



## From Glass Slippers to Glass Ceilings - Women in Leadership

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This paper explores some of the issues for women who desire professional recognition. It is hoped that by acknowledging and respecting the differences between males and females in organisational roles that both men and women will take the permission to choose new ways of behaving, thinking and feeling. Today's organisations need to develop and maintain the values and attitudes that promote and support improvement at work. These improvements include the recognition of women and the skills and benefits women bring to the work place.

Whilst this paper is mainly written from a UK perspective, drawing as it does on UK statistics, there is still relevance for other countries. It is hoped that the reader will compare and contrast the opinions of this author about the UK with their own countries and see how they fare. (Interestingly new women directors are apparently more likely to be found in North America and come from richer and more varied backgrounds than men in the same sectors).

In the UK Women still earn 13.2% less than men. (The National Work-Life Forum, 1999) If all women were working at the level they were capable of it is estimated that the national economic output would rise by £25 billion. Naturally, women's choice also comes into this issue. Women often choose part-time or less demanding jobs so that they can be available to the children. However, there is also a demise in males as breadwinners, and a lone parent heads one in five families. 90% of these are women. Women still shoulder most of the

domestic chores, and 57% find it hard to meet home and work commitments. (op cit) It is therefore unlikely that women have the time and creative freedom to consider moving into positions where balancing work and personal life may be even more difficult. In order for this to take place on a broader scale some fundamental changes need to occur at all levels: micro, meso, and macro, roughly translated to individual, family and organisation, national and international.

Around the world women often hit the headlines in relation to leadership. Unfortunately, this is often not due to their ability to lead but due to the obstacles preventing them from leading. In January 2004 the San Jose Mercury News ran a feature on a programme for women in leadership. Within this feature they quoted the National Association for Female Executives as saying that it is the lack of targeted training – not the lack of ambition – that blocks women's advancement to the highest ranks of corporate America. Unfortunately, America is not alone in this regard. In the UK the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development's (CIPD) *People Management* magazine has a regular Diversity column in which there are frequent news items about gender issues showing that in addition to the lack of training women also face discrimination and stereotyping. Also in the UK the Guardian newspaper regularly features sex discrimination cases highlighting that employment tribunals are increasingly dealing with such cases. The Employment Tribunal Service annual report for 2003-2004 shows that in the year to March there were 98,617 more cases than the previous year, making a total of 115,042.

Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974) noted that change could be undertaken at either the first order or second order. The first order means that people take with them their old ways of thinking, feeling and behaving into the new situation. For example, they may think that they need to take more time out



to balance their life outside work. They decide to become involved in their community and sit on the local residents group to fight to save the latest piece of land being eaten up by the bulldozers. However, in order to do this they think it might be useful to canvass the local residents, go to related meetings etc. Instead of sharing this burden, they attempt to do everything and then find themselves working hard outside of their paid work and having no time to see their friends. It is likely that they have taken their need to control, the usual way they pressure themselves through time, the way they tell themselves they are not doing enough etc., and transported these into this situation.

This can affect change at the macro or organisational level. If changes occur without corresponding changes in attitudes, expectations and so on then little real growth and development will occur, no matter how much restructuring and re-engineering takes place.

Second order change is about changing fundamental patterns. This is where individuals and organisations make changes through challenging old beliefs and expectations. In the short-term this can cause major disruption in process. This is not a good reason for not making change, or for expecting the change to be spontaneous and immediate.

Scott Peck (1987) discusses different stages of community:

- Pseudo-community is where people act as if they are a community, but are conflict avoiding
- Chaos - where people are attempting to hold on to their own expectations and prejudices in order to make this safe and predictable
- Emptiness - where individuals are strong enough to meet the other person/people and see who they are, not who they think they are

- Community - where people meet each other and really say "hello". This would mean that people have "got rid of all the trash which has accumulated in your head ever since you came home from the maternity ward" (Berne 1975)

Whilst organisations are not necessarily the same as communities, organisations are made up of people and without people there are no organisations. Therefore, all those working within organisations come with their own issues, expectations and prejudices. The same is true when it comes to women moving into management and leadership positions. The issue of obtaining these positions is influenced by two aspects. First, the way in which women are limited by gender role stereotyping, and second, by women limiting themselves by self-reinforcing patterns of behaviour, self-limiting beliefs and attitudes.

It has been argued that women see success in terms of:

- achievement
- recognition for their individual contribution, and
- having influence and impact on the organisation.

