

# **WOMEN AND THE LEADERSHIP PARADIGM: BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP**

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## **Abstract**

**The under representation of qualified women in leadership positions has created a gender gap that exists not only in education but in many areas of the workplace. Society has determined that only males make good leaders; therefore it continues to deny easy access for women seeking leadership roles because they do not fit the norm. Women who seek leadership positions face barriers and many times give up because they become overwhelmed in dealing with obvious barriers.**

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uba Chliwniak (1997) defined leaders as individuals who provide vision and meaning for an institution and embodies the ideals toward which the organization strives. Traditional scholars like Birnbaum and Mintzberg (1992) viewed leaders as alike and genderless. If Chliwniak's definition is an accurate and true description of leaders, then why are women having a difficult time gaining employment as administrators in the educational arena? Do men make better administrators than women simply because they are male? Research does not support that assumption. In fact, schools administered by women on the average were superior in performance to those managed by men. The quality of pupil learning and the professional performance of teachers appear to be higher, on the average, in schools with female administrators (Porat, 1991). Ryder (1994) described female principals as very effective and Hensel (1991) described them as capable and as productive as men in the academic arena. Some continue to hold to the belief that women are less capable, less competitive, or less productive than men.

## **Females and Leadership**

Good school administration is more attuned to feminine than masculine modes of leadership behavior. Female attributes of nurturing, being sensitive, empathetic, intuitive, compromising, caring, cooperative, and accommodative are increasingly associated with effective administration. While these characteristics are innate and valuable, women possessing the qualities of a good leader still face higher attrition and slower career mobility particularly in higher education (Porat, 1991). Data on equality of opportunity in educational

administration reveals that gender, more than age, experience, background, or competence determines the role an individual will be assigned in education (Whitaker & Lane, 1990). African American women who hold leadership positions in the educational system face dual burdens of sexism and racism and confront special challenges in promotion and tenure. Race more than gender is the major obstacle to career advancement (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Singh, Robinson, & Williams-Green, 1995).

Management seeks to fill its ranks, particularly at the highest level of management, with those persons that best fit the existing norm (Wesson, 1998). Case in point, the typical president of an American institution of higher education is Caucasian, male, and 54 years of age (Phelps & Taber, 1997). Since gender is a hindrance to women leaders, some believe compelled to lead in the manner that is considered the norm; that is, the way that men lead. Utilizing men's method of leadership is the easiest way for a woman to be hired for administrative positions or any position of leadership, especially since this approach to leadership has repeatedly been established as acceptable to the public and successful in attracting promotion and recognition (Porat, 1991).

In one school district, a Caucasian male administrator discouraged women and members of underrepresented groups from pursuing careers in administration because of the belief that women and/or minorities lacked the requisite leadership characteristics (Allen et al., 1995). They did not fit the existing norm of being Caucasian and male. Females in positions that are male-dominated indicated there was a need to be better qualified than the males with whom they competed. African American women believe they had to be twice as good and better than others with the same aspirations. Those women who had a desire to become administrators have found their institutions and districts do not select or recruit them for training programs in the administration field, making it harder to break into the system (Allen et al., 1995; Lindsay, 1999).

There has been a rise in the hiring of women and minorities as superintendents and in administrative positions. Proportionately more women tend to occupy superintendencies in the smallest and least cosmopolitan districts, with the fewest central office administrators, declining student enrollments, more reported stress on the job, less satisfaction, and the greatest vulnerability lethal to school board conflict. Caucasian women were being hired in very small districts where their duties varied and with very little pay. African American women are being hired in troubled urban districts with inadequate financial resources or districts with a large concentration of minority students who are economically disadvantaged and have low achievement test scores (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Wesson, 1998). Caucasian women and African American women found no problems obtaining principalships at the elementary school level (Pollard, 1997).

### **Gender Gap and Gender-Based Models**

One reason so few women are hired for educational administrative positions is due to the gender gap. The gender gap may represent an impediment to potential institutional improvements (Chliwniak, 1997). Even though effective leadership is more behaviorally derived than gender based, gender remains an obstacle to women seeking and obtaining leadership positions (Getskow, 1996). There are three models that have been used to explain the under representation of women in educational leadership positions (see Table 1).

