

**MA in Education:
Managing People in Schools**

Women in Leadership

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WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

A briefing note of research and theory

Here we summarise briefly some of the research points and theory about women in the context of leadership and communication. The topic is complex, not least because gender cannot easily be separated from a number of other factors, such as status in the organisation, and history.

Organisations have generally been fashioned by men for the use of men, not because men have been deliberately imperialistic, but because they are the people who have traditionally occupied the positions in society where organisational structures and rules were created. The way organisations work usually reflect, therefore, the ways of men more than the ways of women, which have been found to be significantly different. As more women are entering the professional workplace, we need to find out more about the way that they manage and achieve results. The research on gender and management contributes to our understanding of how organisations can become more effective.

The topic is well-represented in the research literature, and this note does not pretend to be inclusive. It selects a few of the areas relevant to educational management in a global environment.

NOTES

- *Just as in the discussions about culture, no-one is neutral – everyone is gender-bound, and it is natural to feel strongly about the issues. In reading the research and discussions, we ask that readers maintain an objective perspective.*
- *As in other areas of management research, most of the work quoted has been carried out in the West; readers will want to take a view on how applicable the outcomes are in the context of other cultures*
- *In some cases, these generalisations are not applicable. Everyone knows women leaders who have adopted a 'masculine style' and vice versa.*

What the research indicates

Ten factors why women are professionally marginalised (Spencer and Podmore, 1987):

- Stereotypes about women, that they are unstable, emotional, not decisive enough
- Stereotypes about the nature of professions and professionals, that women are unsuited to the demands of the job
- The sponsorship system, the lack of older women to support younger women

- The lack of role models and peers
- Women being excluded from informal relationships and networks
- The concept of professional commitment, and the assumption that women will not be committed enough
- The unplanned nature of many women's careers
- The assumptions made about what is 'women's work'
- Clients' expectations – that women are unacceptable in certain roles
- Fear of competition, that women will reduce the prestige of the profession.

Ball (1990) explains the concept of 'discourses' as identified by Foucault:

"Discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations ... Thus the possibilities for meaning and for definition are pre-empted through the social and institutional position held by those who use them." (p.2)

How does it feel when women are excluded from academic (and other) discourses by the use of the pronoun 'he' to encompass both men and women?

How do male and female values differ?

Judi Marshall (1984) suggests that male values include self-assertion, control, rationality, while female values include interdependence, acceptance and emotions.

Stereotypes can be dangerous, if they seem to seal people in behaviours linked with their own gender. Nevertheless, it is useful to recognise that there is a wide range of behaviours that may be helpful to us. We can then, if we wish, use the *whole range* to choose the most appropriate behaviour in any given situation, regardless of our gender. In this way we can extend our repertoire of behaviours which are suitable in any circumstance.

What does research show us about the sort of leadership styles that women use?

Some researchers have found that female leaders stereotypically display the communal attributes of friendliness, concern for others and emotional expressiveness (Eagly et al, 1992). Yammarino et al (1997) examined the relationship between women and their subordinate individuals, and analysed much published research. They state:

"The weight of the evidence indicates that female leaders favour an "interpersonally-oriented" leadership style, that others expect them to display such a style, and that female leaders are successful and effective when they do so.....Such leadership is collaborative, democratic, and interpersonal; such leaders help subordinates, do favours for them, and

look out for them. Informality, warmth, co-operativeness, low leader control, a participative decision-making style, and problem-solving based on intuition and empathy as well as rationality characterise female-stereotypic leadership” (Yammarino et al, 1997, p.208).

In their paper, they found that women leaders favour using one-to-one (“dyadic”) relationships. Both male and female subordinates found this to be the case, and that female leaders had different relationships with each subordinate, depending on the performance of the subordinate.

They conclude that, in terms of managerial practice, women leaders need the opportunity to engage in one-to-one relationships with the members of their team, and find the ways to get the best out of each individual, regardless of gender. They also suggest that

“providing a working environment that encourages considerate, warm, participative, interpersonal relationships may result in stronger dyadic bonds between female leaders and their subordinates, thus fostering productivity, effectiveness, satisfaction, and commitment” (Yammarino et al, 1997, p.220).

