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## Female Leadership Style: Evolving Paradox

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### Abstract

Certainly there is plentiful evidence to demonstrate that female leaders are as, if not more, capable than their male counterparts. Reasons for this include their natural leadership style being collaborative and cooperative, leading to an engaged workforce. They are also risk-averse and take a strategic or holistic view in regard to business decisions, leading to a more balanced level of organisational growth. There is some limited evidence to suggest that there are physiological reasons to support this (principally the ability of most women to manage and monitor multiple streams of information simultaneously), which is clearly a desirable trait in a leadership situation. However the statistical evidence shows that time and again women are either denied leadership positions or choose not to pursue them beyond a particular managerial level. There is debate surrounding this as to whether women choose to opt out or are forced to do so by extrinsic and intrinsic societal pressures. Some research has shown that women who do opt out of senior roles by choice often choose to pursue personal interests and are highly successful. Given the scarcity of research in this area, the article presents an overview of women leadership style which is stereotyped as feminine.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, leadership styles, Women, Management, Glass Ceiling, Gender Discrimination Western, and Non-Western

### Introduction

The study of leaders and leadership theories is well over 100 years old and has a lengthy history and reflects the culture and understanding of the era. However, but there is still no consensus as to the definition of leadership and no paradigms that everyone can accept without caveats. Warren Bennis, himself a leading theorist about leadership wrote: *“Probably more has been written and less is known about leadership than about any other topic in the behavioral sciences”* (Bennis, 1959). Whether it is Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. or Machiavelli’s *The Prince* from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the thoughts about principles of leadership were expressed in terms the people of that time could grasp. Over 50 years later, the same sentiments exist as expressed by Hackman and Wageman (2007, p

43) who expressed the whole field of leadership as being “*curiously unformed*”. This is understandable because there are so many perspectives one might use to formulate one’s personal leadership scheme. In more modern times the range of leadership principles have evolved from time to time, constructed to communicate in contemporary terminology. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a progression of leadership and motivation theories: Taylor, Scientific Management (1911); Maslow, Hierarchy of Needs (1940s); Herzberg, Motivation-Hygiene (1950s); McGregor, Theory X (1960s); Hersey-Blanchard, Situational Leadership (1980s); and Bass, Transformational (1980s), to name a few. These theories consist of many topics: leadership characteristics, styles, and values; how successful leaders think, their patterns of analysis, how they plan and perceive situations requiring action; and how they generally act, the principles and rules that guide their behaviour, all of which no more than simple information unless it leads to actionable learning. The same can be said about studies of why women fail to reach highest levels of management in the same proportion as men.

Day and Zaccaro (2007) identified six major leadership perspectives that are currently in use: individual differences, contingency, transformational or charismatic, follower-centric and shared, alongside special contexts such as culture, gender identity and ethics. Add to this the cultural stereotypes of women and it frequently happens they are perceived to not have what it takes to occupy significant leadership roles. This mismatch between the perceived demands of leadership and female stereotypes is what Eagly and Karau (2002) referred to as role incongruity. Leadership is generally associated with masculinity, calling for assertive, competitive qualities, rather than the nice, compassionate traits associated with women. In the role congruity model (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the lack-of-fit model of Heilman (2001), there is the essence of prejudice against women as leaders. The same biases then carry over into expectations about their performance and how it is evaluated. Women are not expected to perform favourably, a biased pre-judgment that leads to unsatisfactory performance evaluations (Lyness and Heilman, 2006).

The focus of this article has been an effort to confirm what has been stated, concluded and recommended as contributing factors (e.g. individual, institutional and societal) to women’s lack of parity in senior management representation. This is an epistemological issue, trying to verify or validate what has been submitted as true. An equally salient issue is distill knowledge that can help women go beyond the artificial use of tools and techniques of career advancement, trying to emulate unnatural masculine qualities or behaving unnaturally once in a position of authority. The most effective means of ascending the ranks of management will come from a combination of perceiving situations accurately and acting appropriately to get satisfactory results. These are the requisite qualities that, if internalised and incorporated in one’s personal behavioural style, will add much to women’s potential for reaching senior management and executive board positions. Situational Leadership fostered the notion that different circumstances require different skills or traits to address issues. No single style of management is suited for all conditions.