The first is the meritocracy model or the individual perspective model (Estler, 1975; Schmuck, 1980). Both are psychological orientations (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). The model looks to women for cause: personal traits, characteristics, abilities, or qualities. Individual attitudes such as self-image and confidence, motivation, and aspirations also fall into this domain. The belief associated with this model is that women are not assertive enough, don't

Table 1

Gender-Based Models		
MODELS	EMPHASIS	CAUSE
Individual <sup>1</sup> or Meritocracy <sup>2</sup>	Psychological Orientations	Women are looked to as the cause.
Organizational <sup>1</sup> or Discrimination <sup>2</sup>	Educational System	The organizational structures and practices of education which discriminate against women.
Woman's Place <sup>1</sup> or Social <sup>2</sup>	Cultural and Social Norms	Different socialization patterns for women and men.

(<sup>1</sup>Estler, 1975; <sup>2</sup>Schmuck, 1980)

want the power, lack self-confidence, don't aspire for line positions, are unwilling to play the game or work the system, and they don't apply for the jobs (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996).

The belief concerning women's lack of desire for power may not be related to their lack of a desire to obtain power, but how power is perceived, that is quite different from men (Conner, 1992). The method in which women use the power they have is different. Women use power to empower others. They base this on the notion that power is not finite but rather expands as it is shared (Conner, 1992).

The second model, the organizational perspective or the discrimination model, focuses on the educational system. Differences between career aspirations and achievements of men and women as an effect of the limited opportunities for women that accompany systemic gender bias are described (Estler, 1975; Schmuck, 1980; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). The model explains how organizational structures and practices in education discriminated against women (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Men seem to advance to higher levels because they are favored in promotional practices and . . . women cannot advance even if they choose to do so (Estler, 1975).

The third model is identified as woman's place or social perspective model (Estler, 1975; Schmuck, 1980). This model emphasizes cultural and social norms that encourage discriminatory practices (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). The norms, folkways, and mores of the society coincide with different socialization patterns that channel women and men into different areas of work and differential pay and status (Schmuck, 1980).

### Women and Men Leadership Styles

Since men and women have different leadership styles, the variances do not mean that one has dominance over the other (see Table 2). The difference may be due in part to men seeing leadership as leading and women seeing leadership as facilitating (Schaefer, 1985). Although male and female administrators perform many of the same tasks in carrying out their work, different aspects of the job are emphasized (Chliwniak, 1997). Women embrace relationships, sharing, and process, but men focus on completing tasks, achieving goals, hoarding of information, and winning (Chliwniak, 1997). Women educational administrators focus on instructional leadership in supervisory practices and are concerned with students' individual differences, knowledge of curriculum teaching methods, and the objectives of teaching (Conner, 1992). In the area of instructional leadership, women spend more years as principals and teachers, and have more degrees than men; they emphasize the importance of curriculum and instruction in their work (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Women leaders focus

on instructional leadership, men more often emphasize organizational matters (Conner, 1992). Men in leader-

Table 2

### Leadership Styles

Women	Men
Emphasize relationships, sharing, and process <sup>1</sup>	Focus on completing tasks, achieving goals, hoarding of information, and winning <sup>1</sup>
Focus on instructional leadership <sup>2</sup>	Emphasize organizational matters <sup>2</sup>
Facilitative leadership <sup>3</sup>	Lead from the front <sup>3</sup> and stresses task accomplishment <sup>2</sup>
Interact more with teachers, students, parents, colleagues, community, etc. more than men <sup>2</sup>	
Support contributive, consensual decision-making <sup>3</sup>	Lean toward majority rule and leads by rewarding and punishing adequate and inadequate work <sup>4</sup>
Emphasize the process <sup>3</sup>	Emphasize the product, the goal <sup>3</sup>
Encourage feelings of self worth, active participation, and sharing of power and information, which helps to transform people's self interest into organizational goals <sup>4</sup>	Utilize the traditional top-down administrative style <sup>5</sup>
Influence teachers to use more desirable teaching methods <sup>6</sup>	
Emphasize the importance of curriculum and instruction more than men <sup>7</sup>	

