

ASDO

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Osservatorio europeo sulle buone prassi per  
l'eliminazione del "tetto di vetro"

**Ricerca-azione su donne e leadership**

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**Leadership femminile e azione sociale:  
implicazioni per la ricerca e per lo svi-  
luppo delle carriere femminili**

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## QUADRO ISTITUZIONALE

Con il contratto (*grant agreement*) n. VS/2000/0410, la Commissione Europea - Directorate General Employment and Social Affairs - ha accordato ad ASDO (Assemblea delle donne per lo sviluppo e la lotta all'esclusione sociale) un contributo per la realizzazione del progetto "Osservatorio europeo sulle buone prassi per rimuovere il 'tetto di vetro'", denominato ricerca-azione su donne e leadership. Tale progetto si inserisce nel quadro del Programma d'azione comunitaria a medio termine per le pari opportunità per le donne e gli uomini dell'Unione Europea (1996-2000), in particolare tra le azioni volte a favorire lo scambio, lo sviluppo e il trasferimento di informazioni e di esperienze sulle buone prassi.

ASDO è una associazione di donne, con sede a Roma, attiva fin dal 1980 nella promozione di ricerche, attività formative e servizi di sostegno alla famiglia finalizzati all'integrazione di risorse umane femminili nella vita sociale e professionale. In particolare, ASDO svolge da anni attività di ricerca sul tema dell'accesso delle donne alle posizioni di responsabilità in campo politico, scientifico ed economico.

La finalità generale del progetto è quella di mettere in evidenza i vantaggi e le possibili modalità di una valorizzazione delle donne all'interno della vita economica e professionale, contribuendo così al superamento della segregazione verticale.

In particolare, il progetto si prefigge i seguenti obiettivi specifici:

- a) acquisire evidenze empiriche sul ruolo innovativo svolto dalle donne in posizione di leadership all'interno della realtà economica europea;
- b) definire indicazioni operative circa i modi migliori per operare tale valorizzazione, attraverso la realizzazione di specifiche politiche e interventi;

- c) sensibilizzare policy makers e manager sull'importanza e l'utilità della valorizzazione delle risorse umane femminili per la innovazione della vita economica e professionale.

Per la realizzazione del progetto, ASDO ha costituito una équipe di ricerca diretta da Alessandra Cancedda, sociologa.

Il progetto è realizzato in partnership con il Nuffield Institute Centre for Leadership and Management, Università di Leeds (Regno Unito), rappresentato da Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe, e con la Stockholm School of Economics, Department of Management and Organisation, Stoccolma (Svezia), rappresentata da Anna Wahl e Charlotte Holgerson.

Il presente documento, redatto da Alessandra Cancedda, riporta i principali risultati della ricerca svolta sul tema della leadership femminile e degli interventi per la rimozione del tetto di vetro, e mette a punto alcune prime raccomandazioni e linee-guida circa le indicazioni da trarne per la redazione di un manuale sulle buone prassi in questo campo.

Dal punto di vista metodologico, la ricerca si è basata sull'analisi dei documenti (letteratura tecnico-scientifica, documenti politici, materiale illustrativo di programmi e progetti) raccolti nella banca di informazioni istituita nell'ambito dell'Osservatorio.

Questo documento è suddiviso in cinque paragrafi.

Nei primi quattro si riportano sinteticamente i principali elementi emersi riguardo ai mutamenti di contesto, la segregazione occupazionale di genere, e la ricerca su genere e leadership (maggiori dettagli circa le informazioni raccolte in proposito vengono riportati nell'allegato Dossier della banca di Informazioni).

Nel quinto paragrafo si formula una proposta di interpretazione della leadership femminile, e del suo carattere innovativo, come forma di azione sociale. Si mettono altresì in evidenza le implicazioni di tale approccio, e, più in generale, le implicazioni della ricerca su donne e leadership per la progettazione di interventi di sviluppo delle carriere femminili.

PARTE PRIMA

**I principali elementi emersi  
dalla ricerca**





## 1. SOGGETTIVITÀ FEMMINILE, MUTAMENTI SOCIALI E CULTURALI, TRASFORMAZIONI DEL MERCATO DEL LAVORO

Il massiccio ingresso delle donne nel mondo del lavoro è, in Europa come in altri paesi industriali avanzati, uno dei fenomeni più significativi degli ultimi decenni. Dei circa 30 milioni di posti di lavoro creati negli stati membri dell'Unione Europea dal 1961 in poi, 25 milioni sono stati occupati da donne, soprattutto nel settore dei servizi (European Commission 1999).

La maggiore presenza femminile sul mercato del lavoro è parte di una serie di trasformazioni che hanno avuto al loro centro l'emergere di una soggettività femminile<sup>1</sup> e la entrata in **crisi del male breadwinner model** (Pfau-Effinger, 1993). Un'altra di queste trasformazioni è, soprattutto in alcuni paesi europei, l'abbassamento dei tassi di natalità (legato, almeno in parte, anche a più consapevoli scelte riproduttive operate dalle donne), e il conseguente invecchiamento della popolazione. Attualmente, si prevede che l'età media della popolazione dell'Unione Europea aumenterà da 36 anni nel 1995 a 45 nel 2025 (con un incremento medio di un anno ogni tre anni).

Un altro importante mutamento riguarda le tipologie familiari, con un incremento nel numero delle famiglie "atipiche" (rispetto al modello tradizionale della coppia con figli) e delle famiglie unipersonali. Queste ultime, nel 1995, rappresentavano il 27,5% delle unità familiari, con una significativa percentuale di ultrasessantacinquenni, mentre le famiglie di due o più adulti senza figli erano pari a ben il 45,5% del totale. Le famiglie composte da un solo genitore con figli, nel 1993, ammontavano in Europa al 10% del totale (Barnes, 1997). È difficile non riconoscere un legame tra questi mutamenti e il fatto che è saltato quello che è stato definito il "contratto di genere" fondato sulla divisione sessuale dei ruoli all'interno della famiglia o del mondo del lavoro (Gottfried, 1999; Pfau-Effinger, 1993).

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<sup>1</sup> cfr. anche paragrafo 4.1.

## 2. LA SEGREGAZIONE OCCUPAZIONALE DI GENERE

### 2.1. Segregazione orizzontale e segregazione verticale

L'accesso femminile al mercato del lavoro ha avuto però un carattere difforme, sia per quanto riguarda i vari paesi, sia per quel che concerne i settori di attività. Soprattutto, non si è verificato un proporzionale accesso delle donne alle posizioni manageriali, specialmente quelle di livello "top".

Per indicare questo fenomeno, si parla, ormai da diversi anni, di segregazione occupazionale di genere, distinguendo tra "segregazione orizzontale" e "segregazione verticale" (Hakim, 1996).

La **segregazione orizzontale** indica la tendenza alla separazione tra professioni, funzioni professionali o settori di attività maschili o femminili.

Con il termine **segregazione verticale** si fa riferimento invece allo scarso accesso delle donne alle posizioni dirigenziali nelle imprese (e più in generale nelle organizzazioni).

Questi due fenomeni, pur essendo concettualmente diversi, spesso sono compresenti e si rafforzano tra di loro.

Un modo per definire la segregazione verticale che sta diventando sempre più popolare è "**tetto di vetro**". L'espressione *glass ceiling* è stata usata per la prima volta nel 1986, quando due reporters del Wall Street Journal l'hanno coniata per descrivere la barriera invisibile che impedisce alle donne di accedere ai posti di maggiore responsabilità. Successivamente, essa è entrata nel gergo, sia del management, sia del mondo accademico.

Al livello internazionale, i dati dell'ILO mostrano chiaramente che nella maggior parte dei paesi le donne detengono una quota inferiore di posizioni manageriali rispetto agli uomini. In quasi la metà dei 41 paesi nei quali sono disponibili statistiche, le donne tipicamente detengono tra il 20 e il 30% degli incarichi legislativi, di alta dirigenza e ma-

nageriali. Le indagini sulle aziende spesso riportano cifre circa la percentuale di donne nel management che si attestano al di sotto del 10%. La maggiorparte dei dati disponibili rilevati da diverse survey mostrano che la percentuale di donne che occupano posizioni dirigenziali costituiscono l'1,3% in Australia (1999), il 4,7% in Francia (1997), il 3% in Germania (1995), il 3% in Brasile (1991) e il 3,6% nel Regno Unito (1998) (ILO, 2001).

Fin qui, le statistiche. Ma se consideriamo che l'ingresso massiccio delle donne nel mercato del lavoro rappresenta, al di là di tutto, un fenomeno sociale legato all'emergere della soggettività femminile, anche l'esistenza della segregazione verticale richiede una spiegazione sociologica.

## 2.2. Le dinamiche segreganti

Perché, nonostante la sempre maggiore qualificazione delle donne, non si fa pieno uso delle risorse umane femminili? Fornire una risposta a questa domanda richiede di gettare una luce sulle dinamiche segreganti che costringono le donne al di qua del "tetto di vetro". Queste dinamiche sono state messe in evidenza dalla ricerca nell'ambito delle scienze sociali e psicologiche grazie a tre passaggi.

Il primo passaggio, effettuato soprattutto dagli studi femministi sulle organizzazioni, è quello **da una visione *gender-neutral* (o *gender-blind*) delle organizzazioni a una piena consapevolezza dell'importanza delle dinamiche di genere**, e in particolare delle dinamiche di potere connesse con il genere, nella vita delle organizzazioni stesse.

Il secondo passaggio, anch'esso influenzato dagli studi di genere e dalla sociologia del welfare, è quello **dalla concezione del lavoro remunerato come ambito a sé stante a una piena consapevolezza dell'interazione tra lavoro retribuito all'interno delle organizzazioni e lavoro non retribuito** - domestico e di cura - che deve essere comunque svolto all'interno della società, tenendo conto anche dell'incapacità di risposta dei sistemi di welfare ai mutamenti in corso. La scoperta di tale interazione ha portato a un interesse crescente verso il modo in cui si mani-

festano negli individui, e in particolare nelle donne, le difficoltà di conciliazione del lavoro con la vita familiare.

Infine, il terzo passaggio deriva dall'incontro fra le teorie manageriali dell'economia della conoscenza e il filone, più applicativo, del *diversity management* e delle sue conseguenze per il *career development*. Esso ha portato da una teorizzazione della **carriere come percorso lineare** a una **formalizzazione più complessa dei percorsi di carriera**, che tiene conto del venir meno degli automatismi legati alla progressione per anzianità e della crescente richiesta di flessibilità, mobilità, disponibilità all'apprendimento e al cambiamento continuo.

Questi tre passaggi hanno dato luogo alla individuazione di altrettanti **tipi di ostacolo** all'accesso delle donne alle posizioni dirigenziali, che sono stati via via riscontrati in numerose ricerche.

La **prospettiva di genere applicata alle organizzazioni** suggerisce di ricercare l'origine della segregazione verticale guardando al modo in cui le organizzazioni - e i soggetti in esse operanti - producono e riproducono le identità di genere. All'interno delle organizzazioni sono presenti aspettative circa i ruoli degli uomini e delle donne, costruite nelle interazioni quotidiane, e queste aspettative influenzano anche le reazioni dell'ambiente nei confronti delle donne, a seconda dell'atteggiamento che queste ultime assumono. Tali reazioni hanno spesso un carattere implicitamente discriminatorio (Wahl, 2002). Ad esempio, una ricerca svolta su 588 donne in carriera in aree a dominanza maschile in tre regioni italiane ha messo in evidenza, tra le altre cose, l'alta diffusione di **comportamenti e atteggiamenti sessisti tra gli uomini**, tali da fare pensare all'esistenza, in nuce, di una forma di azione collettiva maschile contraria a consentire alle donne l'accesso a posizioni di potere. Ad esempio, il 56,2% delle intervistate ha segnalato battute di spirito sessiste durante incontri e riunioni, il 39,4% esibizioni di ostilità degli uomini nei confronti delle donne in posizioni decisionali, il 30,8% la tendenza a ignorare le donne durante incontri o riunioni, il 29,2% la tendenza a non consultare le donne che ne hanno titolarità durante incontri e riunioni, il 21,4% la tendenza a non presentare le donne a ospiti ed interlocutori. Si tratta di comportamenti particolarmente gravi e purtroppo ancora fortemente diffusi che testimoniano della perdurante incidenza in ambito lavorativo di una cultura ten-

dente a svalORIZZARE e a marginalizzare l'apporto professionale delle donne.

Un altro fenomeno rilevato in connessione con le dinamiche tra i generi nelle organizzazioni riguarda **l'esclusione delle donne dalle dinamiche di potere** e dall'accesso alle informazioni. In generale, la ricerca ha messo in luce **lo scarso riconoscimento da parte dei colleghi** quali una delle maggiori fonti di stress e frustrazione per le donne nelle aree a dominanza maschile. Infine, è stata riscontrata, sia nella ricerca in questione sia in altri studi, **un'opzione preferenziale per gli uomini**, ovvero la tendenza a privilegiare candidati di sesso maschile a parità di qualifica o competenze sia nelle selezioni che nelle promozioni (Cacace, d'Andrea 1999). Tra le ragioni di tali preferenze, alcuni studi hanno messo in evidenza la **differente concezione della leadership da parte di uomini e donne**, unite al fatto che a selezionare i manager sono spesso soltanto uomini (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1993).

#### **POSSIBILITÀ DI CARRIERA DELLE DONNE NELLE AREE A DOMINANZA MASCHILE**

##### **Fattori di ostacolo socio-culturali**

1. Esistenza di pregiudizi e stereotipi sessisti
2. Stereotipizzazione per genere degli incarichi
3. Diffidenza e prevenzione nei confronti della professionalità femminile
4. Tendenza a ignorare le donne nelle aree a forte dominanza maschile
5. Necessità di dimostrare continuamente le proprie capacità
6. Chiusura dell'ambiente maschile
7. Forte competitività degli uomini
8. Scarsa solidarietà tra colleghe
9. Ostilità verso le donne che esercitano ruoli professionali tipicamente maschili da parte delle altre donne
10. Ostilità verso le donne in posizioni dirigenziali
11. Esistenza di comportamenti maschili segreganti (gergo sessista, aperta espressione di sfiducia e ostilità verso le donne)
12. Esclusione dalle dinamiche di potere informali
13. Scarsi riconoscimento e valorizzazione delle competenze delle donne
14. Scarso riconoscimento delle cariche e dei ruoli ricoperti dalle donne
15. Scarso riconoscimento della qualità del lavoro svolto

16. Pregiudizi derivanti dall'aspetto fisico, in particolare per le giovani donne
17. Molestie sessuali (verbal e fisiche)
18. Scarsa credibilità delle donne presso gli utenti/clienti
19. Scarsa credibilità delle donne presso il personale subalterno
20. Prevalenza di un modello maschile di dirigente e di carriera
21. Paternalismo da parte dei dirigenti o dei colleghi più anziani
22. Disagio degli uomini in relazione alla presenza delle donne
23. Invidia e gelosia dei colleghi

Fonte: Cacace, d'Andrea 1999

La prospettiva dell'**approccio di genere al welfare**, anche se non si interessa specificamente del problema dell'accesso delle donne alle posizioni dirigenziali, ha il pregio di fornire elementi di conoscenza circa le dinamiche che pur incidendo sul livello micro o meso, proprio delle biografie individuali e delle organizzazioni, hanno un'origine nella dimensione macro delle trasformazioni dei sistemi di welfare e del mutamento del rapporto tra vita lavorativa e vita familiare; dinamiche che un approccio meramente psicologico-individuale o organizzativo rischia di trascurare.

Nonostante un certo senso comune veda le donne come poco affidabili proprio perché oberate da carichi familiari e esse stesse scarsamente inclini ad attribuire al lavoro la giusta attenzione, le difficoltà di conciliazione tra lavoro e famiglia non sono il principale fattore di ostacolo alla carriera femminile<sup>2</sup> (Quack, Hancké, 1997; Rosener, 1990; Cacace, d'Andrea, 1999). Purtroppo, esse rappresentano ancora un impedimento oggettivo all'accesso alla carriera per molte donne. Di fronte al problema della conciliazione, **persiste la tendenza di molte organizzazioni a impostare i propri modelli professionali sulla figura dell'uomo con disponibilità illimitata di tempo da dedicare al lavoro e con un supporto familiare tale da sollevarlo dalle incombenze dome-**

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<sup>2</sup> In un'indagine del 1996 condotta su 158 direttori di banca di sesso femminile nell'Unione Europea, le intervistati hanno indicato nella predominanza di valori maschili il più grande ostacolo all'assunzione e alla promozione delle donne in posizioni manageriali di alto livello (77,4%) e gli obblighi familiari come il secondo ostacolo (44,5%). Quack S., Hancké B., *Women in decision making in finance*, European Network "Women in Decision Making", 1997.

stiche e parentali. Soprattutto in alcuni paesi europei, appare **ancora limitata la presenza di servizi per l'infanzia all'interno o in prossimità del luoghi di lavoro** (Cacace, d'Andrea, 1999; Cancedda, 2001). Aumentano le richieste di lavoro in orari prolungati, in ore non sociali o nel week-end, mentre non sempre le aziende applicano altrettanta flessibilità per venire incontro delle esigenze dei propri addetti. Anche il problema della cura degli anziani comincia a essere più sentito, stante la tendenza all'invecchiamento della popolazione (European Commission, 1998).

