labyrinth" within the organization.

3.3 Micro-Level: Individual Multiple Role Conflict and Self-Cognition Barriers

Female administrative staff in vocational universities face dual role conflicts between organizational management posts and family care responsibilities, which form internal individual barriers restricting leadership development. On the one hand, the dual pressure of heavy administrative work and full family care leads to insufficient time and energy for female staff to participate in leadership training, school-enterprise research and management ability improvement activities, forming a "motherhood penalty" in career development; women in pregnancy and childcare stages often take the initiative to give up competition for promotion opportunities to avoid role conflict risks. On the other hand, long-term influence of social gender stereotypes makes many female teachers form negative self-cognition: they hold the idea that "leadership is not suitable for women", lack internal motivation to pursue management posts, and dare not take the initiative to apply for reserve leadership talent training, resulting in insufficient endogenous power for female leadership echelon construction in vocational colleges.

In addition, female managers already in leadership positions face higher emotional labor pressure: they need to spend more energy to balance the dual evaluation standards of society and the organization on female leaders, and long-term emotional consumption easily leads to career burnout, further restricting the long-term development of their leadership capabilities and sustainable participation in institutional organizational administration work.

3.4 Negative Impacts of Barriers on Vocational University Organizational Administration

The multi-layered barriers to female leadership development form a vicious cycle affecting the overall governance level of vocational universities. First, single-gender management teams lead to narrow decision-making perspectives, ignoring the practical demands of female teachers, female students and female enterprise frontline technicians, resulting in biased formulation of student management, teacher welfare and school-enterprise cooperation policies, reducing policy implementation effectiveness. Second, long-term suppression of female leadership advantages wastes a large number of human resources of female staff in vocational colleges, reduces internal organizational satisfaction and team loyalty, and increases the turnover rate of excellent female backbone teachers and administrators. Third, insufficient humanistic governance capacity of management teams leads to prominent problems such as rigid student management, insufficient

teacher incentive effects and low efficiency of school-enterprise communication, restricting the high-quality type-based development of vocational universities.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING FEMALE LEADERSHIP TO ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL ADMINISTRATION OF VOCATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Aiming at the three-layer barrier system of society, organization and individuals, this paper constructs a multi-dimensional systematic development strategy covering competency training, mentoring system, professional network, career advancement channel and institutional guarantee, to fully release the governance value of female leadership and comprehensively optimize the organizational administration system of Chinese vocational universities.

4.1 Build Differentiated Female Leadership Competency Development Training System

Vocational education administrative departments and vocational colleges should design gender-differentiated leadership training programs targeting the five core dimensions of female leadership competency, breaking the single unified training model based on male career characteristics.

First, set special training modules for vocational college female managers. Focus on three core modules: school-enterprise collaborative negotiation ability, resilient risk disposal in vocational education management, and work-family balance management. Invite outstanding female college presidents, female enterprise human resource directors and gender research scholars to give lectures, combining typical cases of vocational college administration to help female managers improve core governance capabilities matching vocational education characteristics. Second, build a tiered training echelon: set up reserve female leadership training courses for excellent young female teachers, middle-level ability improvement classes for existing female department directors, and senior governance advanced seminars for female college leaders, realizing full-cycle competency improvement covering pre-promotion, in-post and senior leadership stages. Third, integrate gender equity awareness training into compulsory training content, eliminate female managers' internalized gender stereotype bias, shape positive female leadership identity, and stimulate endogenous career development motivation.

4.2 Establish Dual Mentoring Systems for Female Leadership Growth

Mentoring is recognized by international educational leadership research as the most effective intervention tool to break female career promotion barriers, and vocational universities should build a dual mentoring system combining internal senior female leader tutors and external enterprise female manager tutors.

Internal mentoring: Select outstanding retired and in-service female college senior leaders as tutors for young female backbone teachers and reserve management cadres, carry out one-on-one long-term guidance covering post competition skills, institutional internal resource coordination and gender bias response strategies, help female talents integrate into the college's core management resource network, and break the closed male communication circle within the organization. External mentoring: Cooperate with cooperative enterprises to hire female senior managers of manufacturing, modern service industries as external mentors, regularly carry out joint training and exchange activities, improve female leaders' school-enterprise integration management capabilities, and expand cross-industry leadership vision matching vocational education characteristics. Meanwhile, set up regular mentoring exchange salons, build mutual support groups for female managers, relieve emotional labor pressure through peer communication, and reduce career burnout risks.

4.3 Construct Cross-Institutional Female Leadership Professional Network

Break the isolated growth state of female managers in a single vocational college, build three-level professional networks covering college internal, regional vocational education industry and

national vocational female leadership communities, and expand resource acquisition channels for female leadership development.