(<sup>1</sup>Chliwniak, 1997; <sup>2</sup>Conner, 1992; <sup>3</sup>Porat, 1991; <sup>4</sup>Getskow, 1996; <sup>5</sup>Eakle, 1995; <sup>6</sup>Ryder, 1994;

<sup>7</sup>Tallerico& Burstyn, 1996)

ship positions tend to lead from the front, attempting to have all the answers for their subordinates. Women lean toward facilitative leadership, enabling others to make their contributions through delegation, encouragement, and nudging from behind (Porat, 1991). Because women's main focus is on relationships, they interact more frequently than men with teachers, students, parents, non-parent community members, professional colleagues, and superordinates (Conner, 1992). Men, on the other hand, stress task accomplishment (Conner, 1992) and they tend to lead through a series of concrete exchanges that involved rewarding employees for a job well done and punishing them for an inadequate job performance (Getskow, 1996). Many women support contributive, consensual decision making and emphasize the process, but men tend to lean toward majority rule and tend to emphasize the product, the goal (Porat, 1991). Men utilize the traditional top-down administrative style, (Eakle, 1995) women are more interested in transforming people's self-interest into organizational goals by encouraging feelings of self-worth, active participation, and sharing of power and information (Getskow, 1996). Women spend more time in unscheduled meetings, visible on school campus, and observing teachers considerably more than male principals (Ryder, 1994). Women principals are more likely to interact with their staff and spend more time in the classroom or with teachers discussing the academic and curricular areas of instruction. Women principals are more likely to influence teachers to use more desirable teaching methods.

## **Women Leadership Behaviors**

Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) described in their book, *Megatrends for Women*, 25 behaviors that characterize women's leadership. The behaviors clustered in six central patterns were identified as behaviors that empower, restructure, teach, provide role models, encourage openness, and stimulate questioning. Gillet-Karam (1994), on the other hand, used four behaviors: (a) a vision behavior—in this category, women leaders would take appropriate risks to bring about change; (b) a people behavior—women leaders provide care and respect for individual differences; (c) influence behavior—women are acting collaboratively; values behavior in which women leaders spend time building trust and openness (Getskow, 1996). No matter how the leadership behaviors of women are delineated, the fact is that women do possess the capabilities and skills to be excellent educational administrators.

Gross and Trask (1976) listed capabilities of women in leadership.

- Women principals have a greater knowledge of and concern for instructional supervision.
- Superiors and teachers preferred women over men.
- Students' academic performance and teachers' professional performance rated higher under women principals.
- Women were more effective administrators.
- Supervisors and teachers preferred the decision-making and problem-solving behaviors of women.
- Women principals were more concerned with helping deviant pupils.
- Women principals placed more importance on technical skills and organization responsibility of teachers as a criterion for evaluation.

## **Barriers Women Face in Leadership Positions**

Women in leadership confront barriers or obstacles that men do not realize exist. Some myths suggest women cannot discipline older students, particularly males; females are too emotional; too weak physically; and males resent working with females (Whitaker & Lane, 1990). After the myths are dispelled, the "glass ceiling barrier" that limits women from achieving high ranking position must be overcome (Cullen & Luna, 1993).

Society's attitude toward appropriate male and female roles is another obstacle that identifies women as not task-oriented enough, too dependent on feedback and evaluations of others, and lacking independence. Women receive little or no encouragement to seek leadership positions, while men were encouraged to enter administration to a greater degree than women, despite the positive perceptions of principals toward female capabilities. This lack of encouragement exists even though women who earn doctorates are more likely than men to desire an academic career, but are not being hired at equal rates. The cumulative disadvantage results in women leaving the profession in greater numbers than men. The lack of formal and informal social networks, or not being a member of the "clubs" as men, results in the lack of recognition that often leads to advancement. Administration involves hard work, long hours, and lots of in-house politics which is stress provoking, when child care and home responsibilities are added, a woman can work 70 or more hours per week that may conflict with family responsibilities. Since some administrative positions are located in another city or state, one barrier is the reluctance of women to relocate. The lack of support from the school board, the attitude of a few women administrators that, "we don't hire the competition," the isolation associated with minority status, sex-typed expectations, and gender bias, the enormous amount of stress that is part of the job, and the lonely at the top feelings are barriers women face. There also exists a lack of role models and mentors due to the fact that there is not a large amount of women in administrative positions (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Eakle, 1995;