Yammarino et al’s (1997) sample size was quite small, however (31 managers and 61 subordinates from the sales forces of a variety of organisations). It is, perhaps, questionable how far their conclusions can be generalised to other organisations.

Socio-linguistic research

Tannen (1991) analyses the different ways that men and women use language. She argues that while men stereotypically tend to use language to compete for, achieve and maintain status, women tend to use language to build relationships and collaborate with each other. Tannen also points out that in mixed organisational teams, the rules tend to be those of men, and that women need to understand how to conform to these rules. Her main points are summarised below.

SUMMARY OF TANNEN’S (1991) MAIN POINTS:

- Men use language to protect their independence and to negotiate status: they see themselves as individuals in a world of hierarchies in which they are either up or down, and use conversations to achieve and preserve the upper hand. Life is viewed as a contest/struggle to preserve independence and to avoid failure.
- Women use language to seek confirmation, make connections and reinforce intimacy: they see themselves as individuals in a network of connections, and use conversations to negotiate for closeness – seeking and giving support and reaching consensus. Life is viewed as a community, a struggle to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation.

- Interaction between men and women is therefore frequently misinterpreted, as each gender interprets what the other has said through their own paradigm. Men interacting with men behave quite differently from women interacting with women, but in mixed company the “rules” tend to be those of men, putting women at a disadvantage.
- By recognising the differences, individuals of both sexes are in a better position to understand each other. Conscious altering of behaviour, eg. Sensitivity training for men, and assertiveness training for women, narrows the gap between the two “genderlects” so that each sex can communicate more effectively with the other.

ELABORATION OF ABOVE POINTS:- some examples drawn from observed stereotypical behaviour:

- Men prefer not to put themselves in a low position in a hierarchy: they can make poor subordinates as they don't like someone else being in the higher position. Even asking for information can do this – particularly from women. Women, not seeking status, accept subordination better, and behave collaboratively. This collaborative behaviour is frequently interpreted by men as insecure, incompetent and lacking in independence.
- In boys' play, conversation is based on telling others what to do (Do this, Stop that, Get out, etc.), telling jokes and challenging others in the group. Conversation in girls' play is based on sharing (Let's do this, Why don't we, How about, etc.), making connections, being close and being liked. They tend to avoid conflict, or compromise fast to achieve harmony. Fathers issue more commands to their young than mothers do, and they issue more to their sons than their daughters.
- Status is the chief commodity in boys' games; popularity is more important in girls' games.
- Men feel comfortable in “public speaking” mode (= “report talk”) while women are more comfortable in “private speaking” mode (= “rapport talk”). Social talk between a couple is often used by the man to transmit information, and by the woman to interact. In consequence, women can irritate men, who regard their talk as inconsequential, and women can be disappointed that their men don't talk to them much at home (whereas they might be lively outside the home on an information-exchange basis).
- Women reinforce rapport by talking/discussing; this is often based on emotional troubles, or problems in friendships or at work. Men aren't always the best recipients of this sort of talk as they only see a problem to be solved; they offer solutions where the woman only wants empathy.
- Women tend to use personal experience in their arguments, which does not carry as much weight with men as male categorical statements about right and wrong. *Being aware of this can alert women to using less personal arguments when trying to persuade men.*
- Conversations between men and women frequently take the form of men imparting factual information to women, but very infrequently vice versa: man in role of teacher/expert; woman in role of student/listener. This is not a deliberate attempt to deny women authority: it is the natural way men talk, but whereas another man will challenge/give as good as he gets, a woman, unused to defending herself against challenges, will often misinterpret this as an attack on her credibility. The female tendency to play for being liked can mask her expertise, and she often adopts a subordinate position in mixed company. The result of this is that the imbalance of men lecturing to women is perpetuated by both sexes. *Both can learn from the other: women can interrupt men more, and men can listen more, and not deliver unnecessary information.*