Of the major schools of management theory, the Transformational and Transactional leadership styles may have the greatest effect on the status of women in management. Research on these leadership styles has suggested that the attributes of each style are somewhat different. Initial research on these leadership styles typically described

Transformational leadership as containing many female attributes and Transactional leadership qualities as being predominately male. Male leadership qualities are designated as being structural, transactional, autocratic, instruction-giving, business oriented; whereas female qualities are considerational, transformative, participative, socio-expressive, people-oriented (Appelbaum, Audet and Miller, 2003). These differentiations are important because the qualities are often contained in job descriptions used for internal and external selection purposes and define prospective candidates as being transactional or transformational in nature. Cultural stereotyping tends to define jobs as predominantly masculine in nature and, by definition, calling for a transactional candidate, despite obvious transformational job requirements. One aspect of this specific form of stereotype is that it does not allow for a leader stereotypes to be both masculine and feminine (Koenig et al., 2011). Moreover, any attempts by a woman to assert or exhibit masculine qualifications in the hiring process or in performing the duties of the job can backfire. This was the conclusion of Rudman and Glick (1999) in which being perceived as feminine in a masculine-dominated organisation is a basis for criticism and career stagnation. As Heilman et al. (2003) pointed out, successful women in a male gender-type job show that they can perform but, in violating gender-prescriptive norms, they experience social scorn and negative treatment from both men and women.

As can be seen, women who aspire to senior management positions are subjected to overt and covert obstructions, whether they play by the rules or break out of molds designed to constrain them. Many will find themselves in positions never held by a woman in that organisation before and find that being first (and a minority on several counts) will test their personal capacity for motivation and resilience. The principles, concepts and forces that can shape and direct their career in management are described below. The following aspects of leadership are a distillation of what has been learned how women can navigate an optimal course around obstacles that impede their progress toward careers in senior management.

### **Dimensions of Leadership and Management**

Although they are closely aligned, there are significant differences between leadership and management that have an effect on the nature of the workplace, depending on which concept has the greatest influence on the work environment. Kotter (1999) views management as planning, organizing and controlling organisational activities. It sets budgets and manages activities necessary to achieve the business plan. Management is responsible for organisation, staffing and managing their utilisation in a risk-averse, predictable plan for achieving organisational results. Leadership, by contrast, is responsible for developing the vision, setting the course, aligning resources and motivating people to achieve personal and organisational goals. In a finely tuned organisation, both aspects work together effectively. It is also possible for them to be in conflict. Management is about order and predictability of results. Leadership is about visioning and adapting to changing conditions. The application of a particular management style seeks a significant degree of conformity in order to conserve resources for the main purposes of the organisation. Organizational leaders prefer certain stereotypes believing that their preferred types of employees are best and will reward those employees who behave most consistently with their stereotypes (Raver and Schneider, 2005). Leadership styles by their nature involve

variability and adaptability to address perceived changes in the business environment and employees are preferred who conform to their preferences.

Whilst theories of leadership evolved over centuries, their refinement into a coherent body of knowledge only occurred just over a century ago. During that time, their efficacy has been tested and the fittest survived and are semblances are still in effect. A late-comer to leadership and management theory and practice arose from the social developments from the 1960s – empowerment. Traditional leadership and management theory provide frameworks and structures to facilitate the effective and efficient achievement of goals. Empowerment is a means toward that end.

### **Male versus Female Leadership**

One of the predominant questions which are evident throughout literature is why there are so few female leaders. Much of the discussion in this area compares and contrasts the supposed traits of "male" and "female" leadership style, with the implication that men are more successful leaders because they inherently possess or learn particular leadership traits that are help enable them to reach leadership positions within organisations (Courpasson, 2006). Similarly, some psychologists suggest that throughout early childhood females are perpetually reinforced with the notion that males go out to work and have leadership positions, and females stay at home (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2006). According to Gizelis (2009), this may lead women to develop deep-rooted issues involving confidence and self-belief which in turn affects their propensity to self-promote themselves in order to achieve leadership positions. Furthermore, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2005, p.29) propose that this tactic is imperative for individuals to gain leadership positions. At the same time, it is highly unlikely that merely performing good or high calibre work will be sufficient for any individual in the workplace to be noticed. Therefore those individuals who are predisposed to promote their own activities, in addition to being good at their work, are more likely to be recognised by others and then get promoted to a position of leadership. In some respects, Hinkin and Schriesheim (1995;1989) argue that this is merely another format of the "Golden halo" phenomenon, which will be explored as one of the barriers to women reaching senior management later in this article.