Hensel, 1991; Ryder, 1994; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Whitaker & Lane, 1990; Williams, 1990).

### **Mentoring**

One answer to the barriers and obstacles women administrators deal with on a daily basis is mentoring. In order for women to succeed in acquiring administrative positions in education, mentoring must occur.

- Mentoring can significantly enhance income and promoting possibilities for individuals experiencing these relationships.
- Mentoring can meet the needs of both women and institutions, and it can also assist in attracting and retaining women and minority professionals in the academic work environment.
- Mentoring of younger workers reduces turnover, helps mentees deal with organizational issues, and accelerates their assimilation into the culture.
- The mentees (those women being mentored) benefit because someone cares enough to support them, advise them and help interpret inside information.

The advantages of mentoring are felt not only by the mentees and their organization, but by the mentors themselves. They experience the fulfillment of passing along hard-earned wisdom, influencing the next generation of upper management, and receiving appreciation from a younger worker (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Hagevik, 1998; Whitaker & Lane, 1990).

It is not uncommon for women to have male mentors, but the best mentors for women are other women, because women interacting and sharing experiences and knowledge are significant. Though male mentors readily encouraged women to become principals, they did not eagerly support them when seeking a position at the secondary level. The mentoring experience must help women develop self-esteem, aggressive managerial personalities, and non-traditional attitudes about women and employment. The nurturing of attitudes and characteristics would allow for success in the organization, whereas the male counterpart exhibited personalities that made it easier to advance. The use of mentors to assist present and future leaders is a powerful tool that may be used to bring about more effective school practice (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Daresh & Playko, 1990; Whitaker & Lane, 1990).

### **Techniques Useful for Advancement**

To obtain leadership positions in the 21st century, women can use some career-enhancing techniques. Techniques include availing themselves to mentors, utilizing sponsors, role models, and networking, which allows women a means for getting advice, moral support and contacts for information and providing constructive ways of dealing with frustration, sharing feelings about their work, and providing encouragement (Crampton & Mishra, 1999; Wesson, 1998).

Morrison et al. (1992) suggested the following four “core components of success”:

- *Be able.* Women should make sure that they know what the position entails. They should develop good speaking and writing skills plus any skill that will help compete against everyone else at a particular level. Never stop learning, whether it is formally, in a classroom or informally, on the job. Put in extra time and effort on every job.
- *Be seen as able.* No one should ever allow his/her abilities to be discouraged or ignored. Display competencies in jobs that are visible and valued, especially for jobs that form stepping-stones to the top.
- *Know what you want.* Be willing to balance, prioritize, sacrifice, relax.

- *Help others to help.* Find people who can help even if they are in unrelated jobs. Women need to get a plan, a strategy. Let the boss and others know what it is, so they can contribute to it, not create it.

### Survival Skills

Women in leadership positions or those seeking leadership positions must acquire skills to survive in the workplace (see Table 3).

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Table 3

### Survival Skills

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Skill 1: Take time to plan for a successful career path.

Skill 2: Recognize the fact that competition does exist.

Skill 3: Keep going and develop confidence.

Skill 4: Possess courage and determination to battle the male-dominated establishment.

Skill 5: Learn to delegate effectively.

Skill 6: Meet deadlines.

Skill 7: Develop and exercise the managerial role.

