



The new context where minorities will emerge to lead.

There is a new global reality that we cannot ignore: developing economies playing a more significant role in the world; an increasing percentage of immigrants and minorities in the workforce; large proportions of women in organizations; the demand to integrate people with disabilities; the push for work-life-balance and work-flexibility; open acceptance of gays and lesbians in society and Corporate environment; frequent interactions between people of diverse national, linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Curl & Schmits, p. 1-8).

All these trends and developments in our global context create a new social, cultural and organizational phenomenon; it is today's reality and it is here to stay.

Heterogeneous is replacing homogeneous; minorities are quickly evolving into majorities. With these trends, certain questions must be considered.

Are the organizations ready to allow minorities to lead, thus unleashing their full potential?

Are the conditions ready to help the followers to respect, support, and accept the influence of leaders who belong to minorities (particularly woman and ethnic minorities)? Are the rest of the leaders and managers (who belong to the non-minorities groups) ready to fully comprehend this dynamic? Are they ready to understand their own prejudicial attitudes and to create an inclusive environment to unleash the potential embedded in multi-cultural, multigenerational and gender mixed work-force?

My answer to all these questions is 'not yet'. Contrastingly, organizations urgently need to challenge this mindset.

This article will focus on women who are one of the minorities that have been largely challenging the corporate environment status quo.

Challenges for Women in the work place.

Despite years of progress by women in the workforce (now women occupy more than 40% of all managerial positions in the United States), they still are most present in the lower levels of organizations (only 6% of the Senior Executives in the 500 Fortune companies are women and only 2% are CEOs). Similar numbers emerge from the European Union: 11% are top executives and 4% are CEOs (Eagly & Carli, p. 439-440).

There are some vestiges of prejudice about "men's superiority and effectiveness" and this is reflected by the fact that men are a group that still have the benefit of higher wages and more rapid promotions. Unconscious associations of certain male behaviors with leadership are blocks to women's advancement to higher leadership levels. People associate women and men with different traits and link men with more of the traits that connote leadership. When a woman uses some of the atypical qualities, or those associated with "male" behavior, they are questioned and their influences tend to be undermined. (Eagly & Carli, p. 441-443).



Organizations are not ready to allow woman to lead unleashing their full potential.

Without diminishing all the great efforts and advancements that some organizations have done to allow women to lead, research and data shows that most organizations are still short to create favorable conditions for female leadership (Eagly & Carli, p. 441-443). These are some examples about some conditions that can be or need to be improved:

Organizations can create programs to raise awareness about potential prejudice toward female leaders. This can become educational programs to followers and to other Sr. male leaders who still hold antiquated mindsets about female leadership style and its value.

Not all organizations have created a flex-hour environment that allows women to continue working after maternity; also, there must be an effort to stem the need for trade offs between raising a family or building an executive career.

There is still a lack of balance and objectivity in performance evaluation.

There are not enough and specific training and appropriate assignments to prepare women for managerial positions.

In general organizations can also create an “All Inclusive Multiculturalism (AIM)” environment that helps minorities (including woman) to feel their uniqueness is appreciated and, at the same time, where non-minorities are valued as part of the whole organization (Plaut, et al., 2008). This AIM approach implies specific tactics to appreciate all employees, careful use of inclusive communication and language; structures and units composition reflects inclusion of all groups; clear staffing, promotions, assessment policies that promote diversity; develop of educational programs that promote deeper knowledge of cross-groups interaction and specific group formation that encourages sponsorship of members of different identity groups.

.The followers and other male sr. leaders are not ready to respect, support, and accept the influence of woman in organizations. Followers and other Sr. male leaders are still holding some specific mindset about ‘female leadership’ that do not allow them to accept woman’s influence and leadership.

There is a debate if women need to add more ‘male’ (aggressive, ambitious, dominant, self confident, and forceful, as well as self-reliant and individualistic) ‘agentic traits’ to their leadership behavior repertoire. This would –apparently- made them more ‘respected’ and ‘effective’ leaders. However, this view responds to a long history of male domination of leadership roles that associates ‘leadership effectiveness’ with these types of traits (Carli & Eagly, p. 442).

It’s a fact that women need to develop their own leadership styles without losing the advantages of their ‘communal qualities’ that are more related to being helpful, friendly, and interpersonally sensitive. This is especially important while knowing that these qualities are more required in today’s business environment that involve diverse workforce, interrelated structures, matrix organizations, and complex problems that require the integration of diverse perspectives.



A considerable amount of self-education, self-awareness and preparation is required on the woman's side to cultivate an appropriate and effective leadership style mixing both qualities without losing authenticity.

There are some good examples in today's business environment of women who are successfully leading corporations with the strength and control that today's business environment demands. These women are able to provide a much-needed feminine touch to leadership that appropriately adds sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and a holistic view to their decisions. Indra Nooyi has been recognized for properly balancing both sides of the equation. She says, "I do not want to sound like a male chauvinist pig, but the reality is that women are just not given enough space to move about in the corporate world, in fact not even elbow room. So, in this male dominated world, for a woman to find her own space and leave behind all men and to reach the very top requires a very high degree of tenacity" (3).

At the individual level of development Curls and Schmitz (2006, p. 1-8) suggest in their 'Cultural Orientations Guide' to develop a "Cultural Competence" will help leaders to manage and lead better a diverse work force. Particularly male leaders need to have an open attitude and being receptive to cross-cultural/gender differences; self awareness about their own preferences and assumptions; awareness about others' values and beliefs.

In summation, it's clear some of the advancement that organizations and individuals have made allowing woman to have a better place in our today's organizations, however, there are some specific tasks still pending that would improve significantly with women's leadership performance.

Organizations need to put better systems, policies, and structures in place to guarantee smoother career paths for woman. Also, on the individual side, there is a lot to do to change the dominant male-oriented mindset and respect and accept what would typically be called a 'woman's leadership style.' Otherwise, they will be at a disadvantage to use their power and influence when try to lead in a non-inclusive environment; and especially because they don't match the predominant mindset of what it means to be a leader in some organizations.

Sources

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