According to Calas and Smircich (1993, p.73) particular character traits of females, which she argues are reinforced by societal expectation, include *"submissiveness, passivity, avoidance of aggression and competition, reticence to take risk, and other qualities our culture considers "feminine"'*. The implication is that masculine qualities required for successful leadership, and these masculine qualities are the antithesis of the "female" character traits described above. position.

Fagenson (1987;1990) further points out that, although there is wide acceptance of the fact that confidence is essential for successful leadership, confidence engenders confidence and inspires the workforce (Eastin and Prakash, 2013; Jackson et al., 1993). Men are perceived as confident but women who display the same approach as a male in the same position can be perceived as aggressive. Fagenson (1990) argues that this is a double standard in society that is damaging and counter-productive because it implies that women are inherently incapable of occupying a leadership position.



Keny (1979, p. 117-8) believes that the long-term stereotyping of children into adulthood helps foster a strong tendency for society to pigeonhole women as being less suited to leadership roles. Shaffer (2009), research the development of gender roles in young children, the research revealed that parents tend to cultivate unconsciously some masculine characteristics in their male children and feminine characteristics in their female children (Fagot, 1978 in Shaffer, 2009). This impeded the long-term stereotyping of children into adulthood helps foster a strong tendency for society to perceive women as being less suited to leadership roles. Studies by academics, such as Hu et al. (2012) and March (2007), support the existence of this societal stereotype. These studies have shown that society in general perceives leadership characteristics, such as self-confidence, initiative, forcefulness and task orientation, to be typically "male" leadership traits. It is therefore not surprising that, as a consequence of this, men are statistically more likely to be selected than a woman for leadership roles. Moreover, this means that, even if a female has the necessary technical qualifications (essentially equal or superior qualifications) and the necessary personality traits, she must perpetually fight to overcome societal stereotyping and deep-rooted childhood beliefs that ultimately result in reduced self-confidence.

Research by Fenn (1978) has revealed that, very often when "blind" comparisons are carried out and there is no indication of whether a candidate is male or female, it results in the most qualified candidate being selected for a leadership role. However, when the gender of the candidate is known, invariable societal bias causes the female candidate to be judged as less suitable because there is a deep-rooted belief that she will be incapable of controlling her emotions and demonstrating the necessary character traits. Fletcher (1986;1994) offers another illustration of this theory by pointing out that gender stereotypes of effective leadership are often considered unattractive in females, attributable to the confidence/aggression perception of Fagenson (1990). This creates another barrier for women to overcome if they wish to achieve a leadership position. The challenge to women is to understand that organizational managements have stereotypes as to what types of employees they prefer and tend to reward employees that are most consistent with those stereotypes (Raver and Schneider, 2004). To the extent possible acquiring those skills and attributes can have a positive effect on career advancement.

Riggio (1986) believes that, since females throughout childhood are deliberately encouraged not to acquire personality traits which are associated with successful leadership, this disproportionately increases the likelihood that a female candidate for a senior role would be judged as less qualified or capable. This is an invisible barrier that many women struggle to overcome. Other research concerning the matter of "male" and "female" leadership trends reveals that HR departments and existing leaders and managers discriminate against mobility for females by blocking promotion and discourage women from applying for more senior roles (Kulich et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2011; Grant, 1999). Further, there is a significant lack of senior managers who are willing and able to mentor females who aspire to more senior roles (Ryan et al., 2006a,2006b). Sealy (2010) believes that this is particularly damaging because many males receive informal coaching and mentoring in social settings. Since females do not benefit from this informal mentoring process due to societal beliefs about social activities, this creates a significant barrier for women who are not mentored in the softer requirements of leadership. The transition from

operational to strategic leadership at a senior level, as research by Ryan et al. (2011), has demonstrated that mentoring is particularly important, if leaders are to be considered successful in their role.

