Leadership Development

INTRODUCTION

During the fall of 2023, Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) researchers conducted a statewide study to establish a baseline for public perceptions related to the awareness, understanding, and attitudes about challenges that Utah women and girls face (see Background & Methods for details). The study was created to support the work of 18 areas of focus (spokes) within the movement called A Bolder Way Forward, which is dedicated to helping more Utah girls and women thrive. One of the 18 areas of focus is leadership development, and this summary shares findings that highlight present perspectives and establishes a baseline to track progress in key areas.

BACKGROUND

Although the UWLP has published a plethora of studies on the status of Utah women in leadership roles in a variety of sectors (i.e., state boards and commissions, politics, public education, higher education, state government, county government, local government, business, and nonprofit organizations), tracking specific leadership skills women develop as they acquire leadership roles has not yet been addressed. The goal is having more women serve in leadership roles, and studying how leadership development can help people in all sectors identify and implement best practices. Fortunately, six items from this study provide additional insight that may be useful in determining ways to help more Utah girls and women combat barriers and strengthen leadership abilities. Extensive research has established that when women and men lead together in equal numbers, benefits spread to families, communities, businesses, and society.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Participants responded to each survey item using a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat disagree, 4=neither disagree nor agree, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree). For Sample 1 (non-probability), 2,450 Utahns responded to the six questions, and for Sample 2 (representative), there were 650 (Total=3,100).

1. Aspiration: The first survey item was "I aspire to be a leader." The statistical mean was 5.86 (SD 1.40) for the non-probability sample and 4.78 (SD 1.75) for the representative sample. The difference between samples is significant. In the representative sample, 40.4% of respondents selected agree or strongly agree, compared to 69.7% in the non-probability sample; 20.6% of the representative sample selected neither agree nor disagree, compared to 9.6% in Sample 1. See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

Gender: Women's agreement levels were significantly higher than men's (5.57 and 5.18, resp.).

Age: Those who were 18–24 years old had significantly higher agreement than all others, and respondents who were 60 years and older had the lowest.

Education: Respondents who had graduate degrees were significantly more likely to agree, followed by bachelor's degree holders and those who selected "some college, but degree not received or is in progress" (current students have substantial representation in this category).

Marital Status: There were no significant differences among categories.

Income: Those who had annual household incomes $100,000 and higher were more agreeable, and the agreement level increased as the salary range increased for the top three income categories.

Children: Nonparents had significantly higher agreement than parents. There were no differences, however, based on number and ages of children.

Race & Ethnicity: There were no significant differences.

Religion: There were no significant differences among categories.

Employment: Full-time students and full-time employees were significantly more likely to agree with the statement, while retirees and full-time homemakers had the least agreement.

Residency: Respondents who had lived in Utah more than 21 years had significantly lower agreement.

Counties: The counties that had respondents who had the strongest agreement included residents of Summit/Wasatch, Utah, Washington, Salt Lake, and Davis counties, while the lowest agreement levels were found in Box Elder; the Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute grouping; and the 10 rural eastern county grouping.

2. Consideration: The second survey item was "Others consider me a leader." The statistical mean was 5.73 (SD 1.28) for the non-probability sample and 4.64 (SD 1.62) for the representative sample. Again, there is a significant difference between the two samples, with 56.8% agreeing at some level in the representative sample, compared to 84.3% in the non-probability sample. In the first, 43.2% selected either a level of disagreement or neither agree nor disagree, while in the non-probability sample, only 15.6% responded similarly. See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

Gender: Women's agreement was significantly higher than men's (5.42 and 5.19, resp.).

Age: There were no significant differences among categories.

*Denotes statistically significant differences within the demographic categories.

Education: The higher the educational attainment, the stronger the agreement.

Marital Status: There were no significant differences among categories.

Income: The higher the annual household income, the stronger the agreement.

Children: Parents had significantly stronger agreement than nonparents. Among parents, those who had teenagers at home had higher levels of agreement.

Race & Ethnicity: Respondents who identified as Pacific Islander had significantly higher agreement than all other categories, and Whites and His-panics followed. Asian respondents had significantly lower agreement than all other groups.

Religion: There were no significant differences among religious affiliations, but the more religiously active respondents were, the higher their level of agreement.

Employment: Full-time employees had significantly higher agreement, while the unemployed, full-time homemakers, and retirees had the least.