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The first skill is taking the time to plan for a successful career path, which requires hard work, dedication, and long hours on the job. The second skill is to recognize the fact that competition does exist and women must learn to exhibit the appropriate skills and behaviors needed to compete. The third skill is to keep going and to develop confidence. In order to be recognized for the work well done, performing an exceptional job, doing a job important to the organization, becoming visible so others know who it was who succeeded are essential. The fourth skill is courage and determination to battle the male-dominated establishment. The fifth skill is demonstrating a commitment to work in order to stay ahead of the competition, and to learn to delegate effectively. A good delegator is able to (a) analyze the job, (b) decide what needs to be delegated, (c) plan the delegation, (d) select the person or persons to delegate to, (e) delegate, and (f) follow up on the delegated activity. The sixth skill that should be developed is to meet deadlines. Having the ability to complete tasks in a timely manner will improve others' perceptions of one's performance during the evaluation process. The seventh and final skill is to develop and exercise the managerial role. The leader's aim is to gain respect; not love. In order to gain a leadership role, a female must act the role and utilize the power she has in that position (Crampton & Mishra, 1999; Morrison et al., 1992).

Psychologist, Tingley (1993) addressed in her book the issue of communication barriers concerning men and women. Tingley uses the term "genderflex" to refer to temporarily using communication behaviors typical of the other gender to increase potential for influence, that means one considers a situation from someone else's point of view. Tingley suggested using the following six-step process for adapting to gender differences (see Table 4) (Caudron, 1995; Communication, 1994).

- *Adopt a positive attitude toward differences.* Realize that men and women do communicate differently and use this knowledge when communicating with men.
- *Acknowledge differences.* When this is done, women will be in the right frame of mind to communicate with the opposite sex.
- *Assess differences without judging.* Determine if these differences are content, style, or structure, before presuming someone is being inarticulate.

Example:

A. *Content:* Men and women prefer to talk about different things. Men favor sports, money, and business. Women prefer to talk about people, feelings, and relationships. There are, however, exceptions.

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Table 4

### Steps for Adapting to Gender Differences

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Step 1: Adopt a positive attitude toward differences.

Step 2: Acknowledge differences.

Step 3: Assess differences.

Step 4: Renew positive attitudes toward differences.

Step 5: Choose techniques for action or response.

Step 6: Generalize from the specific.

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B. *Style:* Men want to resolve a problem; they view conversation as a competition. Women seek understanding; they want to support a conversation and use it to connect with another individual.

C. *Structure:* Men tend to get to the point without using descriptive details. Women often are detailed, apologetic, and vague (Communication, 1994).

- *Renew positive attitudes toward differences.* Women need to reinforce the willingness to communicate differently.
- *Choose techniques for action or response.* After listening carefully and assessing differences, make adaptations to improve communication.
- *Generalize from the specific.* If one gets a positive response after adapting, assess the technique chosen.

A leader with an emerging, inclusive style of leadership could provide an institution with new values grounded in cooperation, community, and relationships within the community (Chliwniak, 1997). Women leaders possess an inclusive style that is to improve the institutions. The educational system continues to be structured as a traditional home: men manage the schools, and women nurture the learners (Whitaker & Lane, 1990). If this is the perception that women continue to encounter, then the lack of equal representation in leadership is inevitable. Even today female leaders are still being tested in ways that men aren't. Men do not have to answer basic questions about their abilities or deal with much closer scrutiny as women (Women Gaining Ground in Academia, 1994).

Finally, there continues to be inequities in the workplace concerning women in leadership positions. Research has provided much needed information concerning the gender gap, but how can it be bridged? Will the 21st century really bring about a change? Will time erase the gender gap in leadership that is like a brick wall for so many women? Probably not. Time will help, but more is needed. Yes, we need to recognize that women leadership styles are different from men, but we all must embrace that difference and make room for it in the



educational leadership arena. Women leaders and future leaders must not be intimidated by what society may consider as the norm, male leadership behaviors. Women can no longer remain on the side lines hoping for recognition for a job well done. Women must be adamant in spreading the word, sharing the research, and expecting to be treated equitably. The message that must be echoed is there are not just women leaders, but simply leaders—leaders who are willing to do effectively whatever the position entails.

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