Further to this, research by Kucinkas (2010) and Andersen (2005) has shown that, for senior roles, it is understandably necessary to relocate for jobs, in order to acquire necessary organisational experience. For a female with children this can often be excessively onerous, because they will be reluctant to uproot their children regularly and move them on a regular basis (Andersen, 2006a, p.569;2006b). Again, the argument returns to societal beliefs about the role of gender in society. From a practical perspective, it is particularly unusual for a couple to both have high-profile or senior roles in different industries. The extra requirements of senior leadership positions often require a high degree of flexibility which becomes unfeasible as people build up a home and family life. Therefore, there has been many debates regarding working mothers and their priority of raising up children. Domenico and Jones (2006), asserts working women to be sighted as "immoral and unfeminine objects of pity", and some critics throw their unfair judgments and accused women as "negligent mothers ", and disguising women's major job which is looking after her children and doing the house core in addition to her career. Thus, Couples must choose which partner will pursue their career of choice, because it is exceedingly difficult for couples to manage divergent careers. Therefore, as Kucinkas (2010) points out, many couples must choose which partner will pursue their career of choice, because it is exceedingly difficult for couples to manage divergent careers. Drawing upon the wide body of evidence that there is a propensity for women to lack self-confidence and also believe that they are better suited to looking after children at home. This thought pattern invariably results in women choosing to stall their career in order that their husband or partner can pursue promotions (Goodale and Hall, 1976). Interestingly, a relatively recent line of research has explored the fact that for many women their biological clock (and thus the desire to have children) almost directly correlates to the stage in their career some 10 - 15 years in, where they will be sufficiently experienced for a senior role (Slaughter, 2012). In several professional careers there is an unspoken perception that in order to climb the career ladder there is a policy of "up or out" (Hennig and Jardim, 1977). The effect of this, on an individual who does not continue to climb the career ladder at a relentless pace, is that they are tacitly considered unsuitable and thus they choose to leave, if they do not attain a suitably senior position in a required (and socially imposed) timeframe. Of course, this would never be reflected in any organisational literature and nor would it be endorsed as practice, but Jamieson (1997) has found evidence to suggest that in many professional careers there is a relentless drive for promotion which can often leave behind all but the most confident.

Finally, some research has shown that because women have physical differences compared to men, there is a corresponding perception that they are "outsiders", and thus unsuitable for leadership roles. Radtke and Henderikus (1994) have shown that this can directly result in exclusion from particular social groups or social clubs, meaning that females lack the necessary professional support network required for building careers. This also relates to mentoring, and particularly, mentoring for senior roles where a different skill set is required and which is not readily taught in an academic format. Overall, it can be seen that, through

no fault of their own, females are directly disadvantaged in their pursuit of senior leadership positions. Thus, as a result of their gender and entrenched societal beliefs, these factors inhibit the career progress of many women (Rosener, 1990). Interestingly, research by Sealy and Doherty (2012) and Ryan et al. (2011) has revealed that many women who have achieved a managerial position with some degree of power are often subject to an unspoken belief that they are merely there to represent "affirmative action" or they are the "token female". Again, this is an unspoken societal belief which is deeply disempowering. It causes many women to work much harder to overcome negative preconceptions of their appointment to a role. Sealy and Vinnicombe (2010) suggest that, in many instances, and because females still bear the vast majority of responsibility for managing the home, women have less energy to devote to work. This ultimately causes them to make the decision to preserve their energy levels and maintain their health by "settling" for a role with less responsibility. This is clearly damaging to the organisation and the individuals who make this choice, but the research of Doldor et al. (2012) reveals that many women choose to relinquish fighting the societal perceptions which make their working life extremely difficult. This partially explains how and why some women choose to "opt out" of senior leadership roles. They become aware that the farther they progress up the career ladder that progress becomes more difficult it will be harder to overcome these perceptions. Sealy and Singh (2010) indicate that there is also a damaging view that comes from other females, some of whom attack the choice some women make to pursue senior careers and leadership positions. This may also explain why all but the strongest females choose not to open themselves up to social attack from all sides, and be vilified, for personal choices they make which some may regard as unfeminine.