Men, on the other hand, see material acquisition and position power as important. It is likely that men and women will be given recognition for those attributes, skills and expectations that fit the cultural norm. Women are more likely to be recognised for the "soft skills" and men for strategic thinking, the "hard skills". Without adequate recognition, stress levels rise. Therefore there is very little incentive for women to move into the male dominated areas of management and leadership. However, if and when they do, it is likely that the way they use power will be different to the way men use it. This will also influence recognition in male dominated organisational worlds.



In TA we know that the same thing can be said in different ways. The content of what we say will be altered by the tone and inflection of our voice, the speed we say it and the audibility of it. These aspects will also be affected by the country and region we come from and whether we are male or female.

We learn and rehearse our conversational style in our childhood playgroups. How this goes will affect how we are later as adults. For example, those who are second in command are more likely to be indirect in their comments and observations than those who are in command. This is particularly important when training co-pilots as observations not made assertively can be minimised and therefore be the cause of disasters. These patterns can be formed in the playgroup.

Language negotiates behaviour and therefore relationships. This is one way in which we give ourselves and/or others status. Research suggests (Research on Language and Social Interaction, Vol. 24 1990/91) that women are more likely to be cautious about how they give criticism when they are managing someone than if they relate to their manager. Tannen (2001) suggests that this is to do with the way females are socialised: "Those who are in some way superior are expected to downplay rather than flaunt their superiority".

Tannen's view is that when we are children we are socialised into learning what is important in relationships. Tannen's research noted that boys are encouraged to think of status - who has the bigger toy; bike; best trainers etc. Whilst girls are more focussed on using language to negotiate how close they are, (your best friend is likely to be the one you tell all your secrets to). Girls tend to ostracise someone who acts superior, whilst boys play differently. They tend to be in larger groups where members are not treated as equal. Leaders are

expected to tell others what to do. Boys use language to negotiate status by displaying their abilities and challenging and resisting challenges.

The skill required for managers, consultants, etc. is to become aware of the linguistic differences for men and women as well as for different cultures. In this way those who have something to say will be heard, even if they say it in a way that does not fit with the cultural norm of the work place.

In addition a recent article by Griffiths (2004) noted that new research has shown that it is "glass cliffs" rather than glass ceilings that are the latest obstacle in women's fight for business success. The researchers, Alex Haslam and Michelle Ryan, psychologists at the School of Psychology, University of Exeter, defined glass cliffs (Griffiths op. cit.) as high risk or difficult jobs given to women in which the chance of failure is high. One explanation seemed to be that troubled boards might appoint women to revive business in a new way. Women were also more likely to take precarious positions because they had fewer opportunities.

Krausz (1986) talks about the way power is used in the process of influencing the actions of others:

**Coercion** based on fear to ensure compliance

**Position** based on status

**Reward** the capacity to assign material or psychological compensations

**Support** based on the ability to stimulate the involvement of peers, superiors etc. in organisational endeavours

**Knowledge** related to relevant expertise for the job

**Interpersonal competence** based on communication skills, empathy, authenticity, caring, respect, trust and the capacity for intimacy. This primarily involves the informal network of relationships.

Krausz (op cit) then went on to link the way power is used with different leadership styles. She outlines these as options rather than positive or negative.

**Coercive** - this style employs predominantly coercion and position power. If you win, I lose, so I must win. People are treated like pawns. People who are treated like pawns tend to be passive and feel useless.

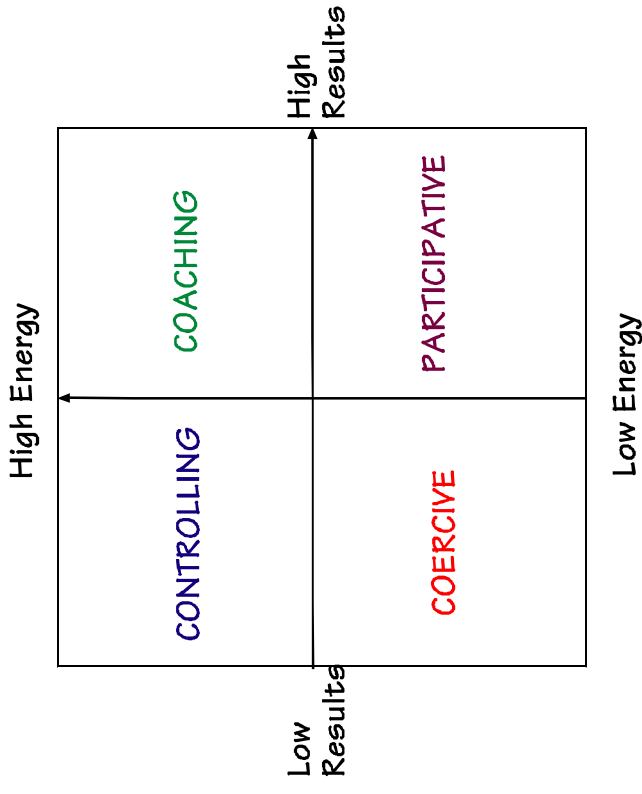
**Controlling** - the types of power predominantly used in this case are coercion, position, and reward.