**POSSIBILITÀ DI CARRIERA DELLE DONNE NELLE AREE  
A DOMINANZA MASCHILE**

**Fattori di ostacolo organizzativi relativi alla conciliazione  
tra vita privata e professionale**

1. Rigidità nell'organizzazione del lavoro
2. Inadeguatezza degli orari
3. Insufficiente capacità di gestire i trasferimenti di lavoro
4. Mancanza di servizi per la famiglia
5. Limitazioni poste dalle responsabilità familiari alla possibilità di partecipare ad attività formative o di aggiornamento
6. Scarso riconoscimento del lavoro part-time
7. Regressione della carriera in seguito alla maternità
8. Subordinazione della progressione di carriera a una grande disponibilità di tempo per il lavoro
9. Difficoltà a collaborare e a competere con gli uomini, che hanno più tempo a disposizione per il lavoro (problema degli orari)

Fonte: Cacace, d'Andrea 1999

Infine, la prospettiva degli studi sul *career development* nel contesto del *diversity management* mette in evidenza **l'arretratezza di molte organizzazioni nello sviluppo di sistemi volti a valorizzazione le conoscenze, le competenze e le specificità individuali**; questi sistemi richiedono, appunto, l'uso di strumenti quali il mentoring, i programmi individualizzati di carriera, il networking. Le donne patiscono maggiormente la carenza di tali strumenti, giacché questi dovrebbero compensare gli effetti negativi per la carriera derivanti dall'esclusione dalle

dinamiche politiche informali e dalle discriminazioni di genere nei processi di selezione e promozione del personale. È per questo motivo che le ricerche vedono, nell'assenza di forme esplicite ed individualizzate di sviluppo della carriera, un fattore segregante.

**POSSIBILITÀ DI CARRIERA DELLE DONNE NELLE  
AREE A DOMINANZA MASCHILE**

**Fattori organizzativi relativi alla carriera**

1. Difficoltà ad accedere alle conoscenze pratiche e ai "segreti del mestiere"
2. Difficoltà ad accedere alle informazioni in generale
3. Mancanza di forme di tutoring per facilitare l'inserimento lavorativo
4. Mancanza di figure femminili di riferimento all'interno del proprio ente
5. Discrezionalità delle procedure di valutazione, a danno delle donne (esistenza di un'opzione per gli uomini)
6. Mancanza di sistemi di programmazione individuale delle carriere
7. Esistenza di forme di discriminazione retributiva

Fonte: Cacace, d'Andrea 1999

### **3. LA "DIVERSITÀ" DELLA LEADERSHIP FEMMINILE**

#### **3.1. Il cambiamento del contesto**

Una delle dinamiche segreganti più spesso messe in evidenza, soprattutto dagli studi che adottano un approccio di genere, è rappresentata dall'**identificazione del management con quello maschile** e con qualità che la società tende ad attribuire agli uomini. Tale identificazione ha portato, per anni, a considerare **le donne manager sempre come eccezioni rispetto a una norma**, data appunto dal modello maschile. Anche i primi studi sulle donne nel management erano fortemente caratterizzati da questo limite, quando indicavano l'incapacità di affermarsi e farsi valere come un fattore che precludeva alle donne la carriera manageriale, ma non mettevano in discussione i modelli di ri-



ferimento e le condizioni in cui le donne si trovavano a operare (Wahl, 2002).

Negli ultimi due decenni, le rapide trasformazioni che hanno investito l'economia, le organizzazioni e il management hanno invece messo in luce una sempre maggiore problematicità degli stili di direzione tradizionali, basati sul comando-e-controllo. Si possono citare, a tale riguardo, il tema del **total quality management**, con la sua enfasi sulla riduzione delle gerarchie e sulla partecipazione e responsabilizzazione dei lavoratori, e più recentemente quello del **knowledge management**, anch'esso fondato sull'idea che la produzione di ricchezza passi per una valorizzazione e uno scambio delle conoscenze all'interno di reti di relazione, le cosiddette comunità di pratica, che solo parzialmente ricalcano le gerarchie formali delle aziende (Prusak, Lesser, 1999). È accaduto così che le caratteristiche che, secondo gli stereotipi, sono tipiche delle donne (come la tendenza a coinvolgersi emotivamente nei problemi, la concretezza, la capacità di ascolto, l'egualitarismo), e che fino a poco tempo fa venivano considerate poco adatte al management, hanno cominciato d'improvviso a essere considerate indispensabili per la trasformazione delle organizzazioni nella direzione auspicata dai nuovi modelli gestionali (Metcalf, 1994; Cancedda, d'Andrea, 1995). Ciò si è verificato, sia nelle grandi imprese, sia nelle imprese di piccole e medie dimensioni, caratterizzate da un forte grado di dinamismo e innovatività (Mastropietro, 2000; Rosener, 1995).

Tutto ciò ha portato a trasformare **la eventuale diversità femminile da fattore problematico a punto di forza**, in quanto potenzialmente in grado di innovare il modo in cui le organizzazioni vengono condotte, secondo le nuove esigenze dell'economia. È quindi venuto d'attualità quello che già diversi anni fa alcuni studiosi indicavano come il modello vincente, il cosiddetto **modello di leadership androgino**, fondato su un mix efficace di caratteristiche stereotipicamente maschili o femminili (Bem, 1975; Cook, 1985).

### 3.2. Genere e stile di leadership

A fronte della crescente popolarità dello "stile di leadership femminile" e di quello "androgino", alcune studiose hanno cominciato a

domandarsi quanto effettivamente uomini e donne differiscano nella leadership.

A questo proposito, gli studi hanno in primo luogo messo in evidenza la **pari efficacia della leadership femminile, nonostante le condizioni più difficili** in cui le donne spesso vengono a trovarsi (Eagly, Karaum Makhijani, 1995). In questo senso, è stata ridimensionata la diversità intesa come inadeguatezza o incompatibilità dell'essere donna con l'essere manager.

Tuttavia, gli studi in questione si sono spinti più in là, cercando di identificare eventuali elementi di **diversità positiva** nella leadership femminile, che possano essere considerati un punto di forza per le donne e una ricchezza per le organizzazioni. Alcuni di questi studi si sono concentrati sugli **stili di leadership**.

#### gli stili di leadership

Gli studi sul management, negli ultimi decenni, sono spesso ricorsi a coppie di opposti per indicare differenti stili di leadership.

Una distinzione classica, ma sempre attuale, è quella tra **orientamento al compito e orientamento alle relazioni** (*task orientation* vs. *relationship orientation*) (Stodgill, 1948; Stodgill, 1974). Con il primo viene indicata la tendenza a focalizzarsi sullo svolgimento del compito, e quindi sulla performance, sul raggiungimento degli obiettivi, sul rispetto degli standard e delle regole, ecc. Con il secondo orientamento, invece, si indica la tendenza a focalizzare l'attenzione sulle relazioni interpersonali, sulla creazione di un clima di fiducia reciproca e sull'armonia nelle interazioni di gruppo.

Un'altra distinzione nota è quella tra **leadership autocratica e leadership democratica** (Tannenbaum, Schmidt, 1958). Il manager che adotta lo stile autocratico ha un'autorità totale e istruisce i suoi sottoposti sulle cose che devono fare lasciando loro pochissima autonomia; l'altro estremo rappresenta uno stile in base al quale il leader delega responsabilità alle persone che dirige e le coinvolge nel decision-making.

Varie ricerche hanno esaminato la propensione di donne e uomini ad adottare lo stile *relationship-oriented* piuttosto che quello *task-*

*oriented*, o lo stile democratico piuttosto che quello autocratico. Pur con vari limiti metodologici, tali ricerche hanno confermato **l'attitudine delle donne a una leadership maggiormente attenta alle relazioni e soprattutto a uno stile più democratico** (Eagly, Johnson, 1990).

Infine, particolarmente rilevante è stata, proprio perché viene considerata all'origine di un nuovo paradigma della leadership, la più recente distinzione tra stile di **leadership trasformatzionale e stile transazionale**. Questa distinzione si basa sul tipo di meccanismi messi in atto dai leader per ottenere migliori prestazioni dai collaboratori e quindi una migliore performance dell'organizzazione. Nel caso dello stile transazionale, questi meccanismi sono costituiti appunto da **transazioni**, basate sull'attribuzione di ricompense. Il leader trasformatzionale, invece, va oltre lo scambio di ricompense e attiva una maggiore consapevolezza e un maggiore interesse, all'interno dell'organizzazione, per una **visione condivisa**. I leader trasformatzionali, inoltre, favoriscono nei loro collaboratori un aumento di fiducia in se stessi, facendoli passare progressivamente dalle preoccupazioni per le esigenze personali all'impegno per performance superiori e per la crescita dell'organizzazione, trascendendo in questo modo i propri interessi particolari (Burns, 1978). Per Bass, i due stili, trasformatzionale e transazionale, possono, anzi debbono essere utilizzati entrambi per un management efficace (Bass, 1997). Lo stile trasformatzionale, comunque, sarebbe maggiormente adatto in situazioni che richiedono profonde innovazioni nel modo di funzionare di un'organizzazione, situazioni sempre più frequenti nell'attuale economia caratterizzata da rapidi mutamenti.

Simile alla leadership trasformatzionale è la **leadership interattiva** (Rosener, 1990). La base di questo stile è rappresentata dal tentativo di incrementare negli altri l'autopercezione del loro valore e suscitare il loro entusiasmo. I leader, in questo senso, si sforzano di incoraggiare la partecipazione, condividere il potere e le informazioni, migliorare l'autostima degli altri, e in generale trasmettere energia.

Secondo alcune ricerche svolte soprattutto negli anni Novanta (in precedenza, gli studi sulle differenze tra donne e uomini avevano mostrato diversità per alcuni aspetti, ma non molto pronunciate), **lo stile trasformatzionale e interattivo sarebbe preferito dalle donne, mentre**

**quello transazionale sarebbe preferito dagli uomini** (Rosener, 1990; Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995; Sparrow, Rigg, 1993).

Poiché lo stile trasformatore viene considerato più efficace in contesti di rapido mutamento, e anche lo stile democratico è prezioso, soprattutto quando si tratta di mettere in atto riforme che richiedono un ampio consenso, ne potrebbe conseguire che **le donne hanno una maggiore attitudine a gestire situazioni di forte mutamento e innovazione.**

Le metodologie adottate, basandosi spesso sulle dichiarazioni delle donne e non sull'osservazione, non sempre hanno consentito di provare completamente l'effettiva adozione di comportamenti trasformatore da parte delle donne. Purtroppo, la ricerca ha quanto meno mostrato una tendenza delle donne a considerare lo stile trasformatore come più desiderabile, e quindi un loro orientamento positivo verso tale stile.

Tra l'altro, l'esistenza di differenti **rappresentazioni della leadership** ha già di per sé **implicazioni per le carriere femminili**: ad esempio, se uomini e donne hanno concezioni diverse circa le caratteristiche del buon leader, chi può garantire che le selezioni dei manager – operate, spesso, da uomini – non siano condizionate da tali concezioni? E che quindi gli uomini non tendano a reclutare soggetti con visioni della leadership omogenee alla propria, cioè altri uomini, valutando negativamente le donne in quanto portatrici di punti di vista diversi? (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1993).

#### contesto e ordine di genere

Se le donne sembrano, in linea generale, più propense a uno stile democratico e trasformatore nella leadership, la ricerca mette in evidenza che il modo in cui questa propensione si traduce in specifici comportamenti al livello delle singole organizzazioni dipende fortemente dal **contesto** (Klenke, 1996). In particolare, l'atteggiamento delle donne può cambiare fortemente a seconda che ci si trovi in un'organizzazione in cui esse rappresentano la maggioranza dei membri, e hanno già accesso a un potere significativo, o che ci si trovi in un'organizzazione in cui la forza lavoro è prevalentemente maschile, i dirigenti sono soprattutto maschi e le donne rappresentano un'eccezione.

**Numerosità** di ciascun sesso, struttura delle **opportunità** e **potere** sono i tre elementi che caratterizzano, per l'appunto, **l'ordine di genere** all'interno delle organizzazioni. Un ordine che rispecchia, in qualche modo, quello della società e che incide fortemente sull'interazione tra le donne leader e il loro ambiente (Kanter, 1977; Wahl, 2001).

Quando le donne sono una minoranza, esse tendono a essere più **visibili** in quanto donne piuttosto che individui, vengono giudicate in base al loro conformarsi o meno agli stereotipi e sono soggette a tentativi di **assimilazione** da parte della cultura maschile. Si trovano quindi in una situazione di maggiore difficoltà, alla quale possono reagire diversamente: possono essere fortemente spinte a conformarsi al modello maschile dominante, possono tentare di sfruttare in positivo la loro diversità, o possono cercare di cambiare il contesto, cioè l'ordine di genere nella loro organizzazione. Queste tre strategie vengono definite, rispettivamente, **strategia neutrale rispetto al genere (gender-neutral)**, **strategia positiva** e **strategia contestuale** (Wahl, 1998).

La conclusione implicita dell'approccio contestuale è che **una eventuale specificità femminile nella leadership ha maggiori possibilità di esprimersi veramente laddove le donne costituiscono una massa critica e sono dotate di un potere effettivo**, mentre rimane fortemente limitata dal contesto quando la loro posizione è minoritaria e precaria.

**impatto e consenso**

Infine, si può notare che negli ultimi tempi, si è registrata la tendenza a spostare l'interesse dalla ricerca di differenze nei tratti di personalità propri di uomini e donne e negli stili di leadership personali alla **ricerca di specificità nel tipo di impatto che l'azione svolta dalle donne leader ha sull'ambiente circostante** (Wahl, 2001); di qui un interesse, ad esempio, verso il consenso alla leadership da parte dei sottoposti. Secondo alcune ricerche impostate con il *360° multirater feedback*, uno strumento che tiene conto anche delle valutazioni dei collaboratori, oltre che di quelle dei superiori, tale consenso viene tributato in maniera superiore alle donne (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998).

Su un altro versante, quello dello studio della leadership politica, in tutto il mondo cresce l'interesse per il ruolo innovativo svolto da alcune figure femminili nei processi di mutamento sociale, economico,

culturale e istituzionale (Klenke, 1996). In questo senso, si propone anche di estendere il significato di “leadership trasformativa” dalla denominazione di uno stile adottabile a prescindere dal fine, alla indicazione di una leadership che ha come scopo la trasformazione politica, economica e sociale (Antrobus, 2000).

### **3.3. La socializzazione ai ruoli di genere come spiegazione della leadership femminile**

Parallelamente alla rilevazione empirica delle differenze tra donne e uomini negli stili di leadership, gli studi sull’argomento hanno tentato di fornire alcune prime **spiegazioni delle ragioni di queste difformità**.

Poco diffuse, anche se non completamente assenti, sono le spiegazioni di tipo “essenzialista” che riconducono la diversità femminile nella leadership alle differenze biologiche (determinate dalla funzione riproduttiva ma anche, ad esempio, da differenti caratteristiche del funzionamento del cervello) (Cook, Rothwell, 2000).

La maggior parte delle studiose, forti della distinzione tra “sesso” come dato biologico e “genere” come costruzione culturale, si orienta piuttosto verso l’assegnazione di una forte rilevanza alla **socializzazione al ruolo femminile**. Secondo Rosener, è nella infanzia che le donne apprenderebbero ad assumere atteggiamenti altruistici, cooperativi, di sostegno, ma anche a mostrarsi dipendenti, emotive e vulnerabili. Adesso che hanno acquisito posizioni di potere formale, le donne tenderebbero ancora a cercare di nascondere e condividere il potere che hanno e a mettersi al servizio degli altri, e in questo modo andrebbero incontro a una delle esigenze più forti della forza lavoro contemporanea: sentirsi importanti e sentire di essere sostenuti in relazione alla propria crescita personale (Rosener, 1995).

Per altre studiose, le donne, avendo interiorizzato la loro incompatibilità con la leadership, e a fronte di una persistente sfiducia nei confronti della propria capacità decisionale, tenderebbero a mettere in atto una **strategia per farsi accettare**, che comprende anche il maggiore ricorso alla consultazione, e uno stile complessivamente più “democratico” (Eagly e Johnson, 1990).

#### 4. LA LEADERSHIP FEMMINILE INNOVATIVA COME UNA FORMA DI AZIONE SOCIALE

##### 4.1. Azione sociale femminile e orientamento al ruolo di genere

Senza nulla togliere alla importanza della socializzazione, la prospettiva che qui si intende proporre mira ad ampliare il ventaglio dei fattori che possono spiegare l'esistenza di una diversità nella leadership femminile, introducendo una prospettiva sociologica e non meramente psicologica o psico-sociale. Per fare ciò, occorre ritornare a quanto affermato all'inizio del presente documento circa l'emergere della soggettività femminile nelle società contemporanee.