### **Men and Women Leadership Styles**

Despite the difficulties that women face in terms of scaling the career ladder and securing a situation of empowerment and leadership, a number of women have been able to achieve this goal. However, the next question to consider is the extent to which (or if at all) there is a difference in male and female leadership styles. It is noted by Mills et al. (1992) that some studies have been able to identify subtle differences in leadership approaches between males and females; however, Powell (1995) disagrees with this and believes that there is little difference between the leadership approaches of men and women in senior positions. Indeed, he goes so far as to assert that a good leader is a good leader regardless of their gender. Instead Powell (1995), and later Eastin and Prakash (2013), believe that the guiding characteristics of leadership are partially innate and partially learnt, and to a certain extent are guided by extrinsic factors such as prevailing circumstances and organisational culture. In essence, the issue is whether or not the leader in question is a good fit for the organisation at that point in the organisation's life cycle. Sinclair (2004) concurs with this to a limited degree, although there is relatively little research which has been able to confirm or disprove this suggestion one way or the other. Arguably, drawing parallels with high-profile political leaders such as Margaret Thatcher or Julia Gillard, there could potentially be some merit in this argument, based on the fact that these women worked extremely hard to secure their respective roles and during their tenure they were faced with a number of high-profile political challenges. However, further research is certainly



required in this area to identify whether or not a positive correlation exists between innate leadership style and organisational circumstance, leading to wider perceptions of leadership success.

Powell (2011) contend that there are three dimensions of leadership which can be measured on a comparable basis which indicate the extent to which a leader has particular personality or character traits. These are: (i) accomplishment style; (ii) interpersonal style; and (iii) decision-making style. The first refers to the extent to which a leader is task orientated. The first refers to the extent to which a leader is task orientated. Literature in this area indicates that not only are males typically more task orientated than females, but from a societal perspective this tends to be regarded as a highly desirable leadership trait. Contu (cited in Knights and Wilmott, 2007, p. 118) suggests that accomplishment style is *"how much the leader initiates, organizes, and defines work activities and processes"*, the implication being that undertaking one task at a time and operating discrete tasks is a preferable process. There is a large body of literature which refers to the capability of women to manage multiple tasks simultaneously (Sealy and Vinnicombe, 2010; Ryan and Haslam, 200a,2005b5; Loden, 1985). There is also a corresponding body of literature which suggests that attempting to multi-task leads to the work being completed to a sub-optimal standard (Sealy et al., 2009). There is also some considerable disagreement in this area as to whether the trait of accomplishment style is gender-based or otherwise, and, to add further confusion to this discussion, the only studies which have shown that there is a difference in male and female accomplishment style have been in a clinical setting as part of an objective study (Van Nostrand and Herr, 1993). The wider body of research, which has explored the differences in male and female leadership style in a natural setting, found no difference at all (Ryan et al., 2011; Terjesen et al., 2009; Powell, 1993) If multi-tasking is seen as a poor trait for leaders, and women are generally seen as good multi-taskers, it is unlikely that they will be promoted to a place where they have to take on a leadership role. Casting doubt on the extent to which there is a difference in income between males and females. Since this is considered to be one of the most important traits of leadership, it would prima facie to suggest that women are perfectly capable of occupying leadership roles, and that it is in fact societal perception that undermines their position.

A similar situation occurs when attempts have been made to measure and benchmark male and female approaches to interpersonal relationships. Research by Mainiero (1986) shows a difference in approaches to interpersonal relationships that are necessary to build morale and trust within an organisation. However, Rosenberg (1979) criticises this work, as she points out that it was speculative in nature to ask individuals to postulate how they might behave any given circumstance; moreover, the research indicated only a relatively limited differential and not a major one. However research by Lorber and Farrell (2001) found that attempts to measure accomplishment style, when managers were observed in a natural setting, determined that there was no discernible difference. The research also showed that highly experienced senior female leaders were more like their male counterparts in terms of temperament than most other average females (average in this context based on statistical norms). The implication drawn from this study was that whether females naturally possess these characteristics or whether they learn them in order to climb the

corporate ladder (as exemplified on the subject of game-playing as presented later in this chapter), the characteristics are required in order to be considered a successful leader. What is yet to be fully determined is whether or not these characteristics are deemed as essential by colleagues, peers and employees or wider society. In short, does the existence of these personality traits create a self-fulfilling prophecy? As yet this seems to be a further area of research which requires greater investigation.

