**Eastern Academy of Management**

**2019 Proceedings**

**Professional Development Workshop:**

**Women in Leadership**

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***ABSTRACT***

This interactive session is focused on exploring the challenges and complexities that face women in leadership. The goal is to provide a forum for discussion of current research and trends surrounding women in leadership. Participants will have the opportunity to examine their own experience in the context of this research and to collaborate with other business educators to develop ideas on ways in which they can contribute to systematic change for women at work.

**Keywords**   
women, gender, workplace, gender bias, authentic leadership, glass ceiling

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Women face distinct challenges in the workplace — challenges that can make it more difficult to access stretch opportunities, networks, resources, etc. Yet, women add unique value and perspective—they shatter groupthink, improve communications dynamics, and reinvigorate organizations in ways that make them more competitive. Clear links to the increased representation of women have demonstrated positive bottom line results supporting the belief that women drive performance and contribute to an organization’s competitive resources (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010; Evans, 2011; Miller & Sisk, 2012). Research shows organizations with a critical mass of top-team gender diversity enjoy significantly better financial performance (Joy, Carter, Wagner, & Narayanan, 2007). Although there have been improvements for women at work, the glass ceiling continues to triumph with the support of several other barriers to the success of women including but limited to:

* Gender bias and gender stereotyping, sexual harassment, the lack of mentors and role models;
* The lack of formal career development activities and projects, the exclusion from informal networks;
* The perception of leadership style and authenticity, and value associated with male-dominated behaviors and functional roles (Hill, Miller, Benson, & Handley, 2016; Rhode, 2017; Warner & Corely, 2017).

All organizations are compelled to address the impact of gender bias, conscious or unconscious, and promote increases in organizational awareness and competitive strategies that address these barriers and encourage the development, recruitment, and support of women. Likewise, institutions of higher education have a duty to generate greater awareness, prepare students with tools and resources, and critically assess and drive an institutional climate for equity and respect. Therefore, we must support gender awareness and uncover systemic perceptions of gender performance and contribution as a condition for doing business (Miller & Sisk, 2012). Blayney and Blotnicky (2010) suggest activities must include building a diverse strategic culture in which we critically evaluate and review organizational promotion practices, reward and recognition systems offered, and developmental processes that are gender specific. Furthermore, it requires open discussion and critical self-awareness. As educational leaders, we need to develop and promote change to the damaging impact of gender stereotyping and assist in mediating this barrier of bottom-line performance potential through increasing gender balance in our organizations through self-preparation and that of our students (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010; Evans, 2011).

This professional development workshop will provide a forum for discussion and exploration of women in leadership including current research and trends surrounding gender stereotyping, gender bias, and authentic leadership. The goal is for participants in the workshop to leave with new ideas, skills, confidence, and fresh perspectives to add more value to their roles and cascade the benefits of improved awareness across their institutions and with their students.

**2 ABBREVIATED LITERATURE REVIEW**

Women find themselves trapped in leadership, gender stigmas. Women leaders face higher standards than male leaders and are rewarded less. Women that exhibit traditionally valued masculine leadership behaviors such as assertiveness are perceived as competent but are not well liked while women that exhibit more feminine, stereotypical behaviors are better liked and perceived as not having the necessary or valued leadership skills to strategically improve the performance of the organization (Evans, 2011). Organizations hold a common belief that masculine leadership characteristics, particularly those related to business acumen and influence, result in better performance while feminine styles of management are evaluated as deficient (Evans, 2011; Miller & Sisk, 2012).

Although leadership characteristics and styles between men and women are marginally different (Eagly & Johnson, 1990), women tend to have higher interpersonal behaviors and are more oriented to demonstrate collaborative and inclusive approaches to support and maintain relationships as compared to men (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010; Evans, 2011; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Accordingly, these differences may have a direct impact on women as compared to men relative to experiencing gender bias. Furthermore, women experience organizational barriers to their success including exclusion from informal networks, the lack of role models and mentors and the inability of organizations to support or offer opportunities for development (Evans, 2011). There is a significant lack of women role models as well as men that are comfortable taking on such a role with women (Miller & Sisk, 2012). As a result, women receive less mentoring and have been perceived as misunderstanding mentoring advances as sexual advances (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010; Miller & Sisk, 2012).

Additionally, women rely on the organization’s formal process for career development and promotion while men tend to use the informal network to support career advancement objectives (Blayney & Blotnicky, 2010). This has resulted in female leaders having fewer development assignments and less mobility for career advancement opportunities. Research conducted by Blayney and Blotnicky (2010) identified that developmental assignments are highly correlated to career success, and women become highly disadvantaged in increasing their capability which marginalizes women to lead smaller functional areas or smaller organizations as compared to men.

The result is that in recent years the pace of change for women in the workforce has slowed, and the percentage of women in top-level management positions has been flat (Warner & Corely, 2017). Women currently represent only a quarter of executive and senior level managers in S&P 500 companies, just over 20 percent of board seats are occupied by women, and there are only 29 women holding CEO positions (Catalyst, 2017).