Una serie di fattori come l'aumento dell'istruzione, la rivoluzione tecnologica, la maggiore disponibilità di beni di consumo e di strumenti di comunicazione, l'allentarsi delle forme di controllo sociale, hanno contribuito a un complessivo **aumento della soggettività degli individui**, che li ha almeno parzialmente liberati dai sistemi di status e ruoli che caratterizzavano in modo molto più rigido le società fino a trentaquaranta anni fa. Come si è detto, i movimenti femminili degli anni Sessanta e Settanta sono stati una espressione di tale soggettività. Attraverso numerose forme di azione collettiva, le donne sono passate **dalla lotta per l'emancipazione** e per una piena integrazione nelle istituzioni e nel mondo del lavoro alla **affermazione della "differenza"**, di una specificità dell'identità e del punto di vista femminile, tale da rendere le donne portatrici di istanze di innovazione e trasformazione.

Ancora oggi che le forme di azione collettiva femminile non sono così visibili e diffuse come in passato, continua l'impegno per le pari opportunità, ma permane anche l'idea che le donne siano "diverse" e portatrici di una visione differente del modo in cui dovrebbero funzionare le organizzazioni e le istituzioni sociali. Si tratta di un'idea che comincia a essere fatta propria dalle organizzazioni (anche con il rischio di una sua adozione puramente retorica), ma alla cui affermazione le donne contribuiscono attivamente. Quanto poi questa idea si traduca in comportamenti e azioni dipende ovviamente dal contesto,

dalle opportunità e dalle circostanze; purtroppo il messaggio fondamentale sembra continuare a circolare – tramite i mass media, le reti informali e trasversali di donne, e altre forme di comunicazione e mobilitazione non sempre visibili ma efficaci. Lo si vede, ad esempio, dalle diverse concezioni del modo in cui dovrebbe essere esercitata la leadership che le donne sembrano condividere; ma, anche in ambiti diversi da quello oggetto del presente documento, dall’impegno che le donne in tutto il mondo sembrano approfondire per la costruzione di società pacificate (Cancedda, d’Andrea, 1999; Naraghi Anderlini, 2000).

In questo quadro, si propone di guardare alla leadership femminile come a un processo legato al dispiegarsi di una particolare forma di **azione sociale**. Per azione sociale si intende qui un “modello operativo introiettato”, cioè assunto dall’esterno e fatto proprio, attraverso un processo di interiorizzazione, da determinate categorie di soggetti, in virtù delle forme più disparate di socializzazione, comunicazione, esperienza di condizioni comuni, ecc. In particolare, parlando di azione sociale femminile, si fa riferimento all’ipotesi che **l’azione collettiva delle donne degli anni '60 e '70** sia oggi dispersa in mille rivoli ma, a dispetto della sua minore visibilità, **abbia comunque lasciato un insieme di tracce nei modi di pensare e - in parte - nei comportamenti quotidiani** di molte donne.

L’azione sociale può essere distinta dall’orientamento al ruolo di genere. Infatti, tale orientamento, così come si è tradizionalmente formato nel contesto della socializzazione delle donne all’interno delle istituzioni tradizionali, nell’ambito di una società fortemente sclerotizzata, è un fenomeno statico. L’azione sociale femminile, invece, può essere considerata come un costrutto più mobile, tipico di una società postmoderna caratterizzata da una fluidità e da una pluralità e dinamicità delle identità. In particolare, essa può essere considerata l’espressione di una percezione di una propria “diversità” rispetto alle istituzioni e allo status quo, una diversità che diventa un modello cognitivo e successivamente un insieme di comportamenti. Alcuni autori parlano, per indicare questa e altre forme di “diversità” cognitiva esperite da alcune categorie di soggetti, di **noodiversità**, evocando, attraverso l’analogia con la biodiversità, l’utilità per tutta la specie umana di una sua persistenza e il pericolo di una sua eliminazione (Quaranta, 1993).



Nel contesto dell'azione sociale, è possibile quindi che alcuni elementi del ruolo tradizionale femminile vengano riscoperti e valorizzati, accompagnati però da elementi di consapevolezza, autonomia, indipendenza e iniziativa che sono estranei al ruolo tradizionale femminile; di qui una possibile relazione tra l'affermarsi di uno "stile androgino" e azione sociale femminile.

Gli elementi essenziali della differenza tra l'azione sociale femminile e l'orientamento al ruolo di genere sono brevemente riassunti nello schema che segue.

<b>DIFFERENZA TRA AZIONE SOCIALE FEMMINILE E ORIENTAMENTO AL RUOLO DI GENERE</b>	
<i>Azione sociale</i>	<i>Orientamento al ruolo di genere</i>
predominio della soggettività	predominio dei sistemi e delle istituzioni
noodiversità	cultura di genere
postmodernità	tradizione e modernità
dinamicità	staticità
esposizione a molteplici fonti di informazione e socializzazione	socializzazione soprattutto attraverso la famiglia
scelta	passività, conformità alle aspettative
valorizzazione delle differenze	adeguamento a stereotipi
in aumento	in diminuzione

#### **4.2. Tre versanti dell'azione sociale femminile nell'economia**

Un'interessante pista di ricerca è rappresentata dal modo in cui questa "noodiversità" femminile si manifesta nel mondo dell'impresa. A tale proposito, sulla base delle intuizioni già presenti in diversi studi e

documenti sul ruolo delle donne nell'economia europea, si può rilevare l'esistenza di almeno tre forme di azione sociale femminile.

Innanzitutto, si potrebbe mettere in evidenza un'**azione funzionale al mantenimento della coesione interna** alle organizzazioni, in un contesto di dinamicità legato alla turbolenza dell'ambiente esterno. Ad essa potrebbero fare riferimento le capacità attribuite alle donne di creare relazioni, risolvere conflitti, aumentare la coesione e la partecipazione interna nelle organizzazioni, incrementare i flussi comunicativi. Gli studi su genere e leadership hanno finora teso a concentrarsi particolarmente, se non esclusivamente, su questo versante.

In secondo luogo, vi è un versante dell'azione sociale femminile nell'economia più rivolto all'esterno, legato al **mutamento del rapporto tra mondo dell'impresa e società, in base a valori o significati sociali**. Tale azione, in particolare, si esprime nell'interpretazione di nuovi trend sociali e di mercato legati alla crescente diversificazione degli stili di vita e alla domanda di qualità dei servizi e dei consumi, e nella traduzione di tali trend in strategie di politica aziendale (introduzione dell'etica, del rispetto dell'ambiente, della responsabilità sociale dell'impresa, della gestione della diversità, delle pari opportunità; incremento di rapporti con altri attori come i consumatori o gli attori delle politiche, ecc.) o anche in vere e proprie strategie di business (ad esempio, il business dell'automedicazione come interpretazione di una più diffusa domanda di controllo sulla propria salute). In fondo, tutta la filosofia del diversity management nata in ambito aziendale si basa sulla possibilità di valorizzare un'azione di questo tipo.

Infine, un terzo versante è rappresentato dall'**esercizio diretto della imprenditorialità** in nuovi o vecchi settori (ad esempio, servizi sociali, culturali, educativi, ma anche il turismo, la moda, l'agricoltura e l'alimentazione di qualità).

#### **4.3. La leadership femminile innovativa**

La leadership, normalmente, si definisce come un processo di influenza nell'ambito della relazione tra un leader e dei followers. Proponiamo, per intercettare i fenomeni di cui si è trattato sopra, un

concetto di leadership legato all'azione sociale femminile che chiameremo **leadership femminile innovativa**. Il concetto di leadership innovativa si ispira a quello di leadership trasformazionale, facendone un uso esteso che suggerisce una tendenza delle donne a mutare e innovare, non solo lo stile della leadership (che può essere peraltro fortemente dipendente da caratteristiche psicologiche individuali), ma anche il tipo di visione, cultura, valori a cui essa fa riferimento e il modo di orientare il rapporto tra impresa e mondo esterno.

La leadership femminile innovativa rappresenterebbe una forma potenziata di esercizio di uno o più dei tre tipi summenzionati di azione sociale, laddove tale azione è rafforzata dal consenso e dalla *compliance* di una *followership*, in una relazione formalizzata attraverso l'attribuzione di incarichi dirigenziali, oppure anche di carattere informale. Una volta ricontestualizzata nell'azione, la leadership femminile può essere vista come **non solo rivolta verso l'interno delle organizzazioni ma anche verso il loro esterno**, in una forma in cui il rapporto con la *followership* è indiretto o figurato.

Si potrebbe affermare che esistono almeno **tre forme o dimensioni in cui la leadership viene esercitata dalle donne**, corrispondenti alle tre forme di azione sociale menzionate nel paragrafo 4.2.; tali dimensioni, naturalmente, possono essere compresenti.

Esiste, innanzitutto, una dimensione della leadership **interna** alle organizzazioni, in cui la *followership* è rappresentata soprattutto dai membri dell'organizzazione stessa. In questo contesto, l'innovazione apportata dalle donne può riguardare, ad esempio, il tema della **qualità dal punto di vista dei processi interni**, quello dell'**incremento della comunicazione interna**, o quello della **risoluzione dei conflitti**. Ad esempio, nella già citata ricerca italiana si riferisce che nella maggioranza dei casi l'accesso di donne a posizioni apicali ha prodotto un incremento dei flussi comunicativi (Cacace e d'Andrea, 1999).

Ma la leadership femminile si esercita anche nella dimensione **esterna** alle organizzazioni; in questo caso la *followership* è rappresentata da altre imprese, organizzazioni della società civile, istituzioni e dalla cittadinanza in generale. In questo caso, l'innovazione può essere rintracciata, ad esempio, nelle varie forme in cui si sostanzia la cosid-

detta **corporate citizenship**, nell'interazione con la **società civile e con le istituzioni**, nell'attenzione alla **qualità per i consumatori**, o per altri versi in forme di **networking tra imprese**. Ad esempio, in uno studio dell'OCSE si mette in evidenza una attitudine delle donne imprenditrici a lavorare in **partnership** (OECD, 1997).

Infine, si potrebbe parlare di una leadership **imprenditoriale** (o di una dimensione imprenditoriale della leadership) in cui la *followership* è rappresentata soprattutto dai clienti o utenti sul mercato. In questo caso, si può fare riferimento alle capacità di **individuazione e sfruttamento di nuove nicchie di mercato** da parte di donne imprenditrici. Nel già citato documento dell'OCSE, si parla dell'esistenza di una specifica cultura imprenditoriale femminile caratterizzata da una forte sensibilità verso l'individuazione di nuovi bisogni sociali (OECD, 1997).

PARTE SECONDA

**Una proposta di interpretazione della  
leadership femminile**



## 5. LE DONNE COME ATTORE SOCIALE: IMPLICAZIONI PER LE POLITICHE DI SVILUPPO DELLE CARRIERE FEMMINILI

L'analisi della letteratura sul genere e la leadership e l'integrazione delle teorie, dei concetti e delle prospettive da essa fornite con l'approccio dell'azione sociale, insieme all'esame delle esperienze già condotte di sviluppo delle carriere femminili nei paesi europei, ha consentito di fornire alcune prime indicazioni riguardo a quelli che potrebbero essere considerati **elementi di buona pratica** negli interventi finalizzati alla rimozione del "tetto di vetro". Prima di riportare tali indicazioni, è opportuno tuttavia ricordare i principali strumenti che vengono utilizzati in questo ambito, così come emergono dalla ricerca documentaria.

### 5.1. Le politiche di *career development*: principali strumenti

Gli interventi di sviluppo delle carriere femminili rappresentano ancora, purtroppo, un'eccezione nel panorama delle aziende europee o, quanto meno, non esiste, circa le iniziative in questo campo, quel grado di consapevolezza e formalizzazione che si può riscontrare, ad esempio, tra le aziende statunitensi. In questo contesto, qualsiasi iniziativa in questo campo è degna di attenzione.

Come illustrato nel "Dossier della banca di informazioni", le politiche di sviluppo della carriera femminile individuate nella ricerca-azione possono essere raggruppate in sei categorie principali:

1. servizi di supporto (modelli di lavoro flessibili, sostegno alla famiglia)
2. mentoring e networking
3. programmi formativi (*assertivness training programs*, *awareness training*, formazione professionale)
4. sensibilizzazione e informazione (*career counseling*, *career guidance*);

5. interventi nell'ambito delle assunzioni, dei processi di selezione e delle promozioni;
6. revisione dei requisiti per l'accesso (*realistic job assessment*)

**modelli di lavoro flessibile e servizi  
di sostegno alla famiglia**

Nei programmi di *career development* è sempre presente una componente di servizi di sostegno alla famiglia, considerata una condizione necessaria, anche se non sufficiente, per consentire a una donna di avanzare nella carriera dedicandosi con intensità all'attività professionale. Tali servizi possono comprendere, ad esempio, asili nido, servizi di baby-sitting, sportelli di informazione e orientamento per i dipendenti circa i servizi offerti nel territorio.

In alcune imprese, inoltre, si prevede la possibilità di **scegliere tra vari modelli di impegno professionale**, in corrispondenza dei quali vengono offerte diverse forme di sostegno familiare.

**mentoring e networking**

Il **mentoring** viene considerato lo strumento principale del *career development*. La **Commissione Europea** definisce il mentoring nel modo seguente:

“...a process in which one person, the mentor, supports career and development of another person, the mentee, outside the normal superior-subordinate relationship. Mentoring is a **sheltered relationship** that allows learning and experimentation to take place, and personal potential and new skill flourish...”<sup>3</sup>

Il **mentoring** rappresenta, quindi, una forma di **facilitazione allo sviluppo della carriera professionale** completa e complessa, orientata a promuovere il superamento di tutti gli aspetti problematici e i fattori di ostacolo allo sviluppo della carriera: dalla capacità di **stabilire dei legami all'interno dell'impresa** con soggetti “che contano”, alla possibilità di **rendere visibile** il proprio operato e di sapersi presentare, alla **conoscenza dell'ambiente** e delle dinamiche che si possono sviluppare all'interno dell'impresa e che può essere utile controllare per non trovar-

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<sup>3</sup>European Commission & Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V., *Mentoring for Women in Europe*, European Commission, 1996.



si in difficoltà, al più tradizionale **apprendimento di tecniche e metodologie** messe a punto dall'impresa o comunque necessarie allo svolgimento delle attività lavorative.

Ugualmente, uno strumento utile è rappresentato dal **networking** tra donne, sia all'interno delle imprese, sia in forma trasversale (ad esempio, reti professionali o di donne imprenditrici).

#### **i programmi formativi nel *career development***

Una componente importante dei programmi di *career development* fa riferimento alle **iniziative formative**. Queste possono essere di due tipi:

- gli **assertiveness training programs**, orientati a promuovere un senso di **sicurezza e di fiducia in se stesse** da parte delle donne. Si parte dall'idea che l'ansia, la paura, il senso di inferiorità e di incapacità tendono ad essere atteggiamenti tipici delle donne nel mondo del lavoro e rappresentano un ostacolo allo sviluppo professionale e all'inserimento in incarichi di responsabilità;
- i programmi di **formazione professionale in senso stretto**, orientati a colmare il **gap di esperienze e di competenze** delle donne.

#### ***career counseling* e *career guidance***

Il ***career counseling*** e il ***career guidance*** sono strumenti che rispondono alla volontà di sensibilizzare e di diffondere su vari livelli, dalle scuole all'impresa, l'idea del cambiamento nella concezione della carriera professionale. La carriera interpretata, cioè, non come percorso predeterminato, ma come processo vario e variabile, in cui le scelte possono condizionare ma non compromettere definitivamente l'andamento della propria vita professionale.

Gli interventi di *career counseling* e *career guidance* possono essere di vario tipo: dai **programmi di sensibilizzazione nelle scuole** di tipo generalizzato e una tantum, ai **programmi realizzati all'interno delle imprese**, rivolti ai singoli dipendenti, con una forma di sostegno costante nel tempo. Tra i programmi delle imprese si segnalano in particolare gli **initial staffing decision**: si tratta di programmi di consulenza rivolti alle giovani impiegate nell'impresa e finalizzati a indirizzare

tali donne verso l'accettazione di occupazioni stimolanti e che prevedono una forte mobilità.

#### selezione, assunzioni e promozioni

Le politiche di assunzione sembrano avere una grande importanza per la riduzione delle disuguaglianze di genere all'interno delle aziende. Molte imprese hanno una vera e propria strategia di reclutamento per l'aumento del personale femminile qualificato, che comprende valutazioni e monitoraggi annuali, borse di studio, internship e programmi di mentoring rivolti a studentesse.

Le politiche di assunzione dirette ad aumentare la presenza delle donne in ambito manageriale possono essere di diverso tipo:

- programmi che stabiliscono quote riservate alle donne;
- seminari per il reclutamento, il cui scopo è quello di allargare l'offerta di assunzione per le donne in posizioni di vertice;
- predisposizione di strumenti integrativi e correttivi per la selezione del personale.

Altri strumenti riguardano la definizione di metodi interni e proattivi di **job posting** o di **careers on line**. A volte, infatti, per aumentare il numero di donne qualificate reclutate per le posizioni dirigenziali, è sufficiente pubblicizzare attraverso procedure trasparenti gli incarichi disponibili.

#### *realistic job assessment*

Una ulteriore pratica di promozione dello sviluppo di carriere femminili riguarda il **realistic job assessment**. Si tratta di interventi che tendono a rivedere i requisiti per l'accesso a determinate occupazioni di alto livello, soprattutto quando tali requisiti non sono indispensabili ma ostacolano fortemente la carriera delle donne. Si fa riferimento, ad esempio, agli anni di esperienza nell'insegnamento, al numero di incarichi di prestigio, al numero delle pubblicazioni, ecc., necessari per ottenere la cattedra di professore universitario. Tali requisiti fanno chiaramente riferimento a una concezione della carriera di tipo lineare-tradizionale, diversa da quella che può avere avuto, ad esempio, una donna che ha interrotto l'attività di studio o professionale per motivi familiari, per poi riprenderla in seguito.