A study by Gary Powell (2011), *Women and Men in Management*, conducted a detailed comparison of male and female decision-making styles in leadership positions. The research was conducted in a natural environment, thus immediately discounting the challenges discussed in previous research. It revealed that women systematically demonstrated a more participative and democratic style which is not only regarded as best practice in HRM literature, but also found to be consistently more effective as a leadership approach (Beale and Hoel, 2010). Powell (2011) also found that men invariably resort to an autocratic and direct approach as their preferred leadership style, especially in times of high stress or challenge, with the implication being that they are engaging with an "alpha male personality" (Briggs et al., 2012). Discussions surrounding personality types form a body of literature of their own, but there appears to be some overlap in this area between preferred leadership styles and personality traits and links to personality traits, regardless of whether they are embedded or acquired. Some academics, such as Craig and Silverstone (2010) and Sealy (2009b), believe that the female tendency to facilitate and negotiate as a preferred leadership style leads to a high level of communication and is ultimately more effective in the long-term because it encourages engagement and employee commitment. Not only that, it has been suggested by Herzfelt et al. (2008) that these "feminine" leadership traits served to reduce hierarchy and therefore increase employer engagement, leading to demonstrably improved organisational performance. In contrast, males have been found to have a high emphasis and preference for power and control, meaning that they override any discussions of negotiation and dislike seeking wider consensus for their suggestions. Ultimately Sealy et al. (cited in Vinnicombe et al., 2008, p. 67-78) believe that the "feminine" approach should be regarded as best practice and the benchmark to which male behaviour should be compared. The increasing body of knowledge which encourages communication and cooperation as a preferred leadership style in the majority of circumstances would tend to support this view. Moreover, this view is held by both academics and practitioners who have wide experience of working with a range of leadership approaches. The only caveat to this relates to specific, very high pressure situations wherein direct authority is required such as in the Armed Forces (Gajjala et al 2010; Yukl, 1999). The overall conclusion is that in democratic organisations there should be virtually no need for autocratic leadership approaches, and in fact the approach preferred by females of nurturing employees, as well as encouraging collaboration and communication should henceforth be regarded as best practice.

There is a line of medical research which provides some physiological justification for the apparent differences in male and female leadership styles. Research by Sagan (1988), who sought to prove that attempts to compare male and female leadership styles was akin to comparing apples and oranges, determined that male and female brain structures are fundamentally different, with the structure of a female brain providing cognitive advantage

in terms of the ability to manage and monitor multiple streams of information simultaneously. Research ascertained that the neurological connections between the left and right sides of the brain are larger in women, meaning that they are physically capable of processing larger amounts of data simultaneously and in multiple formats. It also means that women are better able to integrate right brain (cerebral) and left brain (artistic or visual) activities (Sagan, 1988). Not only does this mean that they can process large amount of data in different formats, they are also better placed to make creative connections between different types of data in order to provide innovative solutions (Dogar, 1998). This being said, research by Karsten (1994) has found that men have a preference for focusing intently on a single topic, meaning that they can often extract greater detail. Potentially, the implication of this is that women would actually be better at managing strategic operations because of their ability to manage large data flows in multiple formats, whereas men would be better focused in specific, narrowly defined roles because this suits their approach to data processing. Again, the research in this area is very much in its infancy and would benefit from further investigation, however it is suggested that providing physical evidence which supports academic research in a natural setting helps to strengthen the arguments in this area. It is also acknowledged that this line of reasoning would turn established sociological belief on its head, and would therefore require much greater research and evidence before it could be considered as mainstream.

There was one final area to consider in respect of gender and leadership is the question of whether leadership is implicitly gendered. To expand, although organisations rightly position themselves as being gender neutral, there is a wide body of legislation and regulation which insists that organisations must position themselves thus, so there is a practical divergent which continues to perpetuate the gender gap. For example, Alimo-Metcalfe, (1995) argues that gender is fundamental to many of the strategic decisions taken by organisations, and in fact guides organisational culture and operational practice. She asserts that although an organisation may believe that it is gender neutral, when leadership positions become available, through organisational growth or restructure, the reality of a job description which includes 70-80 hour weeks, frequent international travel with very limited notice, and a requirement to socialise at unsocial hours to conduct further business, means that very few women would consider themselves able to balance these demands against those of family life. By default, the job description usually favours a man who is less shackled by family commitments. Although there is a steadily increasing number of men who would discount themselves from such roles because of family commitments, the most contemporary research suggests that this is still 90/10 in favour of men (Gaunt, 2012). The preceding discussions regarding levels of self-belief and self-confidence amongst women reinforce sections of society that would serve to support the statistics. As such, Alimo-Metcalfe (1995) asserts that the reality of the situation is that the ostensibly "gender neutral" role cannot accurately be considered as gender neutral, and the self-reinforcing perceptions and requirements of such a role will continue to perpetuate the male/female gender divide in leadership positions. She goes on to assert that, until there is a deep-rooted societal shift in this regard, conventional gender roles will continue to be perpetuated. To conclude this line of discussion, it is suggested that, in fact, this is the challenge which reinforces the difficulties that females in leadership positions face.