Residency: There were no significant differences among categories.

Counties: The counties with residents who most strongly agreed included Summit/Wasatch, Iron, Salt Lake, Washington, and Cache, while those respondents who had the least agreement (lowest first) resided in the 10 rural eastern county grouping; the Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute grouping; and Box Elder.

3. Opportunities: The third survey item was "It is important for me to pursue opportunities to develop leadership abilities." The statistical mean was 5.96 (SD 1.26) for Sample 1 and 4.87 (SD 1.62) for Sample 2. Again, there is a significant difference between the two samples, with 58.9% agreeing at some level in the representative sample, compared to 86.8% in the non-probability sample. In the first, 41.1% sdisagreed or were neutral, while only 13.1% were neutral or disagreed in the non-probability sample. See the combined demographics in the next column.

Gender: Women's agreement was significantly higher than men's (5.69 and 5.30, resp.).

Age: The statistical means for agreement steadily rose until age 60, then it decreased significantly.

Education: Respondents with graduate degrees had significantly higher agreement than all other categories, and bachelor's degree holders were a distant second.

Marital Status: Respondents who were widowed or divorced had significantly less agreement in the other categories.

Income: The higher the annual household income, the stronger the agreement levels.

Children: There were no significant differences between parents and nonparents, but among parents who had multiple children over 5-years-old, levels of agreement were higher.

Race & Ethnicity: The highest agreement came from those who identified as Pacific Islander and Hispanic, while those who identified as Black had the least agreement.

Religion: There were no significant differences among religious affiliations, but those who selected "very active" in the religious activity question were significantly more likely to strongly agree.

Employment: Full-time employees and full-time students more strongly agreed than other employment categories. Retirees and full-time homemakers had the lowest levels of agreement.

Residency: Respondents who had lived in Utah between two to ten years had significantly higher agreement than those in other categories.

Counties: The counties with respondents who most strongly agreed included Summit/Wasatch, Utah, Salt Lake, Cache, and Iron, while the least agreement came from residents in the Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute grouping and Box Elder County.

4. Resources: The fourth survey item was "There are opportunities and resources around me to help me develop leadership skills." The statistical mean was 5.46 (SD 1.39) for Sample 1 and 4.87 (SD 1.53) for Sample 2. Again, there is a significant difference between the two samples, with 58.9% agreeing at some level in the representative sample, compared to 86.8% in the non-probability sample. In the first, 38.9% selected either a level of disagreement or neither agree nor disagree, while in the non-probability sample, only 20.1% responded similarly. See demographics below.

Gender: Women's and men's agreement levels were similar (5.29 and 5.33, resp.).

Age: There were no significant differences among age categories.

Education: Respondents with graduate and bachelor's degrees had the highest agreement.

Marital Status: Married respondents had the strongest agreement of all status categories, while those were widowed had the least.

Income: The higher the annual household income, the stronger the agreement.

Children: There were no significant differences between parents and nonparents, and there were no statistically significant differences among parents based on numbers and ages of children.

Race & Ethnicity: The highest agreement levels came from those who identified as Hispanic and White, while the lowest came from American Indian and Asian respondents.

Religion: There were no significant differences among respondents who selected different religious affiliations; however, the higher the religious activity, the higher the agreement.

Employment: The highest agreement came from full-time students, while the unemployed, retired, and full-time homemakers had the least agreement.

Residency: There were no significant differences among categories.

Counties: The highest agreement levels (highest first) were from respondents in Cache, Summit/Wasatch, Iron, Utah, and Washington counties, and the lowest agreement were in Box Elder and the Tooele, Morgan, and Rich grouping.

5. Confronting Biases: The fifth and sixth survey items related to unconscious bias, which is an important component of leadership development programs. The fifth question was "People in Utah are interested in understanding and confronting their biases." The statistical mean was 2.86 (SD 1.58) for Sample 1 and 3.93 (SD 1.66) for Sample 2. This item is based on respondents' views of Utahns more generally, and 80.4% of respondents in Sample 1 either disagreed or selected neither agree nor disagree, while 64.9% in Sample 2 did the same. Overall, only 8.8% of Utahns in these samples agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

Gender: Women's disagreement was significantly stronger than men's (3.16 and 3.82, resp.).