## **5.2. Fattori di rischio e fattori di facilitazione nei programmi di sviluppo delle carriere femminili: linee-guida e raccomandazioni**

Dopo avere presentato i principali strumenti del *career development*, sulla base di quanto riportato nei paragrafi precedenti circa i risultati degli studi e delle ricerche, è possibile formulare alcune prime linee-guida e raccomandazioni circa i fattori che potrebbero rendere tali programmi più efficaci e su quelli che, al contrario, mettono a rischio il loro esito, e devono dunque essere evitati.

I principali fattori di **rischio** individuati sono i seguenti:

- l' accettazione acritica del modello maschile di leadership;
- la tendenza a limitare gli ambiti di esercizio della leadership femminile;
- la tendenza a considerare le donne come un soggetto debole.

I fattori di **facilitazione** invece sono:

- puntare al cambiamento delle organizzazioni e non al cambiamento delle donne;
- rinforzare i circuiti comunicativi dell'azione sociale femminile;
- coinvolgere i collaboratori nella valutazione dei manager;
- riconoscere e valorizzare le conoscenze e le competenze individuali;
- adattare il *career development* a diversi contesti.

### **a. FATTORI DI RISCHIO**

- **Accettazione acritica del modello maschile di leadership**

Il primo rischio è quello di legittimare il modello maschile di leadership, dando implicitamente per problematica o deviante, rispetto alla norma, l'identità femminile.

Un rischio del genere si presenta, ad esempio, in quegli interventi di *assertiveness training* che partono dal presupposto che le donne, in virtù di alcune loro caratteristiche (insufficiente aggressività, eccesso di emotività, ecc.) siano inadeguate all'esercizio della

leadership, e richiedano pertanto gli interventi compensativi volti a fare acquisire loro le capacità necessarie a conformarsi al modello del manager distaccato, oggettivo e sicuro di sé.

Ci potrebbe essere un rischio di questo tipo anche in quegli interventi di formazione alla leadership diretti sia a uomini che donne, i quali assumono implicitamente modelli di tipo maschile, come ad esempio alcuni programmi di crescita personale che stimolano le capacità di iniziativa individuale e il *team building* attraverso la simulazione di situazioni estreme e pericolose.

Le raccomandazioni che ne derivano sono pertanto:

- fare attenzione alle implicazioni di genere dei modelli di ruolo e delle esperienze presentate nei programmi e nei corsi di formazione alla leadership
- fare attenzione, nella comunicazione relativa ai programmi e ai corsi di formazione, a non diffondere involontariamente il messaggio che le donne hanno bisogno di un “di più” per accedere ai posti manageriali

- **Limitare gli ambiti di esercizio della leadership femminile**

Un secondo fattore di rischio è rappresentato dalla tendenza a limitare, di fatto, gli ambiti in cui può esercitarsi la leadership da parte delle donne, orientando le carriere femminili esclusivamente verso quei settori che appaiono, secondo gli stereotipi, a loro più congeniali, come le pubbliche relazioni o la gestione delle risorse umane. È il caso dei programmi che, pur partendo da un riconoscimento delle specificità e della diversità della leadership femminile, la associano troppo automaticamente a determinate aree di attività, precludendo quindi la possibilità di valorizzare le donne in ambiti meno “ovvi” e favorendo un rafforzamento degli stereotipi. In questi casi, le donne vengono viste come risorse umane utili, ma non sempre investite di potere effettivo. Più in generale, può essere

fuorviante, e rappresentare quindi uno spreco anche dal punto di vista delle aziende, considerare le donne come capaci solo nella dimensione interna della leadership e non anche in quella esterna o quella imprenditoriale.

Le raccomandazioni che ne derivano sono le seguenti:

- fare precedere la progettazione di interventi formativi da un'accurata analisi dell'ordine di genere all'interno dell'organizzazione (numero di donne e uomini, posizioni ricoperte, opportunità presenti, ecc.);
- promuovere la presenza di un maggiore numero di donne leader in quei dipartimenti o settori in cui esse sono più scarsamente rappresentate, oppure dove, pur essendo numerose, non possiedono un potere o un'autorità effettivi;
- offrire alle donne leader una adeguata visibilità esterna e un adeguato potere di rappresentanza e negoziazione con altri soggetti;
- scoraggiare e prevenire, attraverso appropriati interventi di sensibilizzazione, i comportamenti volti a delegittimare informalmente le donne dotate di autorità formale.

- **Considerare le donne come un soggetto debole**

Le politiche *family friendly*, volte a favorire la conciliazione tra vita lavorativa e vita familiare, assumono una grande importanza anche ai fini dello sviluppo delle carriere femminili. Servizi di *childcare* o *eldercare* di qualità, con orari flessibili, in modo da adeguarsi alle esigenze di un lavoro di responsabilità, sono certamente uno strumento molto rilevante per l'ascesa professionale femminile. Per contro, alcune delle politiche dette *family friendly* che puntano in modo definitivo e drastico a una riduzione degli orari e dei ca-

ricchi di lavoro possono, alla lunga, rinforzare una concezione secondo la quale le donne non sono in grado di assumere gli stessi livelli di impegno e di responsabilità degli uomini. Questo avviene soprattutto quando tali provvedimenti costituiscono eccezioni pensate specificamente per le donne e non comportano un mutamento complessivo nel funzionamento dell'organizzazione. Dietro a queste iniziative si potrebbe nascondere una sottovalutazione della capacità delle donne in quanto tali di assumere forti carichi di lavoro e una sopravvalutazione del peso del fattore "conciliazione lavoro-famiglia" rispetto ad altri fattori che impediscono l'accesso delle donne alle posizioni dirigenziali.

Le raccomandazioni che ne derivano sono le seguenti:

- proporre alle donne modelli alternativi di impegno professionale, ma garantendo anche una piena reversibilità delle scelte fatte (ad esempio, tornare a un impegno full-time dopo avere sperimentato periodi di *part-time*, *flexi-time*, *job sharing* o simili);
- offrire alle donne l'opportunità di rimanere in contatto con il luogo di lavoro durante eventuali assenze prolungate dovute a impegni familiari o di altro tipo;
- promuovere la creazione di servizi di sostegno alla famiglia che si attestino su standard di flessibilità e qualità corrispondenti alle esigenze poste da un impegno professionale di alto livello.

b. FATTORI DI FACILITAZIONE

- **Puntare al cambiamento delle organizzazioni e non al cambiamento delle donne**

Per valorizzare al massimo l'apporto innovativo delle donne, risultano più adeguati programmi che non si propongono semplicemente di inserirle in maggiore numero nelle posizioni manageriali,

ma che puntano contestualmente al mutamento delle organizzazioni. Se esiste, infatti, un legame privilegiato tra leadership femminile e qualità o tra leadership femminile e valorizzazione della conoscenza, appare allora particolarmente opportuno che i programmi di *career development* vengano associati a un'adozione di tali approcci da parte delle aziende.

Più in generale, risultano appropriati quei programmi di *awareness raising* che insegnano alle donne ad applicare una strategia contestuale, cioè una strategia che punta a modificare l'ambiente adattandolo a se stesse e non semplicemente ad adattarsi all'ambiente, e al tempo stesso sensibilizzano e informano anche gli uomini, e soprattutto il top management, sulla gestione della diversità come fattore di ricchezza per le aziende.

Le raccomandazioni che ne derivano sono le seguenti:

- fare precedere gli interventi di *career development* da un'adeguata sensibilizzazione del top management e possibilmente coinvolgere quest'ultimo negli interventi stessi;
- stabilire sinergie tra progetti di *career development* e altri progetti innovativi in corso nell'azienda (ad esempio, programmi di *total quality management* e di *knowledge management*);
- includere, nelle iniziative formative rivolte alle donne, elementi relativi all'analisi critica del funzionamento dell'organizzazione, sia in generale, sia dal punto di vista delle dinamiche di genere.

- **Rinforzare i circuiti comunicativi dell'azione sociale femminile**

Secondo la prospettiva dell'azione sociale, la specificità della leadership femminile è legata all'esistenza di un modello operativo che si trasmette tra le donne attraverso una molteplicità di ca-

nali di comunicazione, ivi comprese le relazioni di tipo informale tra donne.

Nell'ambito del mentoring, appare quindi particolarmente opportuna l'adozione di programmi in cui la *mentor* e la *mentee* sono entrambe di sesso femminile. Ciò sia per evitare il riprodursi di una situazione di subordinazione e soggezione delle donne rispetto ai colleghi maschi (pericolo che esiste quando il mentor è un collega anziano), sia per favorire una trasmissione di modelli di ruolo positivi femminili. Particolarmente adatte risultano, quindi, anche le forme di mentoring informale, come quelle che si vengono a creare nell'ambito del networking femminile.

Le raccomandazioni che ne derivano sono le seguenti:

- identificare e attivare potenziali mentor di sesso femminile;
- favorire la nascita di circoli, club o reti di donne all'interno dell'organizzazione;
- facilitare la partecipazione delle donne alle reti professionali esistenti nel loro campo (ad esempio, agevolando la partecipazione a congressi e convegni, corsi di formazione, ecc.).

- **Coinvolgere i collaboratori nella valutazione dei manager**

Secondo alcune ricerche, le donne manager ricevono valutazioni maggiormente positive se a valutarle non sono solo i loro superiori, ma anche i loro collaboratori. È chiaro, allora, che introdurre nuove metodologie di valutazione che tengono conto anche dei sottoposti, come ad esempio il 360° *multirater feedback*, è un fattore di rafforzamento della leadership femminile. I programmi di selezione, reclutamento e promozione che tengono conto di questo aspetto potrebbero essere quindi particolarmente adeguati.



Le raccomandazioni che ne derivano sono le seguenti:

- introdurre i metodi “a 360°” nella prassi di valutazione dei manager;
- creare occasioni pubbliche in cui il consenso riscosso dalle donne leader tra i propri collaboratori – e tra i propri supervisori – venga adeguatamente rappresentato.

- **Riconoscere e valorizzare le conoscenze e le competenze individuali**

Spesso le donne manager che sono una minoranza all'interno di organizzazioni a dominanza maschile soffrono, da una parte, di un eccesso di visibilità in quanto donne e, dall'altra, di una invisibilità in quanto individui. A fronte di ciò appaiono particolarmente appropriati quei programmi che mettono in atto, anche non necessariamente solo per le donne, forme di *career counseling* e *career guidance* personalizzati. Risulta inoltre utile anche l'adozione di criteri di selezione e valutazione del personale basati su un genuino e obiettivo riconoscimento delle competenze individuali. Le donne, infatti, tendono ad emergere tanto più facilmente quanto più si adottano criteri obiettivi - e non distorti da pregiudizi di genere. In questo senso, i programmi volti alla revisione dei requisiti per l'accesso alle posizioni di responsabilità, così come gli interventi nel campo del reclutamento, della selezione e della promozione del personale, possono essere particolarmente indicati.

Le indicazioni che ne derivano sono pertanto le seguenti:

- utilizzare sistemi trasparenti nella pubblicizzazione delle offerte di posti dirigenziali;
- rivedere accuratamente il linguaggio degli avvisi di selezione, onde assicurarsi che non siano presenti elementi discriminatori;

- organizzare programmi di internato e seminari di reclutamento presso le università o altri luoghi dove sono presenti donne qualificate;
- sperimentare sistemi formali di pianificazione della carriera;
- offrire a uomini e donne la possibilità di ricevere valutazioni e feedback sul proprio lavoro, con anche indicazioni per la prosecuzione della carriera;
- pianificare in anticipo le sostituzioni dei manager, attivando opportuni programmi di formazione (succession planning);
- attivare programmi di affiancamento e di passaggio volti a favorire la mobilità delle donne tra varie posizioni lavorative.

- **Adattare il career development a diversi contesti**

Le buone prassi che vengono usualmente presentate nei repertori spesso derivano dall'esperienza di grandi aziende. Esse comportano, in genere, investimenti che – anche se non molto rilevanti e pienamente giustificati dai guadagni ottenibili – non sempre sono alla portata delle piccole e medie imprese. Eppure, alcune recenti ricerche hanno messo in evidenza un inaspettato interesse dei piccoli e medi imprenditori per la valorizzazione delle risorse umane femminili (Mastropietro, 2000).

Le indicazioni che ne derivano sono le seguenti:

- riconoscere e diffondere le buone prassi di sostegno alla carriera femminile che vengono attuate, anche in modo informale, nelle piccole e medie imprese;

- mettere a punto programmi di *career development* che prevedano anche il ricorso a risorse e strutture esterne alle imprese o il consorzio tra imprese, e che adeguino la concezione della carriera alla realtà delle piccole e medie imprese.

Un altro elemento di contesto da tenere in conto è rappresentato dal carattere *male-dominated* o *female-dominated* del settore di attività che, come si è visto, può influire fortemente, sia sulla situazione delle donne manager, sia sugli atteggiamenti di queste ultime.

Le raccomandazioni che ne derivano sono le seguenti:

- identificare le problematiche di genere specifiche del settore professionale ed economico nel quale l'intervento viene svolto, e impostare quest'ultimo in modo da considerare queste problematiche;
- sensibilizzare le donne presenti in aree *male-dominated* affinché adottino una strategia contestuale, ovvero un atteggiamento consapevole delle dinamiche di genere e di potere, piuttosto che una strategia neutrale rispetto a tali problematiche o una strategia che semplicemente esalta la femminilità come una risorsa.



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**ALLEGATO**  
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**Leadership & Gender:  
A Masculine Past; A Feminine Future?**

Thematic Paper for ASDO Project

By

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## Introduction

Leadership research, like most, if not all, of the research in management, has been gendered. It has reflected the study of men, by men, and the findings have been extrapolated to humanity in general. Even today, the popular texts on management and leadership, blatantly disregard this fact. On the unusual occasion of reference being made to gender, it is typically limited to a brief section on 'women in management', in which women are treated as a peripheral variable in any discussion.

It can easily be argued, that any investigation into women's lack of access to power in organisations, must take into account an understanding of the nature of the history of research into leadership, since the study of leadership, represents the study of individuals who are particularly effective in influencing others in the achievement of organisational objectives. It is this body of research that informs organisational assessment processes, such as selection, promotion, and performance management activities. Thus, the basis for entry into higher, and more influential, echelons in organisations, is largely informed by what emerges from these studies as the 'received wisdom' of leadership.

## The History of Leadership Research

Psychologists, along with other social scientists, have long-held a fascination for studying what makes some people particularly effective in influencing the behaviour of other individuals, or groups, "to make things happen which would not otherwise occur or prevent things from happening that ordinarily would take place" (Rosenbach & Taylor, 1993, p.1). Such researchers have looked at leadership from a variety of perspectives, which include: - who leaders are - namely, the identification of personal attributes which differentiate those perceived as leaders, or perceived as displaying leadership, from those who are not/followers; also what leaders do, and how they do it. More recently, research has focused attention on the relationship between leaders and followers, with some writers stressing the need to study *followership*, not only because all leaders are also followers, but also because modern notions of leadership place considerable emphasis on the power and importance of followers as the *constituents* of leadership, and thus, in ultimately enabling those in leadership positions to have greatest effect (e.g. Lee, 1993; Hollander, 1993).

Although methodologies and models have changed during these phases of leadership research, one factor has held constant. This is, the virtual absence of women in such studies. Is it surprising, therefore, that women are still largely excluded from power and influence in organisations, when there is little evidence of their being perceived as legitimate sources of study in the all-important arena of leadership research?

Despite this depressing fact, there is, good news. There are signs that Times are changing with respect to what modern society is expecting from those in leadership roles. Literature is accumulating which is challenging the old models, which are essentially 'heroic' and masculine in nature. Recent research is identifying a new form of leadership - which is far more feminine in nature - as the

model of leadership that best suits modern organisations. It is also the model that women are more likely to display.

In this thematic paper, I would like to briefly summarise the history of leadership research, then describe the influence of gender on such research, and finally, look at the findings which have emerged from the first-ever gender-inclusive study of leadership, and the implications of these findings for women and organisations.

#### *The Great Man theories*

Most commentators regard the research efforts of the 1930s to 1950s as delineating the beginning of the formal study of leadership. This era is often referred to as the 'Great Man' or Trait approach, when there was a general assumption that what differentiates leaders from non-leaders, or followers, was their personality. That is, it was due to the possession of certain characteristics such as intelligence, energy, dominance, which are largely in born, and thus are enduring. This suggests, therefore, that they predicted effectiveness in a variety of situations. However, two important reviews of the literature by Stodgill (1948), and Mann (1959) were widely interpreted as concluding that there were no consistent findings in relation to personality characteristics that differentiated leaders from non-leaders.