There is a paradox between individual perspectives and collective perspectives, meaning that if an individual is asked whether or not they believe a female should be in a leadership position they are more likely to say yes. However, the collective view is diametrically opposed to this, and yet unspoken, leading to the situation where there is a dichotomy between spoken and unspoken actions and behaviour. Thus, it is suggested that understanding the existence of this paradox goes some considerable way towards explaining why women (and other minority groups for that matter) appear to face invisible hurdles when they seek to obtain leadership positions. It is also suggested that, as a direct result of this collective belief, women must work even harder to achieve recognition in a leadership position. The final conclusion is that it is not impossible for women, as evidenced by some extremely high-profile female leaders, but it is certainly more difficult, despite the fact that women are as qualified and capable, if not more so than their male counterparts, based on academic and scientific evidence.

### **Female Leadership and Organisational Culture**

The evidence and discussion thus far have generated the following conclusions. First, women have a discernibly different leadership style than their male colleagues and counterparts, and they favour participative and inclusive leadership which draws employees into an organisation and empowers them with knowledge and information (Kark et al., 2012; Fairlie and Robb, 2009; Goby and Eroglu, 2011; Helgesen, 1995). Secondly, this gendered difference appears to present itself regardless of cultural impact and context, but the evidence in this area is very limited in Arab contexts as opposed to Western cultural settings and has been extrapolated from international studies, as a smaller than desirable sample. Thirdly, it is determined that, regardless of culture, female leaders are still grossly under-represented at a senior level in comparison to proportional explanation (Shapria et al., 2010; Blau and Kahn, 2007). The contributory reasons for this are numerous and it is unlikely that this particular research study will be able to provide a comprehensive response to this question which has plagued academic minds for many years. Suffice to say that it can be firmly established that the reasons for this representation are numerous and variously weighted, according to relative personal factors. Fourthly, the empirical evidence presents incontrovertible proof that female-led organisations are more successful in the longer term and have more stable rates of growth and success and lower rates of failure (CWBR, 2008; NSH, 2009). Whilst this evidence may be uncomfortable it is demonstrable evidence of the fact that female leadership styles which favour empowerment and participation are almost invariably more stable. The term "successful" is not necessarily appropriate here as success is relative to each organisation, but the fact remains that female leaders have a distinct and palpable impact upon the organisations in which they work.

### **Organisational Politics**

A small body of research has touched upon the concept of women and their reaction to organisational or "office" politics. Examples of office or workplace politics include gossiping and manipulation of working relationships by individuals with charisma or in positions of localised power. As noted by Kirton (cited in Townsend and Wilkinson, 2011, p. 28-29), there is a fine line between organisational culture and organisational politics, as a measure

of moderated gossip, it is fundamental to building workplace relationships. However, according to Berne (2010) and Gizelis (2009), it is only relatively recently that people have been prepared to discuss the phenomenon and its wider negative impact. Berne (2010) asserts that although it is typically women who are considered to be "gossips", it is often men who build social networks and who use their positions of power within organisations to play psychological games. The principal challenge with this situation is that people are either reluctant to discuss, or in denial, as to whether they employ such tactics in the workplace, and, people on the receiving end of office politics or who lack the social skill necessary to play the game, are unlikely to progress. Arguably, this can be linked to the research of both Gries and Naudé (2009) and Ridgeway (2001), who both assert that female personality and leadership traits are not necessarily suited to office politics. Their reasoning is that women dislike the confrontation involved in office politics. In short, women do not consider game playing in organisational context to be a profitable use of time or resources.