Age: Respondents older than 60 had the lowest disagreement, although those 18–24 disagreed less, particularly compared to those in the 25–29 age range, who had stronger disagreement.

Education: The higher the educational attainment, the stronger the disagreement.

Marital Status: Married but separated respondents had the strongest disagreement.

Income: The higher the annual household income, the stronger the disagreement.

Children: Nonparents had significantly stronger disagreement than parents; there were no statistically significant differences among parents based on numbers and ages of children.

Race & Ethnicity: There were no significant differences among categories.

Religion: Agnostics and atheists had the strongest disagreement, while Catholics and Latter-day Saints disagreed the least. Regarding religious activity, respondents who selected "very active" disagreed the least.

Employment: Full-time students had significantly stronger disagreement than any other category. Those who disagreed the least were retirees, full-time homemakers, and the unemployed.

Residency: Respondents who had lived in Utah for less than two years had significantly less disagreement.

Counties: Respondents with the least disagreement included (strongest first) included Summit/Wasatch (by a significant margin), Box Elder, and Iron, while respondents with the least disagreement included the Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute grouping; the Tooele, Morgan, and Rich grouping; and Washington.

6. Bias Awareness: The final survey item was "People in Utah are aware of their own biases." The statistical mean was 2.50 (SD 1.46) for Sample 1 and 3.80 (SD 1.73) for Sample 2. This item was based on respondent's perceptions of Utah residents more generally, and 87.2% of respondents in Sample 1 either disagreed or selected neither agree nor disagree, while 66.8% in Sample 2 did the same. Overall, 6.8% of survey participants agreed that Utahns are aware of their own biases. See the combined demographic findings below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

Gender: Women's disagreement was significantly stronger than men's (2.84 and 3.63, resp.).

Age: Respondents over 60 years of age had significantly less disagreement, along with college-aged adults (18–24 years of age). All other age ranges had stronger disagreement.

Education: The higher the educational attainment, the stronger the disagreement.

Marital Status: There were no significant differences.

Income: The higher the annual household income, the stronger the disagreement.

Children: Nonparents had significantly stronger disagreement levels than parents, and there were no statistically significant differences among parents based on numbers and ages of children.

Race & Ethnicity: There were no significant differences among race and ethnicity categories.

Religion: Agnostics and atheists had the strongest disagreement, followed by spiritual but no affiliation. On the other hand, Catholics and Latter-day Saints had significantly less disagreement than all others. Generally, the less religiously active, the stronger the disagreement.

Employment: Full-time students and full-time employees had the strongest disagreement levels, while retirees, the unemployed, and full-time homemakers disagreed less.

Residency: There were no significant differences by categories.

Counties: Respondents with the strongest disagreement included Summit/Wasatch (by a significant margin), Box Elder, and Iron, while the ones with the lowest disagreement levels included Millard, Sevier, Juab, Beaver, and Piute grouping; the Tooele, Morgan, and Rich grouping; and Washington County.

CONCLUSION

This summary highlights key findings from four questions focused on leadership development, with two additional questions that measured perceptions of unconscious bias in Utah. Respondents from across the state participated in the study (see Background & Methods for the demographic details of both samples). Each sample is useful in understanding the perceptions and attitudes of Utahns on this topic; however, Sample 2 (representative sample) may provide a better understanding of the perspectives of Utahns more generally.

In sum, although the majority of Utahns aspire—at least somewhat—to be leaders, respondents in rural Utah aspired less. In addition, although many Utahns agree that others consider them

to be leaders, there are many demographics to consider in designing strategies for developing women leaders in all sectors of the state. In both survey items, women had higher agreement than men, which surprised us. Only 9.2% disagreed—and 12.2% neither agreed nor disagreed—with the statement that it is important for them to pursue opportunities to develop leadership abilities. In addition, many Utahns did not know about available opportunities and resources to help them develop leadership skills. And, finally, most respondents believed that people in Utah are not aware of or interested in understanding and confronting their biases.

A Bolder Way Forward aims to make Utah a place where more women and girls can thrive in any setting, and strengthening leadership skills and abilities for girls and women is a powerful way to do this. It is critical, however, that leadership development programs and related opportunities be carefully designed based on the latest research and theory. Rigorously designed opportunities will move the needle much more effectively than those that are not. Overall, as more women become leaders and work alongside men in all settings and domains, families, business, communities, and society will benefit.

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