**Coercion** - tends to be subtle, though emotional and material manipulation. Controlling leadership is similar to McGregor's (1960) X Theory. The climate under this leadership reflects a diminished sense of accountability, competition, mistrust and defensiveness.

**Coaching** - this style uses predominantly position, reward, knowledge and support power. It allows individual development and professional growth, although it may also stimulate dependency in relation to hierarchical superiors and more experienced people in the organisation. Organisational power tends to be underused. Climate is one of co-operation and openness.

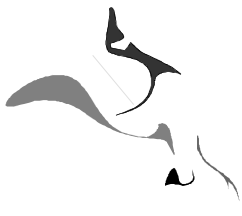
**Participative** - with this kind of leadership reward, support, acknowledgement and interpersonal competence are the most frequently employed types of power. Creativity, problem

solving, and decision making are enhanced. The climate reflects trust and respect regardless of the individual's position in the hierarchy. There is an overall sense of well-being and worth.

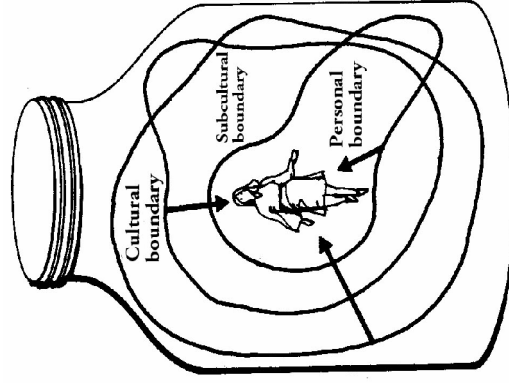


(Kosa Krausz 1986)  
**Leadership Style, Amount of Energy Used and Results Obtained**

Whilst many generalisations can be drawn and may be useful. Given that women place more importance on achievement it is less likely that they will adopt coercion or position power as the basis for their work. They are also more likely to adopt coaching and participative styles of leadership. Again these may be styles that go virtually unrecognised in traditionally-led organisations.



The need for recognition tends to draw people to culturally accepted ways of being. When growing up, children receive messages about themselves and others from significant authority figures in their lives. These verbal and non-verbal messages start to create values, expectations, and ideas about what they can and cannot achieve. Jongeward and Scott (1987) drew these self-limiting areas around the individual and placed the person in a jar.



**Collective boundaries and limits**  
(adapted from Jongeward & Scott, 1987)

The first boundary or limit would be those messages that the individual obtained from their family. The next would be the neighbourhood, and the next the national culture. For example, if someone grew up being told: *Women need to be tough to get on. There are only tough women in this family. In this neighbourhood women need to be tough to survive*, and culturally they are put down; it is likely that they will come out fighting to prove, outside of their conscious awareness, this is

how they have to be. This serves to make the world predictable and they know how to be.

Geographical location also has an influence on women in leadership positions. For example there are more women in top positions in London than in the north-east of England. Therefore women in leadership is systemic, contextual as well as geographical. Despite these regional cultural differences women need to believe they are good enough, account their skills and abilities and understand their fears and passions. In this way they can begin to get in touch, or stay in touch, with their own internal sense of power, as well as in using power to influence others. Through being in touch with their own internal sense of power they are thus more likely to use power *with*, rather than over others. Changing self-limiting beliefs and patterns of behaviour and “breaking out of the jar”, or at least knowing that they are choosing to keep within these prescribed boundaries is an important part of the individual’s development.

Younger women, educated in a world with fewer stereotypical limitations may have less difficulty locating their own power and using power effectively and developmentally at the micro and macro levels. Of course, the culture of the organisation within which they work will have a major part of play, whatever the personal beliefs and skills of the individual. However, for those women who are 35+, and want to be in management, “breaking out of the jar” may cause some dilemmas and conflicts, both intra-psychically and with others.

A range of strategies will be necessary for growth and development. These might include finding other women to act as coaches to support their journey, networking, attending training courses for women who want to be leaders and managers as well as ensuring life balance. And, above and beyond all this they need to ensure they have recognition in



they lives for both being and doing. Both men and women need to work at the organisational level to encourage others to accept and acknowledge difference and to form alliances. Organisations may need to make a strategic decision to promote able, competent women into management positions whilst at the same time changing embedded organisational cultural assumptions about women in leadership.

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