There is further anecdotal evidence for this, with the urban terminology "glass ceiling" derived from the notion that at a senior level within organisations a large amount of organisational strategy is in fact discussed in a social setting, specifically the Gulf course. This gave rise to the urban terminology because businesswomen are seldom seen at the Gulf course and in consequence they are not privy to the social relationships formed by senior executives which cement their working lives. At the time of this writing, this is a significantly under-researched avenue, and to date a single piece of evidence is presented for this situation by Hladik (2012). He argues that many researchers have ignored the existence and nature of the relationship between social and corporate activities for many senior executives. He contends that, because the potential population of individuals with a suitable skill set for senior executive roles is in fact very small, these people choose to socialise together as well as work together. In many respects, this line of reasoning supports the evidence presented by Conley (2011), Healy et al. (2011) and Cook and Dar (2008), who all assert that this small pool of potential candidates is a self-regulating group. In that respect it is unsurprising that they would choose to both work and socialise together when very few other people could fully understand the nature of their work. Since there is a large body of evidence which illustrates that social bonds are critically important to human relationships and organisations (Healy et al., 2004), the fact that work is informally conducted in a social setting such as the Gulf course should come as no surprise.

### **Observations and Conclusions about Leadership**

Leadership is what leaders do. It takes on many forms. Gender adds another dimension to what is already a complex topic. In essence, leadership is what organises disparate variables and brings them into a coordinated relationship that enables them to facilitate a course of actions that collectively achieve what none of them alone, independently could do. The enabler is the proper application and utilisation of plans, traits, communication and control mechanisms for the attainment of a pre-determined goal that satisfies a need of the entity that engages the participants until the objective has been accomplished.

It takes a leader to amass all of the required resources and accomplish all of the above tasks in a timely fashion. Depending on the meta-task, the leader and leadership style will need



to fit the unique requirements of the situation. Success requires the proper and efficient use and allocation of resources, human and physical. It involves the integration of various types of resources into a comprehensive action plan that anticipates issues that need to be addressed and has a contingency plan for expected obstacles. The plan and the team remain in effect until changes need to be made and until the goal is accomplished.

All of the above leadership requirements could be met by either a man or a woman, independently or together. However, there are intervening factors that often prevent a simple solution. Depending on the circumstances, gender stereotypes might preclude women from fully participating in the project. In some environments women may have no relevant experience (e.g. construction), the participation requirements may not suit them (e.g. international travel), or the positions that are qualified to do are considered to be too risky for a woman without a relevant track record to perform (e.g. direct contact with senior management decision-makers). In all of these examples, it is possible for every example of gender bias to occur.

The issues involved in this hypothetical case run the gamut of gender issues found in society today. Top management positions are reserved for men, because they require skills that men excel at. Women are considered for entry-level and middle management jobs because they don't have to compensate them as much and their work will be overseen by a male who makes important decisions. The women that are hired will probably be over-qualified for the positions, but they need the jobs and the work experience, so they will probably accept them. Once on the job, they are potentially subjected to all of the work environment issues that exist: social isolation, organisational politics, harassment and other issues that may not be beneficial to their career advancement. They will need to understand what the "rules of the road" are and decide how to respond. If they adopt a masculine demeanor, they may come across as inauthentic and compromise their integrity. Men and women alike often see through that unnatural behaviour and dislike the person for it.

It is in this type of environment that most women enter the business world and must learn to cope in their own way and find their own path through the labyrinthine maze that confronts them throughout their career. There are many theories and principles that will be tested in the laboratory of reality, becoming personal. Nowhere is this truer than in women's quest to achieve senior management and executive board positions. The obstacles are real. The leadership theories and practices must be honed to match each individual's own circumstances. The body of knowledge is replete. The effectiveness of its applications is to be determined along the way.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This article has presented women leadership styles illustrating the predominant themes which have emerged from this comprehensive literature review can be summarised as follows. Certainly there is plentiful evidence to demonstrate that female leaders are as, if not more, capable than their male counterparts. Reasons for this include their natural leadership style being collaborative and cooperative, leading to an engaged workforce. They are also risk-averse and take a strategic or holistic view in regard to business decisions, leading to a more balanced level of organisational growth. There is some limited evidence to suggest that there are physiological reasons to support this (principally the ability of most

women to manage and monitor multiple streams of information simultaneously), which is clearly a desirable trait in a leadership situation. However the statistical evidence shows that time and again women are either denied leadership positions or choose not to pursue them beyond a particular managerial level. There is debate surrounding this as to whether women choose to opt out or are forced to do so by extrinsic and intrinsic societal pressures. Some research has shown that women who do opt out of senior roles by choice often choose to pursue personal interests and are highly successful.

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