#### *The Behavioural theories*

In the 1950s, the attention of psychologists investigating leadership, switched from focusing on the personal characteristics of leaders, to the behaviour of individuals who influenced followers. Of the number of research studies in this area, the most famous were those undertaken by the researchers at the Ohio State University where Stodgill worked. The main approach was to administer questionnaires to the subordinates/direct reports of individuals in supervisory positions, in which the subordinates were asked to respond to a battery of statements about their supervisor's/manager's behaviour. The questionnaires typically measured leadership style by a combination of scores on two separate

dimensions. These dimensions have been described in various ways, but can be summarised as a 'concern for the task', and a 'concern for the people' undertaking the task.

Subsequent studies at the Ohio State University (eg Fleishman, 1953; Halpin & Wiver, 1957; Fleishman & Harris, 1962) led these researchers to produce a model of leadership style as being based on a combination of the two dimensions, which they referred to as 'consideration' and 'initiating structure', and which importantly, they maintained as being independent of each other. The consideration behaviours of a 'leader' - ie Supervisor/Manager, someone who occupies a leadership role - were found to correlate positively with employee satisfaction, but negatively with the productivity of the manager's group (Stodgill, 1974, cited in Wight, op.cit.).

#### *The Situational models*

The major omission of this research was the lack of consideration given to situational variables that affect the appropriateness of a particular style. This realisation led to the development of a variety of new models of leadership, which dominated the 1960s & 1970s and which came to be known as 'Situational' or 'Contingency' theories of leadership. Examples of these theories include the classic model developed by Fiedler known as Fiedler's Contingency Model (Fiedler, 1967), House's path-goal theory of leadership (House, 1971), and Vroom & Yetton's normative model of leadership behaviours which linked various options in leadership style to clear situational criteria (Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

The late 1970s and early 1980s marked a watershed in the history of leadership (Hunt, 1999) since the situational and contingency models, whilst providing guidelines for dealing with complexity, and greater efficiency, offered little advice as to how to approach leadership in an environment of continuous and significant change. Mintzberg (1982), in particular, produced a scathing critique of the irrelevance of leadership research to practising managers.

### *The Emergence of the 'New paradigm' models*

It was in this climate that the 'new leadership' paradigm emerged (Bryman, 1992), which encompassed 'visionary' (Sashkin, 1988), 'charismatic' (House, 1977; Conger, 1989; Conger & Kanungo, 1988), or 'transformational' models (Bass, 1985; Tichy & Devanna, 1986; see Bryman 1992 for a review). Situational models of leadership which preceded the emergence of the new leadership, are referred to as models of 'traditional' (Hunt, 1999), or 'transactional' (Bass, 1998) leadership, or 'management' (Kotter, 1990). They provide valuable information as to how to plan, organise, create order and structure, at times of relative stability, but are not sufficient in leading organisations through times of rapid change. The term 'transactional' is adopted because the leader's/manager's influence is as a result of exchanging rewards, and praise, or sanctions, in return for desired performance.

US psychologist and leadership scholar, Bernard Bass (1985) built on Burns' notions of leadership and corrected a fundamental error in Burns' theory, namely, Burns' assertion that transformational and transactional leadership are at opposite ends of a single continuum of leadership. On the basis of his later research (Bass & Avolio, 1990a, b), Bass found the two approaches to be independent and complementary. Bass asserts that transactional leadership entails an exchange between leader and follower in which the leader rewards the follower for specific behaviours, and for performance that meets with the leader's wishes, and criticises, sanctions or punishes non-conformity or lack of achievement. Rewards may be tangible, such as financial 'perks' and incentives, or non-tangible, such as prestige. Such exchanges cater to the self-interest of followers (Bass, 1998a). Zaleznik (1993) refers to transactional leaders as managers, and states that they "concentrate on compromise, intrigue, and control. They focus on the process not the substance of the issues. They are often seen as inflexible, detached and manipulative" (p. 13).

Bass also argued that research comparing the effects of transactional and transformational leadership has shown that "generally transformational leadership

is more effective and satisfying than transactional leadership alone although every leader does some of each. Context and contingencies are of some importance as a source of variance, but the fundamental phenomena transcend organizations and countries" (Bass, 1998a, p. 1).

Bass developed his model of transformational leadership based on data from interviews with 70 South African executives, in which he asked them if they had known transformational leaders, as described by Burns. From these data, he and his colleague Bruce Avolio developed an instrument which measures the full range of leadership modes, *The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)* (Bass & Avolio, 1990a,b). This is referred to as the most commonly used leadership instrument across the world (e.g. Carless, 1998).

It measures the following dimensions of leadership::

- *Idealised influence*: transformational leaders behave in ways that result in them being admired, respected and trusted, such that their followers wish to emulate them. They are extraordinarily capable, persistent, and determined;
- *Inspirational motivation*: transformational leaders behave such that they motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning, optimism and enthusiasm for a vision of a future state.
- *Intellectual stimulation*: transformational leaders encourage followers to question assumptions, reframe problems, and approach old solutions in new ways, and to be creative and innovative. At times, their followers' ideas may differ from those of the leader, who may solicit or encourage such responses;
- *Individualised consideration*: transformational leaders actively develop the potential of their followers by creating new opportunities for development, coaching, mentoring, and paying attention to each follower's needs and desires. They know their staff well, as a result of listening, communicating, and "walking around" encouraging, rather than monitoring their efforts.

The two transactional components comprise:



- *Contingent Reward*, whereby approved follower actions are rewarded; disapproved actions are punished or sanctioned;
- *Management by Exception (active) and Management by Exception (passive)*, which are corrective transactional dimensions. The former involves a monitoring of performance, and intervention when judged appropriate; the latter reflects correction only when problems emerge;
- *'Laissez-faire'*: a style of leadership that is, in fact, an abrogation of leadership, since there is an absence of any transaction. This style is deemed to be most ineffective (e.g., Bass, 1998b, p. 7).

Over 20 years of research has been undertaken by psychologists adopting, most commonly, the MLQ (Carless, 1998) to compare the effectiveness of transformational and transactional leadership styles, which has provided evidence that the transformational style is generally more effective and satisfying than the transactional alone (Bass, 1997;1998b), and that followers' commitment is greater. These studies have ranged from studies of the leadership style of secondary school teachers ( Koh, 1990), white collar workers (Pitman, 1993), and supervisors of insurance company employees (Nichoff, Eng & Groven, 1990), to military personnel (e.g. see Bass 1998b). Other studies have shown a negative relationship between a leader's transformational leadership style and staff stress levels (Bass, 1998b).

Whilst there are numerous studies which provide evidence of the superiority of the transformational approach over the transactional, Bass (1998b) has emphasised that both are crucial for managerial and organisational effectiveness.

## The History of Leadership from the Perspective of Gender

Several years ago, I had the fortune to attend a presentation at an *Academy of Management* presentation, at which two presenters, Sarah Williams Jacobson, and

Roy Jacques (1990), presented their model of the gendered history of research into management and leadership. They described their 2-dimensional model, as reflecting, on one axis, the gender of the 'Knower' – that is the researcher – as either male or female. This person is assumed to be 'objective', transparent, and neutral; a perspective that is dangerous in its naivety, since it denies the influence of socialisation on the attitudes and approach/behaviour of the researcher. The other axis represents the 'Known', or the subject of research – again, either female or male. The Known is not synonymous with the individuals who were included in the original studies, but the populations/groups whom they are assumed to represent.

Figure 1 shows in diagrammatic form, the model developed by Jacobson & Jacques. There are four areas constructed by the division of the two axes by gender.

*Research pre-1970s: Male Knower, Male Known*

The top left area, represents research prior to the early 1970s, and is marked by the domination of research by male researchers, of male subjects. The issue of the gender of researcher as a potential source of bias, was unchallenged, and the fact that studies were based almost solely on studies of men, was of minimal, if any, interest.

*Research post-early 1970s: Male Knower, Male & Female Knowns*

This was followed by the era of 'equality'. As a result of equal opportunities legislation in the US and other countries in the early 1970s, women were seen to enter male-dominated occupations, such as management, and gender differences in leadership styles began to be investigated. Few, if any differences were found (e.g. Powell, 1993), and when found, they were relatively minor, but they suggested that women were likely to be more participative and democratic in decision-making (e.g. Eagly, 1991; Jago & Vroom, 1982), and more team-orientated (e.g. Ferrario, 1990). However, feminist writers, such as Carol Gilligan (1982) noted

that the differences were drawn as a result of women being compared to the male norm, as opposed to a real study of differences in which each gender is viewed in its own right. She also noted that when differences were found, such as women being rated as more democratic than the men, this difference was perceived as a 'pathology' that could be rectified by appropriate 'socialisation', i.e., women were sent on courses to develop their assertiveness.

It was only in the 1990s that major significant differences with respect to gender and leadership style, began to emerge. Adopting the MLQ, US professor Judy Rosener (1990) published the findings from a survey of female and male executives' descriptions of their leadership approach, which revealed significant differences with respect to the use of transformational behaviours, with women scoring higher on the use of transformational behaviours (apart from Intellectual Stimulation, which showed no significant differences). A possible reason for the lack of gender differences in previous research, may have been due to the fact that leadership instruments designed prior to the MLQ had only measured transactional aspects of leadership (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1994; Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Rosener's research attracted a great deal of interest, and criticism (*Harvard Business Review*, 1991, letters section). The main criticism was that the conclusions drawn from the data were of dubious validity, since the data collected were based solely on self-report of leadership style. This is, of course, a legitimate criticism. Nonetheless, it is important to consider what the differences did reveal. Were they representations of the managers' *espoused* notions of leadership? If so, then they provide important evidence of gender differences in notions of what is perceived as desirable leadership characteristics of how one *should* lead.

It is interesting to note that two independent UK studies which investigated the constructs of leadership held by senior female and male senior managers in two

major public sector organisations (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995; Sparrow & Rigg, 1993), obtained data which supported Rosener's findings, with women in general identifying transformational components, and men in general, identifying transactional ones.

Alimo-Metcalfe (1994) has suggested that these findings may represent evidence of gender differences in 'Implicit Leadership Theories' (Lord et al. 1984); that is, that women and men, in general, construe leadership differently, however, the author is not aware of any research that has investigated this specific proposition.

Whether this is the case, or not, the findings have very important implications for the practices associated with the assessment and development of management and leadership in organisations. Alimo-Metcalfe (1993,1994) has argued that there is potential gender bias in every stage of the assessment process, including the identification of the criteria of leadership; the selection and design of the assessment process; and the judgements of assessors, and cites evidence to support her arguments.

If we should rightly question the use of self-report as a basis for determining the presence or absence of leadership, then we need to ask, 'whose perceptions of the leadership effectiveness/style of the manager should we solicit'? The answer must surely be, the perceptions of those who are the recipients of the leadership process; in other words, the direct reports/subordinates of the manager in question. Do gender differences emerge from studies that have compared the ratings by subordinates of their line managers' leadership style?

#### *Gender & Leadership style: Perceptions of staff*

There are several studies that have looked at gender and leadership style, as rated anonymously by co-workers of managers as part of a 360-degree feedback process. Such studies have consistently revealed that women are rated as significantly more transformational in general, than men (e.g. Bass & Avolio, 1994;

Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996; Druskat, 1994). With respect to how female and male managers were rated by their subordinates on a specific leadership instrument, Bass and colleagues used the *MLQ* (Bass, Avolio and Atwater, op. cit.), which measures transformational, transactional, Management by Exception, and laissez-faire leadership styles, in 3 separate samples. They concluded, that the three studies "represent the first substantial empirical investigations of sex differences in leadership style including laissez-faire, transactional and transformational leadership measures" (p.24), and that the findings revealed that "women leaders were rated by *both* their female and male direct reports as displaying certain key aspects of transformational leadership (i.e., charisma, individualised consideration) more frequently than men" (p.5), and that "... female leaders were generally rated higher (by followers both randomly selected and those chosen by the leader) on leadership factors that have been shown to predict individual, group, and organisational performance" (p.26).

These findings provide validation for Rosener's conclusions cited earlier.

#### *How valid are subordinates' views of leadership?*

Whilst it is a conceptual imperative to judge leadership – if it is defined as a social influence process (e.g. Bass, 1985, 1998; Parry, 1998; Yukl, 1994) - by its effect on subordinates, we must also establish whether subordinates' views can accurately predict the positive effects of leadership on future outcomes.

One such study, which sought to investigate the predictive validity of subordinates' ratings of their manager's effectiveness, was undertaken by US psychologists McEvoy and Beatty (1989). It has long been established that assessment centres provide the most valid data for predicting future managerial effectiveness (e.g., Cook, 1996). McEvoy and Beatty compared the predictive validity of data collected as a result of a group of managers attending an assessment centre in 1977, with data collected from the managers' subordinates' anonymous ratings of them in an employee climate survey questionnaire. The outcome criterion against which these two sources of data were compared, were

future ratings of the managers' effectiveness, by their line manager and subordinates, two, four, and seven years later. They found that the anonymous ratings by subordinates in 1977, were more valid predictors of future effectiveness than assessment centre data, two and four years later. This led them to summarise their findings in the following way:

“In this study, subordinate ratings were considerably better intermediate term predictors of ratings (of managerial effectiveness) than the OARs (overall assessment ratings from assessment centres). “This predictive validity places subordinate ratings in the upper echelons of managerial performance....along with assessment centers” (p.50 ).

Although the acceptability of using subordinates' ratings of managerial effectiveness is less than wholehearted, in most organisations, the importance that researchers in the field of assessment are placing on their validity, is undoubtedly increasing. In a recent paper by US psychologists Hogan & Hogan (2001), they go so far as to state “We believe subordinates' ratings are the best single way to evaluate a manager's performance” (p.40).

Another measure for predicting leadership effectiveness, has been the degree of similarity between managers' self-ratings, and the average (anonymous) ratings of their subordinates. Whilst research on 360-degree feedback data consistently reveal a tendency for managers, in general, to rate themselves as more effective than do their co-workers (i.e., boss, peers, and subordinates), (eg. Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Bass & Yammarino, 1991; Church, 1995; Church & Waclawski, 1994, 1995; Furnham & Stringfield, 1994, 1998) (a caveat to this will be added later), research has consistently found that the closer the correlation between self versus subordinates' ratings, the more transformational they are perceived to be (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Bass & Yammarino, 1991). Also, higher performers in the field of management and leadership are less likely to inflate their self-ratings than

are low performers (eg Bass & Yammarino, 1991; Hater & Bass, 1988; Church, 1997; Atwater & Yammarino, 1992).

### *Gender, Leadership, and 360°/Multi-Rater Feedback*

As noted above, most research findings state that managers tend to rate themselves higher in competence than do their work-place colleagues. But most studies have not included managers' gender as a variable, perhaps, or because there were few females in the samples studied. However, of those studies which have included gender of manager as a variable, some have found that more women than men rate themselves lower than their colleagues rate them (e.g. Beyer, 1990, 1992; Wohlers and London, op cit.), and lower than their boss rated them (Wohlers and London, op.cit.). Studies have also found that there is higher agreement between female managers' self-ratings and subordinates' ratings of them than was the case for male managers (Wohlers and London, op. cit.). In the former study, the self-other agreement for female target managers was particularly close on items pertaining to interpersonal managerial relationships, such as communication and empowerment.

In a US study of 645 men and 270 women (Perrault and Irwin, 1996), female managers were rated significantly higher by work-place colleagues than were male managers, on 28 of the 31 competencies assessed, which reflected six out of the seven competency clusters, viz, problem solving, planning, controlling, managing relationships, leading, and communicating.

Church, (1998, op. cit.), investigating moderating variables of co-workers rating managers, found that:

"the trend was for women managers to receive slightly higher or better ratings overall ... more specifically, women managers were more consistently rated significantly by their direct reports as being more adept at the communicative and facilitative aspects of managerial behaviour (e.g., providing clarity, communicating openly, ensuring participation) as well as

some of the more leadership or charismatic related aspects (e.g., standing up for principles, inspiring others, taking appropriate actions regarding poor performance) compared with male managers. Peers, on the other hand, rated women managers as being more encouraging of new ideas and focused on the development needs of their direct reports, compared with male managers .... Clearly, among the present organisation, women managers were seen as being more communicative, effective and inspiring compared with their male counterparts" (p.4).

Thus, taking these various studies of leadership assessment, there would appear to be substantial evidence that women are rated as more effective in leadership, in general, than are men.

### **A New Approach to Investigating the Nature of Leadership**

The fourth category of Jacobson & Jacques' model, is the knowledge which might emerge if a female 'Knower' were to study female 'knowns'. They refer to this category as the 'dreaming' category, and ask "What new kinds of questions may be posed?; what new methodologies may be adopted?; what new data may emerge?"

We believe that we dared to explore this new category of research when we attempted to address some of the concerns we had with the gender bias of the approaches typically adopted in current leadership research. Specifically, we had the following concerns:

- (1) the new paradigm researchers, like all their predecessors, had shown no concern for the fact that men in leadership positions were the major focus, to the virtual exclusion of women;
- (2) the new paradigm models stress the importance of subordinates being the natural constituents of the leadership process, yet subordinates' notions of what is leadership did not appear to be given a prominent voice;



rather, the emphasis has been on the views of managers in senior positions, in large US organisations. An exception to this approach, may be regarded as Bass's development of his transformational model. However, he gathered examples of leadership from asking "70 senior South African executives" to describe their experiences of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1998), and from these data developed a questionnaire which was piloted on junior officers rating their superior". Whilst junior staff were involved in one element of the process, they were using the criteria of leadership behaviours elicited from senior executives. It is worth noting that all 70 senior South African executives were male, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, 69 were white (Bass personal communication).