- Men and women demonstrate different listening behaviours: women in the West tend to respond more with non-verbal sounds, whereas men are more silent. There is a similar disparity in body language. Misunderstandings can arise: on the one hand, women may think men are not listening to them; on the other hand, men may take “Mmm” “Yes” and encouraging visual signals to be signs of agreement, whereas they are actually signs of encouragement/ understanding. It can therefore come as a shock if the woman, when she replies, disagrees with the man’s argument.
- Conflict: men/boys tend to use conflict as a bond of closeness, whereas women/girls take conflict more personally. Women’s conflict is often therefore more disguised/indirect than men’s, and men may be confused as to what is being said.
- Storytelling: women often tell stories against themselves, making themselves look foolish. It violates the female egalitarianism to appear better than their peers. Men tend to tell stories that make them look good. Hearing women’s stories therefore reinforces their view of women as having less status; ie. Each interprets the other in the paradigm of their own sex.
- In “rapport style”, women use a conversational style that is continuous: they’ll interrupt each other to reinforce/support, and end sentences with “and....”, or “tag questions” eg. “Isn’t it?”. Men interrupt each other less, but when they do it is usually to offer information or to challenge. Men thus perceive it hard to get a word in edgeways into female-female conversation, and can be irritated by female effusive support when they (men) are speaking.

Gender and culture

The research on culture indicates national or ethnic tendencies to embrace certain “cultural norms”, ie. The assumptions and values by which we live and judge our lives (Hofstede, 1991). In studying cultural norms, it is interesting to ask where these came from. To what extent are the cultural stereotypes for any group of people consistent across gender?

Kanter and Corn (1994) found in their research that, if developed carefully, an organisational culture can be a more powerful influence than other cultural pulls. If we ignore the various cultures – which are often competing with each other – in the organisation, without exploring how they inter-relate and communicate, change can be dealt with superficially, and implementation becomes a problem as people find ways of sabotaging new ideas.

How can we use this information productively in the workplace?

None of the preceding is intended to be pejorative. There is no “right” or “wrong”, and neither are we “locked in” to a certain gender-related set of behaviours.

Gray (1992) suggests that, while there *are* differences in the way each gender works (he uses the metaphor of coming from different planets!) we each need to understand the values of the other in order to build a working relationship. Tannen (1991) reiterates this, and also gives ideas as to how women can become more effective in the male environment of most organisations. One of the headteachers in Ozga’s research (1993) points out that it is important for women to see the complementarity rather than the conflict.

But this one-way adjustment should not be the only solution. *Both* genders, if sensitised and/or trained, can use behaviours from the opposite end of the spectrum. The problem for men is that, because organisations traditionally are structurally and operationally “male”, it is easier to carry on as before than to make a deliberate effort to change to a different way of working. Those organisations that have made the effort, however, have had positive results. “Change” research in organisations shows that participative organisations are more effective at innovation than the more rigid hierarchical sort of organisation (Kanter, 1984), which is good at maintaining the status quo and limiting the introduction of change.

The participative way of running a business or leading a team is sensitive to the strengths and the development needs of all the individuals, and leads to a flexible and creative working environment. This is conducive with female styles of leadership, and, indeed, much work on leadership demonstrates a new effectiveness in “feminine” styles that is being promoted more widely by management development consultants in male-dominated organisations.

Strategies for change

Davidson and Cooper (1992, p.166) suggest the following strategies that organisations could adopt to address barriers faced by women.

Barriers	Strategies
<p>Organizational barriers Unfair selection or promotion procedures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal opportunities policy • Equal opportunities training • Dual interviewing • Precise job specifications • Objective assessment criteria • External advertising • Equal opportunity audits • Monitoring • Targets
Inflexible working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior level part-time/job-sharing arrangements • Flexitime • Working at home • Annual hours • Other flexible arrangements
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement dropped or modified • Dual-career job search
Age limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement dropped

<p>Traditional roles</p> <p>Work and family life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career break schemes • Workplace nurseries • Childcare vouchers • Parental leave • Enhanced maternity leave • Other childcare help
<p>Attitudinal barriers</p> <p>Lack of confidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal opportunity advertising • Headhunting • Internal promotion policies • Women-only training courses
<p>Prejudice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boardroom commitment to change • Equal opportunities training for managers • Awareness training for all staff