Within the college: Take the women's committee of the trade union as the carrier, establish a female administrative staff exchange platform, regularly organize management experience sharing meetings, and set up special research projects on vocational college gender equity governance to encourage female managers to jointly study institutional administration reform problems.

Regionally: Led by municipal and provincial vocational education associations, set up a special committee for female leaders of vocational colleges, organize cross-college exchange visits, joint training and joint research projects, realize sharing of excellent female leadership management cases, and break the institutional boundary of female talent resource circulation.

Nationally: Rely on national vocational education research institutions to build an online communication platform for female college leaders, carry out annual national forums on female leadership and vocational college governance, connect high-quality policy research resources, and provide top-level theoretical support for female managers to participate in major institutional decision-making. The professional network can effectively make up for the disadvantage of female managers in internal organizational resource access, and form a mutual empowerment growth mechanism for female leadership groups.

4.4 Optimize Gender-Inclusive Career Advancement Pathways for Female Managers

Vocational colleges need to revise internal human resource management systems, design career promotion channels with gender equity considerations, and eliminate institutional implicit barriers restricting female leadership promotion.

First, set up a fixed proportion reserve talent pool for female management cadres. Clarify in cadre selection measures that the proportion of female teachers in the reserve leadership talent pool shall not be lower than 40%, and give priority to recommending outstanding female reserve talents to participate in cross-post rotation, school-enterprise temporary training and major institutional reform project work, accumulate core governance experience for female talents, and break the gender solidification of auxiliary service posts. Second, implement flexible post assessment and working system for female staff in childbirth and childcare stages. Cancel overtime, long-distance business trip and full-time emergency duty as hard assessment indicators for female staff with childcare responsibilities, implement flexible commuting and remote office systems, reduce the family-work role conflict pressure of female talents, and avoid the "motherhood penalty" leading to voluntary abandonment of promotion opportunities. Third, establish a gender equity cadre evaluation mechanism. Add gender equity governance indicators into the performance assessment system of college party committees and human resource departments, take the growth quantity of female middle and senior leaders as an important assessment standard for institutional talent work, and restrain the implicit gender bias in cadre selection from the institutional level.

4.5 Improve Institutional Policy Support System for Female Leadership Development

From the dual dimensions of higher vocational education administrative policy and internal college rules, build a complete institutional guarantee system to support female leadership development, and form a long-term mechanism to optimize organizational administration relying on institutional norms.

At the government policy level: Education bureaus at all levels should incorporate the construction of female leadership echelons into the vocational education high-quality development assessment index system, issue special policy documents to require vocational colleges to clarify gender equity targets in medium and long-term talent development plans, and set up special financial funds for female leadership training and exchange activities. Learn from the experience of the *China Women's Development Outline (2021–2030)*, promote gender

mainstreaming in vocational education management system construction, and provide top-level policy support for breaking cultural and organizational barriers.

At the college internal institutional level: Revise school cadre selection, training, performance management and trade union women's work management measures, clarify the rights and interests of female managers to participate in major institutional decision-making, guarantee the seat proportion of female representatives in the faculty congress and school management committee, and set up a special gender equity supervision group to investigate and correct gender discrimination behaviors in post allocation, training opportunities and promotion evaluation in a timely manner. Meanwhile, increase investment in supporting service systems such as campus kindergartens and employee elderly care services, reduce the family care burden of female staff from the supporting service perspective, and create an organizational culture of equal gender development within vocational universities.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Revise the vocational college cadre construction management measures, clearly stipulate the minimum proportion of female cadres in school-level and middle-level management teams, and take the gender equity of management teams as a core assessment indicator for vocational college operation evaluation.

Set up a national special training project for female leaders of vocational colleges, allocate special financial funds to carry out long-term cyclic training covering competency improvement, gender equity governance and school-enterprise integration management.

Cooperate with women's federations to compile guidance manuals for gender mainstreaming in vocational college organizational administration, guide all vocational colleges to revise internal human resource and cadre management systems, and eliminate implicit gender bias in institutional rules.

Establish a permanent female leadership reserve talent pool, implement regular cross-post rotation and enterprise temporary training for female reserve cadres, break the solidification of female staff in auxiliary service management posts.

Build an internal and external dual mentoring system for female managers, rely on trade union women's committees to organize regular female leadership exchange salons and peer mutual support groups to relieve emotional labor pressure of female administrators. Improve supporting service systems such as campus childcare and flexible working systems, reduce the family care burden of female staff, and alleviate the work-family role conflict barrier restricting female leadership growth. Integrate female leadership development into the college's medium and long-term talent development plan, set up special research projects on gender equity governance of vocational colleges, and encourage female managers to participate in major institutional administrative reform decision-making.

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