Our investigation was to involve the elicitation of constructs of leadership, that were held by staff at various organisational levels (middle to top).

We were mindful of the literature on social distance and leadership. The relationship between leadership and social distance is important in the light of evidence from a study by Shamir (1995). In his study he found that different characteristics are ascribed to 'distant' as opposed to 'close'/'nearby' leaders, with the former being described as possessing a more ideological orientation and a strong sense of mission, which they expressed with rhetoric, courageously, and with little concern for personal criticism or sanction. In contrast, 'nearby' or 'close' leaders were seen as, 'sociable, open and considerate of others, having a sense of humour, having a high level of expertise in their field, being dynamic and active', and as 'having an impressive physical appearance, being intelligent or wise'; they were also seen as 'setting high performance standards for themselves and their followers, and being original or unconventional in their behaviour'. It should be noted, however, that Shamir's subjects were Israeli university students, as opposed to adults working in organisations, with the majority of the 'distant' leaders being

political figures, spiritual or religious leaders, and military personnel. Most of the 'close' leaders were teachers and lecturers, military persons encountered during compulsory military service, and peers, classmates and friends. They were, therefore, somewhat atypical of those individuals typically involved in organisational studies of leadership. Nevertheless, social distance is likely to be a significant variable in perceptions of leadership. Our investigation was to focus on constructs of nearby leadership.

- (3) survey methods, or case studies have been most commonly adopted. The former ignores the importance of initially soliciting *constructs of leadership*, but rather gathers data based on a standardised instrument; and the latter is typically based on observing single individuals who occupy formal senior management positions. These individuals may, or may not, display leadership behaviours and characteristics, but may have achieved their position as a result of politics, and/or luck (Hogan & Hogan, 2001). Our investigation was to focus on identifying the distinguishing characteristics of individuals who work close proximity to their staff, and who are perceived as having leadership qualities, as defined by their direct effect on their staff's motivation, satisfaction, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and effectiveness in their work role.
- (4) we were concerned with the major preoccupation of the new paradigm writers, with the prominence – if not centrality – of the notion of 'charisma', in the dominant US models of leadership (see 1999 issue, Volume 10, no.4, of *The Leadership Quarterly* for relevant discussions). It relates strongly to the two major dimension of Bass's (1985) model, and is central to those of Conger and Kanungo (1987), and House (1977). Originally based on Weber's (1947) writings on charisma, these theorists have modified some of the Weberian ideas to 'domesticate' them (Bass,

1999), by applying some of the characteristics to the organisational leadership context.

We were uncomfortable with the general masculine 'heroic' tenor of the charismatic models, which as Australian writer Peter Gronn (1995) notes, resurrects the 'Great Man' theories of the 1930s and 1940s, and which are "long since discredited and virtually defunct" (p. 14). Most importantly, we were intending to explore - for the first time - the views of women, as well as men, as to the nature of leadership, adopting a Grounded Theory approach, which Parry (1998) describes as "a research method in which theory emerges from, and is grounded in, the data". Parry also argues for complementarity, rather than competition between qualitative and quantitative methods. Such a combination of methods was adopted in the present study.

Our investigation would start with no preconceived idea as to the nature of the phenomenon we were investigating, other than it being identified by its positive impact on individuals' motivation, sense of self-efficacy, confidence, and effectiveness in their jobs. The second stage of the research would employ the distribution of a questionnaire, which reflected the leadership characteristics, and which would gather data from individuals who worked in a large random stratified sample of organisations.

- (5) we also wished to make the investigation as inclusive as possible, with respect to race and ethnicity. There is a paucity of research on leadership in relation to race and ethnicity, although a major study is currently being conducted globally which is comparing the relative importance of certain management and leadership competencies and qualities, referred to as The Globe Project (e.g., Den Hartog et al., 1999; House et al., 1999). However, this project is collecting data on 'implicit leadership theories', that is, "...beliefs held about how leaders behave in general and what is expected of them (Eden & Leviathan, 1975)" (Den Hartog et al., p.226),

in relation to ‘charismatic/transformational’ leadership. Whilst individuals’ implicit leadership theories will undoubtedly influence their judgements of effectiveness, this is not the same focus on leadership as would be obtained by an approach which asks individuals to consider similarities and differences in the behaviours of individuals with whom they currently work, or have worked. In other words, it does not investigate ‘nearby’ leadership, and in fact the Globe Project researchers themselves remark: “A possible limitation of the study stems from the fact that middle managers (who comprised the sample), when rating characteristics for effective leadership in their organisation, are more likely to think of the upper echelon leaders” (p. 242). In other words, they are likely to be reflecting on ‘distant’ leaders. As noted in point (2) above, Shamir identified very different characteristics associated with ‘distant’ as compared with ‘nearby’ leaders. As stated before, these are more likely to emphasise the ‘charismatic’, or ‘heroic’ aspects of leadership.

Another feature of the GLOBE project is that whilst cross-culturally inclusive, there was no specific intention for it to be gender-inclusive.

- (6) we were concerned that the new paradigm models reflected data collected, in the main, from individuals working in US commercial and military organisations. We had no reason to assume that such data would have high construct and content validity to non-US organisations. Furthermore, we were intending to conduct the first of our two research projects in the UK public sector. Unfortunately, there is little research on the impact of organisational context on the new paradigm models (Yukl, 1999).

## PRESENT INVESTIGATION: A Gender-inclusive study of Leadership

### (1) *The Public sector study*<sup>1</sup>

Thus, this research study was intended to conduct the first gender-inclusive approach to investigating the nature of ‘nearby’ leadership, adopting a combined qualitative and quantitative approach. Specifically: (1) to investigate the constructs of ‘nearby’/‘close’ leadership held by women and men at different levels (middle, senior, top) in two major parts of the UK public sector (local government and National Health Service), in relation to managers or colleagues with whom they currently work, or have worked, whom they regard as possessing leadership qualities, i.e., had a particularly powerful effect on their motivation, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and/or performance; (2) to inspect the constructs that emerge and to content analyse the constructs in terms of consistent themes or groupings; (3) to use the emergent groupings of constructs as the basis of a pilot questionnaire to be distributed to a range of middle to top managers within a national random, stratified sample of organisations in two major UK public sector organisations (local government & NHS); (4) to analyse the factorial structure of responses to the pilot questionnaire, in order to devise a questionnaire that measures transformational leadership.

*Data Collection: Repertory Grid interviewing technique to elicit constructs of leadership:*

A total of 92 female and male managers were interviewed. Table 1 shows the distribution by sector, gender, and level. For all interviews, a form of Repertory Grid technique (Alban-Metcalf, 1997; Kelly, 1955) was used. Under conditions that ensured anonymity, the ‘elements’ comprised: (a) individuals, with whom they had worked or currently work, whom they regard as possessing leadership qualities, i.e., had a particularly powerful effect on their motivation, self-

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<sup>1</sup> A fuller description of the methodology of this study is published in various articles. See ‘References’ section of this paper.

confidence, self-efficacy, or performance, (b) individuals who did not possess such qualities, and (c) individuals who were 'in between', plus themselves. (For a fuller description of the methodology used, please see Alimo-Metcalfe (1998), Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, (2000c).

#### *The Development of The Pilot Leadership Questionnaire*

Content analysis of the 2000+ constructs which emerged from the Repertory Grid interviews, conducted independently by the two authors, led to the emergence of 48 'themes', which formed the basis of items for a 'pilot leadership instrument'. In order to reflect 'futures thinking', this item bank was augmented by a small number of items based on a review of the leadership literature. No significant differences were detected between the range of constructs from NHS and LG managers.

Since it would have been impossible to generalise from the views of around 150 individuals, to the wider public sector population, a 171 item Pilot Leadership Questionnaire was distributed, initially to a sample of 100 managers, who were asked to comment on the clarity and relevance of the questions, and then to two samples of managers, one in the NHS, the other in local government. Participants were asked to rate, either their current manager, or a previous manager with whom they had worked in the NHS or LG, on a 6-point scale from, 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'; two additional responses were available: 'Don't know' and 'Not relevant'.

For local government, a random sample from a national stratified data bank of LG organisations was selected, and a pack of questionnaires was sent to a previously identified, named individual, who arranged for the instrument to be randomly distributed amongst men and women, at middle to top levels in the organisation. Guidance was provided on the numbers at each level to which they should be distributed, to reflect organisational staffing structures, and a request was made to

try to ensure that at least 15% of the questionnaires were distributed to individuals from ethnic minority groups.

In the NHS, around 300 organisations were selected at random from the range of Trusts (hospitals and health authorities) in the *NHS Year Book*. Packs of 45 to 60 questionnaires, depending on size of organisation, were distributed to Trusts. Similar instructions were provided on distribution and completion of the instrument.

By mid-1999, after a second wave of requests to both organisations, a total of 1464 usable responses were received from local government, and a further 2013 from the NHS.

The results were analysed separately for the two public sector organisations.

Among the NHS managers, six factors emerged in the research model, and a further 8 factors emerged in a second additional analysis of the data. These were turned into 14 robust leadership scales, with high internal reliability coefficients, each of which measures a different aspect of leadership. These dimensions form the basis of a 360-degree feedback instrument, *The Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLO)*©( *Public sector version*). The LG model comprised 12 scales, which closely resembled those obtained in the NHS, but which also reflected the specific political context of local government. The dimensions that emerged are described in Figure 2.

## ***(2) The Private sector study***

In 2001 a similar study was conducted in the private sector.

Constructs of 'nearby' leadership were elicited from 24 male and 23 female managers, white and ethnic minority, at different levels (Vice President, top,

senior, middle managers) in three *Financial Times Stock Exchange* (FTSE 100) companies (telecommunications & e-commerce, pharmaceuticals, leisure & tourism).

Interestingly, there was far more similarity than differences among the public and private sector notions of leadership. There were only two major differences. First, public sector managers produced significantly more constructs relating to 'integrity'.

The second difference was perhaps more surprising. It was in connection with constructs relating to a concern for the needs of customers, and other stakeholders –both internal and external to the organisation. The public sector managers provided a much wider, and more complex, range of behaviours. This is worth noting, given the almost constant admonishing of public services in the UK to follow the example of private sector managerial practice.

A Pilot Questionnaire was developed, comprising 173 items (of which 10 represented dependent variables) and placed on the web-site of a major international test publisher, Saville & Holdsworth (SHL), and companies were invited to participate by asking managers at different levels to rate their current, or previous boss, anonymously. An opportunity sample comprising 139 female and 168 male managers in UK-based organisations completed the Pilot Questionnaire.

Exploratory factor analyses were conducted on the data to ascertain the possible structure of the scales, and a cluster analysis of each scale was conducted. Whilst it is recognised that the sample size was relatively small at this early stage of the research, it was noted that the scales which emerged were of high reliability. The dimensions and alpha coefficients for the scales are described in Figure 3.

As can be seen from the two Figures that describe the dimensions of 'nearby' leadership which emerged in the public and private sector samples, they are highly similar in nature and complexity.



It should be borne in mind that these represent what a sample of private and public sector managers across the UK believe to be the *leadership qualities of individuals at any level of the organisation. They do not describe the attributes of any one person.*

### ***The Findings from the first-ever gender-inclusive model of ‘nearby’ leadership.***

What emerged from the separate analyses of the public and private sector versions of the *TLQ*, is virtually identical. However, the model of leadership which emerged, while consistent across both UK organisational sectors, was found to be, in some respects, very different from existing dominant US models, based largely on male samples.

The UK model was more complex. Fourteen dimensions were identified in the *TLQ*-public sector, twelve dimensions in the *TLQ*-private sector version. The difference in number of dimensions does not reflect any conspicuous differences in the two UK models. In both cases the leadership dimensions fall into three clusters: *Leading Others*, *Personal Qualities*, and *Leading the Organisation* (see Figures 1 & 2).

There is another, more important distinction, between the UK and US models, which relates to the relative emphasis of the different components of leadership reflected in the respective models. US models typically identify the two most important leadership characteristics as vision and charisma, with concern for individuals receiving less attention. In the UK models, the overwhelmingly most important dimension, for both public and private sector managers, was what we have described as ‘Concern for others’ well-being and development’, with vision and charisma coming much lower on the list.

Another flavour of the difference between the US and UK models is the emphasis of the latter on working in close collaboration with others, rather than distancing

oneself from staff and from other stakeholders. There is also an element of humility, and even vulnerability emerging in the UK model of leadership, which is almost entirely absent in US models.

Thus, while US models tend to emphasise the leader *as primarily acting as the role model for his/her followers*, the managers who participated in our study, were clearly stating that the most important prerequisite for a leader is *what s/he can do for their staff*. This is far more reminiscent of the model of 'leader as servant'.

But they are not simply stating that leadership is about meeting staff's needs; it is much more than that. The 4,000 individuals who participated in this research project are also saying that leadership is fundamentally about engaging others as partners in developing and achieving the shared vision and enabling staff to lead. It also about creating a fertile, supportive environment for creative thinking, for challenging assumptions about how a service or business should be delivered. And it is about much closer sensitivity to the needs of a range of internal and external stakeholders, inside and outside the organisation. It is about connectedness. It is also essentially more 'feminine' than existing dominant models of leadership.

Are the differences emerging in our study due to the difference in research methodology? US studies have often focused on the observations and views of top managers, and/or on those researchers who develop models from their observations of CEOs. In contrast, our results emerged from asking the recipients and ultimate arbitrators of leadership effectiveness, namely the staff who work at different levels in organisations, how they perceive leadership.

Or could it be that differences emerging in the UK model of leadership are due to a difference in culture; or to the gender of managers involved; or to the level of managers, or any of these combinations? Does it matter? Given the indisputable link between the quality of leadership in an organisation, and its sustained success, 'getting leadership right', and taking it seriously, has to be one of the most important challenges for any organisation, whatever business it's in.

The most important issue for organisations is to adopt the model of leadership which is most valid for its purpose. There is an increased sense of discomfort with the 'heroic' models. Not only do they resemble the 'Great Man' theories of yesteryear. More seriously, individuals are citing the potential danger of promoting such qualities as unquestionably desirable in organisations, since these are the very characteristics found in some of the most dangerous characters in society.

### **The Implications of the findings for organisations**

The findings from this study have important implications for organisational practices, such as selection, promotion, performance review, and development activities. However, even if these organisational practices were reviewed to reflect the dimensions of leadership identified in this study, perhaps the most formidable barrier to effective leadership might still remain. This is the behaviours and attitudes of the existing senior managers. A recent study in which the author was involved (Alimo-Metcalfe, Ford, Harding & Lawler, 2000) investigated the reasons why, despite substantial investments in leadership development initiatives, organisations in both the public and private sector appear to achieve little sustained benefit. The overriding problem that we identified, was the negative attitudes and commitment of senior managers. This is hardly surprising, given that it is unlikely that they were promoted or selected on the basis of displaying the behaviours identified in this study.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Previous research investigating the nature of leadership has disenfranchised a vast proportion of the population, including women, and individuals representing

minority ethnic groups in their organisations. By focusing almost exclusively on white males in the top echelons of organisations, leadership researchers have legitimised and reinforced those in the most powerful positions. How can this ever support the enfranchisement of the vast population of those at lower levels? And how can this be good for realising the massive potential that resides in society?

The current obsession of judging organisations' success by their *economic capital*, is being challenged by those who realise the crucial importance of *social capital*, that is, those resources inherent within the network of alliances and relationships within a workforce which contribute to identity, morale, motivation, commitment, and ultimately, performance (e.g. Haslam, 2001). We need to start thinking of people as human *beings*, not simple human *doings*. This means we need new models of management and leadership.

Our investigation has enabled new voices to be heard. We believe that our research provides the first real evidence that a more feminine model of leadership is desired at all levels of organisation, not only because it values the contributions of women, but because it values the contributions of a truly diverse population.

Following the catastrophe of September 11<sup>th</sup>, our global- consciousness has been sharpened, and 'the dark side of charisma' has been brought into clear relief. Is it not time to replace the 'old heroic' model, with this *new* 'new paradigm' model, and by so doing, re-humanise the world of work?

Table 1: Public sector study: Composition of sample from whom constructs of leadership elicited, by sector, sex and level in their organisation

	Local Government		National Health Service		TOTAL	
Level:	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Chief Executive	6	5	1	3	7	8
Director	2	8	11	8	13	16
Assistant Director	5	6	8	9	13	15
Middle Manager	9	2	6	3	15	5
Sub-total	22	21	26	23	48	44
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>		<b>49</b>		<b>92</b>	

**Fig. 2: Dimensions of Leadership identified by  
*The Transformational Leadership Questionnaire*©  
(Public sector version)**

### ***Leading & Developing Others (1)***

#### **Genuine concern for others' well-being & their development**

Genuine interest in staff as individuals; values their contributions; develops them  
(13 items;  $\alpha = .95$ )

#### **Empowers, delegates, develops potential**

Trusts staff to take decisions/initiatives on important matters; delegates effectively; develops staffs' potential.  
(6 items;  $\alpha = .86$ )

#### **Accessible, approachable, in- touch**

Approachable and not status-conscious; accessible and keeps in-touch.  
(5 items;  $\alpha = .84$ )

#### **Encourages questioning, and critical and strategic thinking**

Encourages questioning traditional approaches to the job; encourages new approaches/solutions to problems; encourages strategic thinking.  
(8 items;  $\alpha = .88$ )

### ***Personal Qualities (2)***

#### **Transparency: Honesty, & consistency**

Honest and consistent in behaviour; more concerned with the good of the organisation than personal ambition.  
(4 items;  $\alpha = .93$ )

#### **Integrity & openness to ideas and advice**

Open to criticism and disagreement; regards values as integral to the organisation.  
(9 items;  $\alpha = .89$ )

### **Decisive, risk-taking**

Decisive when required; prepared to take difficult decisions, and risks when appropriate.

(5 items;  $\alpha = .83$ )

### **Charismatic; in-touch**

Charismatic; exceptional communicator; inspires others to join them.

(5 items;  $\alpha = .84$ )

### **Analytical & creative thinker**

Capacity to deal with a wide range of complex issues; creative in problem-solving.

(5 items;  $\alpha = .85$ )

## ***Leading the Organisation (3)***

### **Inspirational communicator, networker & achiever**

Inspiring communicator of the vision of the organisation/service to a wide network of internal and external stakeholders; gains their confidence and support. of various groups through sensitivity to needs, and by achieving organisational goals.

(12 items;  $\alpha = .92$ )

### **Clarifies individual and team direction, priorities, & purpose**

Clarifies objectives and boundaries; team-orientated to problem-solving and decision-making, and to identifying values.

(9 items;  $\alpha = .90$ )

### **Unites through a joint vision**

Has a clear vision, in which s/he engages various internal and external stakeholders in developing; draws others together in achieving the vision.

(7 items;  $\alpha = .90$ )

### **Creates a supportive learning and self-development environment**

Supportive when mistakes are made; encourages critical feedback of him/herself and the service provided.

(9 items;  $\alpha = .90$ )

**Manages change sensitively & skilfully**

Sensitivity to the impact of change on different parts of the organisation; maintains a balance between change and stability.

(6 items;  $\alpha = .85$ )

**Scales assessed by**  
***The Transformational Leadership Questionnaire*©- 360**  
***instrument***  
**(Private sector version)**

***Leading & Developing Others (1)***

**Concern for others**

Shows an interest in staff as individuals, and in their development; values their contributions. Is sensitive to cultural differences, and is aware of the impact of their behaviour on others.

( 9 items;  $\alpha = .91$ )

**Enabling**

Actively supports the development of staff's potential, by coaching, and delegating in an empowering way.

( 9 items;  $\alpha = .94$ )

**Accessible**

Approachable & accessible; likes to keep in-touch with staff, and seeks feedback

( 7 items;  $\alpha = .88$ )

**Focuses effort**

Gives clear direction, and ensures clarity of roles and goals

( 7 items;  $\alpha = .89$ )



## *Personal Qualities (2)*

### **Intellectual versatility**

Capacity to deal with a wide range of complex issues; creative in problem-solving  
( 9 items;  $\alpha = .91$ )

### **Entrepreneurial**

Encourages an entrepreneurial and customer-focused approach to work  
( 8 items;  $\alpha = .89$ )

### **Integrity**

Behaves consistently with integrity; treats individuals with respect; creates a culture of transparency  
( 9 items;  $\alpha = .92$ )

### **Charismatic**

Inspires others to join them, by their passion and determination; shows resilience to setbacks; self-confident  
( 9 items;  $\alpha = .91$ )

## *Leading the Organisation (3)*

### **Builds the Vision**

Has a clear vision of where the organisation is going; is effective in gaining the support of a wide range of internal and external stakeholders to achieving organisational goals.  
(9 items;  $\alpha = .89$ )

### **Networking**

Is effective in networking inside and outside the organisation, to the benefit of the organisation  
(6 items;  $\alpha = .87$ )



### **Promoting Change**

Creates a culture which encourages the challenging of traditional ways of doing things, and which promotes innovative problem-solving; views dissent and feedback as valuable.

(9 items;  $\alpha = .91$ )

### **Managing change**

Sensitivity to the impact of change on individuals and the organisation; maintains a balance between the need for change and some stability.

(9 items;  $\alpha = .91$ )

**Fig. 1 The History of Research on Leadership & Management, by Gender**

***KNOWER***

Male	Female
<p><i>Pre-1970s</i></p> <p>Lack of interest in gender</p>	<p><i>Early 1980s</i></p> <p>Feminist writers challenge widely-accepted constructs, such as ‘power’, ‘career’, etc.</p> <p>Stress on valuing ‘diversity’</p>
<p><i>Post early 1970s</i></p> <p>Age of ‘equality’, but Women compared to existing masculine norm</p>	<p><i>Post 1990s</i></p> <p>The ‘dreaming’ category</p>

Source: Jacobson, S. W. & Jacques, R. (1990) Of knowers, knowing and the known: A gender framework for revisioning organizational and management scholarship. Presentation to the Academy of Management Annual Meeting, Aug, 10-12, San Francisco, CA.

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# **Women as Managers**

## **A research overview**

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BEST PRACTICES TO REMOVE THE "GLASS CEILING"

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This paper deals with women as managers, a subject which has gained actuality in both theory and practice during the last 25 years. The aim here is primarily to give an insight into how theory has developed on the subject, and also to discuss how research has influenced practice. The recurring theme is the way in which the view of women as managers has changed, and the importance of this to both theory and practice.

## **Gender Blindness in Management Theory**

Both in practice in organisations and in the literature, management has been described and interpreted as a gender-neutral phenomenon. In research, when something is described as gender-neutral despite gender being a characteristic feature, the term 'gender-blind' is used. When descriptions of reality are gender-blind, gender appears to be without importance. In the literature of management, leader figures are

portrayed as genderless individuals. By reading between the lines what is taken for granted is revealed: managers are men. The inherent logic in a gender-neutral description is that 'men are managers' and 'masculinity is not an issue'.

What then is the situation in practice? Can it simply be that management literature merely reflects reality? The dominance of men among managers and executives in organisations is quite clear in most areas of business, and at all levels. It is particularly apparent at higher levels in business, where men hold 94 per cent of company management positions (Höök, 1995).

Gender blindness is expressed in two clear ways in relation to management. The first way is through description of management as something gender-neutral. The second is the manner in which the domination of men in leading posts is considered *self-evident* without need for further explanation. The problematic nature of gender blindness exists both at a conceptual level and in 'real' organisations. Despite organisations being so clearly structured in terms of gender, the common pretence is that this is not the case.

The gender blindness in organisations partly explains why change is slow or non-existent. The manifest dominance of men in management is not generally considered a problem. Research conducted in Swedish business life has shown that only one third of major companies had established the existing gender distribution in management posts as a problem. In other words, two thirds of Swedish companies work on the basis of a gender distribution at management level of 94 per cent men and six per cent women as normal and not a problem (Höök, 1995). Gender blindness is not confined to practice but also exists in the theory. Management theory mirrors practice. The reality described by theory is marked by the gender order existing in organisations, and notions of management circulating in these. Gender order is a concept within gender theory that describes the power

relation between women and men at structural level. It is both a symbolic order and a highly tangible order leaving clear social results, such as the gender distribution in management.

The fact that managers happen to be men is not described or explained in organisations in terms of gender. Instead, the explanation is that these people own particular suitability or competence. Men are said to possess the right management qualities, not as men but as individuals. The gender dimension of management is only made visible once *women* as managers are taken up for discussion. Since, in full contrast to men, women as managers are described as lacking the right qualities exactly because they are women, not as the individuals they are. Men are described as individuals and gender-neutral managers, women as different and gendered managers. In this way, women are made the bearers of the gender dimension in the management discourse, the discourse on how the subject 'management' is thought about and articulated. This is something that follows the silent logic built into gender-blind theory within many disciplines, where men are the norm and women represent a deviation from this. Management as a gender-neutral phenomenon have received criticism from a gender perspective. Theory where management is instead looked upon as a gendered phenomenon has been developed within the gender theory (feminist theory) field of research.

### **From Individual Perspective to Structural Perspective**

Interest in women as managers – the phenomenon termed 'women in management' – arose in the seventies (see e.g. Marshall, 1984 chapter 2; Billing & Alvesson, 1989; Wahl, 1995 for a review of the field). It was above all in the USA that the phenomenon received attention in

research and more popular leadership literature. The empirical phenomenon of women as managers received attention as something new, thus study of it started. Since a small number of women became visible as managers in American companies and organisations they could be studied. At the same time, the women's movement gained new impetus at the end of the sixties, acting as an important promoter in the issue of giving visibility to women and women's work.

Early research on women as managers often fails to look critically at men's dominance in leading positions. This is taken for granted. Instead of looking at the context in organisations, the focus is on women as different from the norm, and the dominant issues relate to how women function as managers. The studies most certainly resulted in numerous interesting descriptions of the situation of women managers in organisations (e.g. Hennig & Jardim, 1976; Harragan, 1977). But since they lack a theoretical frame of reference based on gender theory, they go no further than interesting descriptions of women as managers. What characterises these descriptions is a comparison with male managers, where women often stand out as defective managers in one way or another. Thus these studies seldom present any fruitful explanations as to *why* there are so few women managers.

### **Management Style – are women 'same' or 'different'?**

Women's management style was primarily studied and analysed on the basis of men as the uncritical norm of management. Women's style is described as either like or unlike that of men's. The unspoken norm is not problematised in itself, but taken as given. In the majority of empirical studies conducted, women managers are most frequently described as being like male managers (Marshall, 1984; Wahl, 1998). In line with the logic of norm and divergence, women are usually described as defective or lacking. In accordance with the assumed gender order, men's dominance is uncritically confirmed. The



management style of women is like that of men but not quite as good. Shortcomings are often attributed to female socialisation (e.g. see Hennig & Jardim, 1976). The women have not played football or done military service, so how could they be good managers? At the same time, the few women managers that exist are considered 'anomalous' rather than 'typical' women. By considering women managers as exceptions to the rule, i.e. as different to 'ordinary' women, the gender order with women in a subordinate position is confirmed and reproduced.

Sometimes highlighting women managers as different holds interest (e.g. Loden, 1986; Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Lipman-Blumen, 1992). Women as different is usually explained in research on management as being founded on women's different (compared to men's) experiences. In more popular leadership literature, it is not however uncommon to find explanations more closely related to essentialism, where women's 'nature' is described as intrinsically different. Common to both types of explanation is however that women's subordinate position in society is given implicit description, as a fact between lines, without critical appraisal. In popular discourse, such as in the media, in books and at conferences, lack of clarity surrounding femininity as difference is both widespread and confusing. No specific definitions of difference are made, creating a fluid state between nature and conditions (Wahl, 1998, 1999). Differences between women and men are often described in ideal terms, something to be acknowledged and legitimised in a leader.

The power perspective is also conspicuous by its absence in the popular discourse. There is normally a complete lack of any description or analysis of the gender order. The whole issue is thus placed on individual level, explaining why it is not uncommon to find descriptions of women's shortfalls as managers even in recent years. The confusion around the ideal of 'difference' between men and

women also creates room for an increasingly more frequent biological interpretation. The different situation of women managers is interpreted in terms of an essential difference between women and men based on biology. Gender theory represents an alternative to this type of interpretation of women managers, where both the power perspective and a view of gender as a social and cultural construction are emphasised. The *conditions* facing women in organisations are stressed instead of qualities of difference.

### **Structural Perspective of Women as Managers**

The individual perspective of women as managers lacks theory of gender and gender order in its analyses. Consequently, management in relation to women as a category in society or in organisations cannot be analysed. It is even harder to explore structures in organisations from a critical perspective. However, studies critical of the individual perspective on women managers were already being produced in the seventies.

One of the first to criticise the individual perspective was Rosabeth Moss Kanter. She showed that a structural perspective could produce different and better explanations of why men dominate in leading posts (Kanter, 1977). She claimed that people are both formed and limited by the position they hold in an organisation. In her book there are three basic structures in organisations, all of which are related to gender; the structure of *opportunity*; the *power* structure and the structure of *numbers*. The link within organisations between position and gender, for example managers being considered masculine and the secretaries being considered feminine, in turn creates completely different career opportunities and power relations for women and men in organisations. What distinguishes women's positions is lower mobility. Women become entrenched because career opportunities are so small, not because women in general are unable or unwilling to

make a career. Men find themselves in positions where making a career is expected, thus such opportunities are also created. Kanter shows the importance of gender distributions in themselves through analysis of majorities and minorities within management. Typical for the situation of women managers is that they are almost always in a clear minority as women, the 'token' position. What is interpreted as typical female characteristics can be seen as resulting from structural effects in organisations with a majority of men and a minority of women. The three structural effects in a minority situation are called *visibility, assimilation and contrast*.

Visibility entails a woman leader being visible in terms of divergence, but invisible as an individual. She is normally considered a female exception to the rule, since she is nearly always the only woman present. While in certain circumstances she is instead considered a representative for women. Perhaps her performance will determine 'what women can cope with'. In the eye of the majority, if she fails then all women fail. Assimilation means that stereotypes are formed around minority women in organisations. These give rise to specific expectations on women that can appear to provide a degree of affirmation, but which quite rapidly become limiting. Finally, the contrast effect means that the male majority strengthens masculine culture when a woman enters the brotherhood of management. She is tested in various ways on her loyalty towards the majority. It is important, for example, that she has no close relation to other women or that she takes up women's issues. Nor should she challenge the existing culture through criticism of, or opinion on sexist jokes. Nor is she expected to compete with men for attractive tasks, but instead should be thankful for the position she has been given as an exception to the rule.

Kanter puts the lack of women in senior positions into critical focus. The structural perspective makes *organisation* an interesting

object of scrutiny. Analysis at both individual and organisational level is possible. Knowledge on the effects of women in minority in management adds both structural and power dimensions to research on women managers. In order to understand how women managers are treated in organisations and how they themselves react, it is important to study gender distribution in organisations and the proportion of women in management. The proportions of men and women in an organisation always have an impact on how structures are developed and expressed.

### **Gender Structures Influence the Conditions for Women Managers**

From the structural perspective, studying the situation and conditions existing for women in organisations becomes interesting. The term *gender structure* may be used as a tool for shedding light on the importance of gender in organisation structure. The term is composed of three elements: the numerical distribution of men and women; degree of task, profession and position segregation between women and men; hierarchical distribution expressed as degrees of influence and power (Wahl, 1992).

With a structural perspective, the differences between men and women as managers as expressed in organisations revolves not around differences in nature but rather around differences in conditions (Wahl, 1998, 1999). The conditions of women managers are highlighted in research on discrimination, i.e. different treatment due to gender (in a negative sense). The phenomenon of discrimination is loaded and taboo in organisations, while at the same time a study of the career developments of women engineers and MBA's (Wahl, 1992) showed it to be so common as to be considered rule rather than exception. The majority of the women experienced direct discrimination, i.e. being discriminated against in a specific situation because of gender. Involved are issues of promotions, salaries, lack of recognition and sexual

harassment. Those women who said they felt no direct discrimination still experienced a generally different treatment of women (in a negative sense) or that women worked under different conditions to men. Both gender and position were important factors regarding who individual women felt discriminated by in specific situations. In environments with men in majority, direct discrimination is more common than where women are in relative majority. A man who discriminates from a superior position is also more common than colleagues or subordinates discriminating.

The same study also shows there to be a *defensive attitude* towards discrimination among women which means that only a minority of women experiencing discrimination acknowledge it openly. One of the reasons for such a defensive attitude is that women see the risk of themselves standing out as the problem in an organisation, rather than the organisation itself being the problem. This reflects the gender-blind attitude existing in most organisations. If the issue of discrimination is raised, it is seen by people to be on the individual level, i.e. the problem lies with individual women (see also Kanter, 1977; Cockburn, 1991; Franzén, 1995; Wahl 1995). Thus only a small proportion of those women in an organisation who feel discriminated against due to gender speak out in the organisation. The most common reaction is to pretend indifference, laugh it off or remain silent.

The conception of how common discrimination is differs between women and men. The majority of women usually consider that conditions in organisations differ for women and men, while the majority of men usually consider that conditions are equal for women and men (Asplund, 1988; Cockburn, 1991). Women experience problems in organisations because they are women. However, these problems are seldom articulated to men via the women since the latter often take up a defensive attitude (see above) towards discrimination.

Consequently, men managers remain ignorant of the fact that gender discrimination exist within their own organisation.

### **The Strategies and Identity of Women Managers**

How then is the gender order expressed at individual level in organisations? How do women managers handle the fact that they belong to a subordinate category at structural level? Women's active attitudes towards the gender order are described and interpreted in theories dealing with *women's strategies*. Such strategies in male-dominated environments may be interpreted in terms of the power relation to men in an organisation (Lindgren, 1985; Sheppard, 1989; Wahl, 1992). The prevalence of discrimination in organisations, along with its simultaneous invisibilising, influences how women managers relate to their gender, i.e. how they relate to themselves as women and how they look upon other women.

Women in a minority situation often possess a gender-neutral attitude in organisations, a *gender-neutral strategy*. They deny the importance of gender in organisations, and therefore must also remain gender-neutral towards their own identity as managers. Individual qualities and competence are given prominence before gender. The gender-neutral strategy may be interpreted as a way for individual women to deal with their token position in the group. As described above, the visibility effect means that women managers become visible as different, but invisible as individuals. With a gender-neutral strategy, women managers thus project themselves as gender-neutral managers rather than women managers, which means however that they can seldom gain affirmation in their identity as both manager and women. Relating to other women professionally becomes difficult, and even greater difficulty is experienced in working with other women towards changing gender relations in the organisation. Gender neutrality means denying the importance of gender in organisations.

There are other common strategies besides the gender neutral, e.g. *positive strategy* and *contextual strategy* (Wahl, 1992). These both relate to an attitude where importance of gender is acknowledged. Positive strategy – shown to be common in male-dominated environments – emphasises the advantages of being a woman. In short, importance of gender is acknowledged, but not from a power perspective. In the positive strategy femininity is seen as an asset. Being a woman is often held up as something different and complementary. Women managers are expected to contribute with something previously lacking, they are a different resource (Wahl, 1998).

Women managers with a contextual strategy are conscious of gender order in organisations. They can understand their own situation on the basis of differences in conditions valid for men and women. When a woman with a contextual strategy is exposed to discrimination she is able to interpret it as an expression of organisation gender order, rather than personal shortfalls in management qualities. This strategy enables women to be considered a power resource, i.e. a resource that can exercise power instead of a different resource to be used by power (Wahl, 1998).

## **Culture, Masculinity and Sexuality**

As we have seen, research into women as managers has gone through a change in perspective from an individual perspective lacking in theory on gender, via structural and power perspectives, to a critical gender perspective on management. Gender research aims to show how gender is constructed and reproduced in various contexts, and how this in different ways is made systematic called gender system or gender order in society. From a gender perspective, questions may be raised on how management is *gendered*. The expression *gendering*

means that a phenomenon or term is associated with a specific gender, such as a certain profession being dominated by men or a certain behaviour being regarded as feminine. In the light of this, studying *both* women and men as managers in relation to their genders becomes of interest.

Constructions of femininity and masculinity are created in time and space and hence are variable. These constructions are defined and perceived in various ways depending on context. At the same time it is possible to see patterns in how gender is organised at a societal level within a certain context (expressed through the terms gender order, gender system or patriarchy). In the existing gender order in society the consistent pattern is men's dominance and women's subordination from a power perspective (Hirdman, 1998). The term gender order at organisational level comprises an understanding that structures, power, culture, notions and processes are all gendered (Wahl, Holgersson & Höök, 1998). The term gender order may be said to comprise the term gender structure, as well as gender symbolism and notions of gender (Wahl, Holgersson, Höök & Linghag, 2001).

Thus a dividing line can be seen in organisation and management research between those who confine interpretation of women managers' situations to the individual level without theory on gender, and those with theory of gender order. With gender order as a point of interpretative departure, a power perspective on gender relations in organisations is included. With a power perspective, management involves determinations of gender.

### **Cultural Perspective on Gender and Management**

The situation of women managers can also be explained with help from organisation culture theory (Kanter, 1977; Cockburn, 1991; Gherardi, 1995; Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Avotie, 1998). In many male-dominated organisations, a masculine culture is created which is



indirectly hostile to women (Cockburn, 1991). Attempts at change towards more equal gender distribution among managers often activates a resistance, which may be interpreted as an expression of organisation culture (Kanter, 1997; Cockburn, 1991). The cultural perspective is part of the approach within gender research, since the term gender in itself is defined as a social and cultural construction. The term *gender order* links it to the power perspective on organisations, where cultural constructions of gender are 'ordered' both socially and symbolically. The gender order in organisations is expressed in various ways and varies within and between organisations as well as in time (Sundin, 1998; Lindgren, 1992, 1999). It can express itself through both contradiction and ambiguity. Symbolic gender order serves either to strengthen or conceal the gender order that actually exists. The notions of feminine and masculine in an organisation might not coincide with the prevailing conditions and circumstances (Wahl, Holgersson, Höök & Linghag, 2001).

### **The Preferential Right of Interpretation of Men Managers**

Men were studied in a new way within organisation research during the 1990's. Instead of assuming men to be the gender-neutral norm in organisations – as in gender-blind research – they are studied as belonging to a specific gender category. In this way masculinity is not something self-evident, but is rather looked at as a social and cultural construction. In order to understand masculinity in organisations and in management it must be interpreted in context. Studies of the production and reproduction of masculinities have resulted in new management theory (Collinson & Hearn, 1994, 1996; Lindgren, 1996, 1999; Holgersson 2001). The importance of looking at the power relation between men and women in organisations in order to understand women's situation has directed attention towards men managers. Men managers must be studied in order to interpret why

there are so few women among managers (Wahl, 1995, 1998; Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Holgersson, 2001). The close proximity between constructions of management and constructions of masculinity has shown significance for notions that management suits men and that women managers are deficient. Thus descriptions and interpretations of situations with only men, as in top management, have become important for an understanding of how masculinity is constructed (Lindgren, 1996; Roper, 1996). Masculinity is part of the norm of management. Particular attention has been paid to *hegemonic masculinity*. There is a definition of masculinity in western society that functions as a yardstick for other forms of masculinity when they are measured and evaluated. Femininity is also related to this type of masculinity as generally applicable norm. It is the masculinity which has become associated with men in power, i.e. white, middle class, middle aged and heterosexual men (Connell, 1987).

The domination of men in senior management posts thus gains importance for perceptions of management. At present, men possess preferential right of interpretation regarding definition and formulation of management. The often homosocial (all male) environments of management represent an obstructive factor, since notions of women can here be uncritically reproduced (Wahl, 1995). There is also a tendency towards reproduction in homosocial gatherings, where the process of affirming sexual identity plays its part (Lindgren, 1996, 1999). Men are confirmed in their sexual identity through being together with other men. They do not always actively *not* choose women, but actively choose other men. The lack of women managers is not only due to women being women, but due to not being men.

### **Sexuality and organisation**

Sexuality is a central theme in feminist research in general. Other social theories draw a limit at the private, while feminist research questions the boundary itself (Hearn & Parkin, 1987). The significance of sexuality within organisations is given actuality in research into sexual harassment (MacKinnon, 1987). The wider aspects of sexuality are linked to organisation in research based on knowledge of sexual harassment (Gutek, 1985; Stockdale, 1996; Wahl, Holgersson & Höök, 1998; Höök, 2001). Sexuality is expressed in various forms in all the processes of the gender order in organisations (Acker, 1992).

Men managers do not have the same need for gender neutrality as women managers. Men can confirm each other in their sexual identity *through* management. The consequences of these differences in conditions between men and women managers has also been discussed in the link between management and sexuality (Hearn & Parkin, 1987; Hearn et al, 1989; Gutek, 1989). Management, self-esteem and sexual identity are held together and strengthened in men managers, whereas with women managers they must often be disengaged. How women deal with this depends on both position of power and awareness of gender and sexuality (Sinclair, 1995).

### **Methods to change gender order**

Work towards change in organisations, with the aim of changing gender order, is frequently entitled equal opportunities initiatives, though other terms are also used. In many cases it represents a field of change where knowledge from gender research is used in the definition of both problems and solutions. Research *about* this type of work towards change describes and analyses commonly arising

methods, perspectives and experiences (Cockburn, 1991; Wahl, 1995; Wahl, Holgersson, Höök & Linghag, 2001).

Methods of change aiming at an increase in the proportion of women in management vary both in form, perspective and degree of integration (Wahl, 1995). Both single-sexed and mixed programmes are used. Some programmes use a gender perspective and others are gender-neutral. Programmes may be integrated into the organisation's other activities or exist relatively independently. Perspective may be further related to training programme contents (Holgersson & Höök, 1997). Organisations carrying out this type of change process over a period of time may sometimes show a certain degree of development. The process often takes form in accordance with a maturity curve where several methods are frequently used in parallel and where programmes with only women may be used in a more gender-conscious manner (Wahl, 1995; Holgersson & Höök, 1997).

In organisations where the change process aims at changing gender order, e.g. through efforts to increase the numbers of women managers, resistance against such actions can also be established (Cockburn, 1991; Wahl, 1995; Holgersson & Höök, 1997). Therefore, research on change often deals with resistance to change. Studies in this respect have often primarily concentrated on women's strategies as a way of coping with the gender order at the individual level (Lindgren, 1985; Sheppard, 1989; Wahl, 1992; Holgersson & Höök, 1997). The strategies can be seen both as women's *resistance to change* (gender-neutral strategy) and women's *active participation in change* (contextual strategy). Adopting a gender-neutral strategy, the individual women (often in a minority situation) can deny the existence of the gender order, and with this deny belonging to a subordinate category. The individual women adopting a contextual strategy can interpret discrimination as an expression of the gender order instead of an

expression of lacking qualities. The contextual strategy also facilitates her taking part in change processes in the organisation.

Men's reactions and attitudes to change in the gender order have also been studied, though to a lesser extent. Studies exist, for example, describing the reactions of men to women entering previously male-dominated places of work, and studies which describe men's reactions to equal opportunities initiatives in their own organisations (Cockburn, 1991; Kvande & Rasmussen, 1993; Wahl, 1995; Holgersson & Höök, 1997). The most consistent analysis of men's attitudes has to do with their view on whether or not a problem exists in relation to gender in organisations. Men and women's perception of the existence of the gender order in an organisation commonly appears to differ. Women are more often aware of the gender order than men. Something that has consequences for the change process through women's greater involvement in equal opportunities issues. Men more frequently remain passive towards equal opportunities initiatives than women do. It is also more common for men to be active opponents of equal opportunities.

### **Women Managers as a Power Resource**

When interest in women managers awoke in the seventies the big question was do women manager's work like men managers or do they work in some other way? Such a question deals in particular with any possible similarity or difference in women's management style. Various motives have lain behind showing women to be either like or unlike men as managers. Where the need has been legitimisation of women's existence as managers, showing a likeness to men has been of interest. Where interest has been in showing that women can actually make better managers than men, their different management style has been emphasised (Marshall, 1984; Billing & Alvesson, 1989). Where likeness to men has been pointed out, the focus has been on manager

qualities. It has been important to show that women own what is considered the required qualities, such as vision, involvement and strength. Emphasis on difference to men has more frequently meant focus on style of management, commonly expressed as women's greater orientation towards relations and people. Thus what we see is not only emphasis on likeness or unlikeness between women and men, but also a difference in *what* is described: management qualities or management style (Wahl, 1997).

From a feminist perspective, both comparisons based on the dichotomy sameness/difference (essentialism) and the dichotomy likeness/unlikeness (experience-based) are regarded as problematic. Comparisons between women and men are almost always based on men's conditions. Introduction of a power perspective relates the comparison to the gender order. Women managers are then interpreted from the perspective of women as category being subordinate in society. Comparison with men managers is otherwise marked by men's superiority and thus by men's preferential right of interpretation as regards defining and evaluating management. Here, women managers are not only compared with men managers but also with the norm of how a manager should be.

Women's majority in top management teams can create a certain degree of space for a women's management norm, as shown in a study of a management team consisting of five women and three men (Wahl, 1997, 2001). The men managers were compared with the norm, which was characterised by the women in the team as regards, for example, management style and language. Management team *ideal* in the group was a mixed group of both women and men, which stands in contrast to the single-sexed (only men) ideal that dominates in business in general. The women on the management team considered having women in senior posts as significant for organisation conditions. They had preferential right of interpretation as to what management is, not

least with regard to gender. They compared the pleasure of being a leader in a situation where they themselves could shape management with the hopelessness they felt is normally experienced by women in organisations (Wahl, 1997, 2001).

### **The View of Women Managers in the Change Process**

Research has interpreted women's management in different ways during different periods. Many of these ways with, for example, their assertions on femininity, have been then transferred into practice and have thus influenced on-going change processes aimed at increasing the number of women in management. Assertions on femininity in relation to management may be summarised as follows:

- 1. Biological quality.** Gender is interpreted in essential terms as having a natural foundation in biology. Normative, since everyone wishes to be a true man or woman.
- 2. Learnt inadequacy.** Women are compared with the norm, i.e. with men. Women are found lacking, e.g. lack of self-confidence and lack of will due to faulty socialisation.
- 3. Learnt advantage.** Women are better suited to management due to their ability of combining the feminine (relations) with the masculine (tasks). Works normatively.
- 4. Social and cultural construction.** Femininity is created according to situation. Whether femininity is constructed in an environment dominated by men or by women plays an important part. Many constructions of femininity that take place can be interpreted as expressions of subordinate position, e.g. delegating, listening and being compassionate.

- 5. Potential for change.** New constructions may be made beyond the dichotomies of sameness and difference. Using knowledge on the gender order, greater space can be made for interpretations of what is considered feminine and masculine. This can contribute to changes in conditions in organisations for women and men.

(Source: Wahl [1997], pp. 131-132).

### **Concluding remarks**

After approximately 25 years of research, one can ask oneself: has the view of women as managers changed? And *if* it has changed, has this influenced the numbers of women managers and their situation? The majority of texts currently written on women's management deal with some form of power aspect, but not always with theory on gender and gender order. There is a greater awareness that women managers are part of the circumstances in which they find themselves and that this influences how their leadership takes form. Development of theories on management and gender is expansive and innovative – something that has also had an effect on the management field as a whole. Nowadays writing completely gender-blind texts on management is more difficult, though it still happens. Interpreting women managers on the sole basis of their individual qualities is no longer as common either. Management theory has been affected, and in many circumstances where management theories are discussed a gender perspective is integrated in one way or another. Thus we can say that the view of women managers at theory level has changed. Below is a chronological summary of questions raised in research on women managers, plus descriptions of those types of interpretation they have given rise to:



**1. Can women be managers?**

*Description of women as deficient. No gender theory.*

**2. How are women as managers?**

*Description of women as like/unlike men managers. No gender theory.*

**3. Why the lack of women in management posts?**

*Critical perspective on organisations, structure and power. From a gender perspective.*

**4. How is management/leadership gendered?**

*Gender theory; management and gender as social constructions.*

**5. Why is the domination of men in management considered normal?**

*Gender and power; on constructions of masculinity and reproduction of the gender order, for example through resistance to change.*

**Questions raised and description/interpretation of research on women's management.**

(Source: Wahl, Holgersson & Höök [1998], p. 32)

The view is still often expressed in practice that women managers 'have problems' which they themselves must solve in some way, i.e. a view based on the assumption that gender is solely an issue on the individual level. It is not uncommon to see discrimination explained as women being poor at 'asserting themselves' and that women should thus build up their self-confidence. This phenomenon could recently be witnessed in new companies in the IT sector. Companies which

proved false the idea that equal opportunities in working life is a generation issue that will be automatically solved in time. Despite young people predominating in many of the new companies, men have rapidly reached domination in management positions and masculine organisation cultures have developed. The general debate on these companies reveal that in practice discussion of the phenomenon women managers (or lack of them) is still on the individual level (Wahl, 2000).

At the same time many organisations are involved in a resolute and serious process of change aimed at increasing the numbers of women managers. The issue is often part of wider-scale equal opportunities initiatives in organisations (Franzén, Linghag & Zander, 1998; Franzén & Lantz, 2000). Slowly but surely research has an impact on practice. Increasing numbers of those engaged in change processes are becoming aware of the knowledge available, and that good analysis of the problem is a precondition for changing the gender order in an organisation. In this way, the view of women as managers has changed in many organisations. Being able to discuss the issue of numbers of women in management positions from a structure perspective instead of from a view of women as deficient in management qualities is a major step forward. To discuss management in relation to men and masculinity as the norm – something increasingly common – is further expression of the effect of research on practice. Up to now, however, the changed outlook has not resulted in any real increase in women in management positions in general, and in particular not at higher levels.

An essential question following on from any change in gender distribution in management is of course: does it make any difference in working life? What effect can women managers have on organisations? Will priorities be different? How will profits, salaries, operations etc be affected? An interesting question from a feminist

perspective is whether or not gender equality will be greater in organisations with more women in management. Are women better than men at creating equal conditions for women and men? Can women in management contribute to a change in the current management ideal of total dedication to work? These questions are directly linked to the question of strategies to use which will enable women managers to work for change in organisation gender order rather than being compelled to adapt. Can women managers create more space for other women so that the influence of women on organisations can increase? The objective of this article is to shed light on the structures and notions encompassing women as managers, to allow an interpretation of women's management on the basis of current theory. The changed view within research of women as managers also has repercussions on how women in management are able to act in practice. Management designated 'feminine' leadership does not exist outside its context and in many cases appears to be a limitation to rather than a platform for influence.

In the study referred to above of the management team with five women and three men, there are indications that gender distribution does in fact influence both shaping of management and organisation conditions. Gender distribution in the team has an impact on management norm, which in turn affects conditions developed for both women and men in the organisation. The study does however show that no organisation exists in a vacuum, but is always part of a wider context. Even if a new ideal of a mixed management team exists, it does so from awareness that men possess higher status than women in society do in general. Drawing far-reaching conclusions on the effects of women in management positions is difficult, since it is still quite rare for women to work in organisations largely shaped by themselves. From a power perspective we can however study when and under what circumstances women may create space for a management based

on their own conditions. The surrounding context must always be present in the analysis in cases where the effect of women's management can be studied. Many of the issues involved represent important points of departure for future research on management and gender.

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