Dimensions of women’s careers, career choices and obstacles, organizational culture, self- efficacy, and the “opt-out revolution,” offer additional insight into perspectives and barriers that women experience in leadership. While not without critique (Cossman, 2008), the idea of the “opt-out revolution” is supported by the fact that more women than men leave the workforce in mid-career. Also, while younger women demonstrate similar ambition for leadership advancement as men, by middle age, there is a significant difference in the desire to continue on the leadership track (Rhode, 2017). Women often cite issues of gender roles and work-life balance as reasons for leaving leadership positions (Rhode, 2017). However, others remind us women are not “choosing” to leave at all, but rather are pushed out of the labor market by unfriendly policies and lack of true advancement (Williams, Manvell, & Bornstein, 2006). There is also a line of thought suggesting women may be leaving to find a more nuanced career model (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). It is suggested women may abandon corporate leadership tracks mid-stream due to the difficulties they face in developing an authentic leadership identity combined with normal developmental challenges of mid-life, their traditional role as primary caregiver to children, and the organizational culture.

In the context of organizational life, roles outside of gender-circumscribed roles, equate to more male-dominated career choices and ideals of authority, independence, and assertiveness, and traditional gender expectations put women in a double-bind (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Women can conform to traditional gender expectations but may be viewed a weak leader or can project a more traditional masculine presence and be penalized for not meeting the social expectations of women’s behavior (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Also, as individuals reach the middle point of their adult years, typically considered between the ages of 40 to 65, they often have considerable responsibilities and stressors outside of their career obligations. These obligations can include children, aging parents, personal health concerns, or community engagements. Adult development theories suggest that middle adulthood is marked by an increased desire for generativity (Erickson, 1950), and finding balance in life (Jung, 1971; Levinson, 1977). This includes looking for balance in their identities (Jones, Whitbourne, & Skultety, 2006). With this in mind, the authors contend that as women face the issues of mid-life—whether this is how to attend to the needs of a growing family, a failing parent, or their health concerns--traditional leadership roles and organizational contexts may no longer provide meaning. These events all significantly impact women’s ability to embrace authentic leadership.

In summary, the literature suggests that the challenges facing women in the workplace are varied and complex and require systematic solutions. Given the increased cultural awareness and attention currently placed on women in the workplace with the #metoo movement, we believe that the time is right to enter into substantive dialogue on the role of higher education and specifically business education in contributing to the systematic change needed to make more significant progress for women at work.

**3 LEARNING OBJECTIONS AND DISCUSSION**

The learning objectives for this professional development workshop include:

* Examine the opportunities, challenges, trade-offs, and organizational dynamics experienced by women in work organizations and higher education
* Increase participants’ knowledge about their values and vision, as well as enhance your capabilities as a leader, manager, and team contributor in and outside the classroom.
* Discuss systematic ways participants can make a difference

The following details the structure and timeline of the workshop.

* Panelist Discussion – 30 minutes. Panelists will provide context for the session through discussion of their current research and personal experience guided by the following discussion questions:
  + What are the valued attributes and behaviors of women in the workplace?
  + How does the gendered nature of organizations impact women?
  + What derails women’s career advancement and what propels us upward?
  + What impact do gender roles play in leadership and perceptions of leadership? (i.e., Either based on your own experience or your research)
  + Throughout the world, including the United States, we find laws and cultural practices that prevent women from reaching their full potential and equal place in society. Yet, we also see women stepping up and out of their cultural constraints and into leadership roles, engaging in courageous acts of social change. What is the influence of culture on perceptions of women in leadership and in our ability to serve authentically?
  + Do women have agency in their leadership journeys or are there cultural implications and pressures that limit their leadership journeys?
* Participant Discussion – 30 minutes. During this section of the workshop participants will be encouraged to discuss both their own experiences of gender in the workplace, as well as how as business educators we can contribute to making systematic change for women at work. The panelists will “work the room” to facilitate these discussions guided by the following discussion questions.
* Examining Experience (15 minutes). Open discuss led by the following questions.
  + What are your leadership goals and aspirations?
  + How can you best integrate your multiple family and work life commitments?
  + How do you define career success?
  + Have you had difficulty feeling like a legitimate leader or being perceived as a legitimate leader due to gender bias? And, if you can, give an example of a scenario where you felt like it was difficult to lead authentically.
  + What strategies do you use in navigating workplace politics and gender bias while being authentic or genuine? A follow-up question, how do mentorship programs help women navigate leading authentically and gender bias in the workplace? What are problems with mentorship programs for women?
* How can Business Educators Contribute to Systemic Change (15 minutes). This concludes the workshop with a final discussion of strategies to contribute to a system of change.
  + What opportunities could our global economy harness by advancing women to leadership?
  + What can organizations do to provide women with opportunities to excel?
  + How can the full talents of the workforce be tapped into and developed?
  + What are some of the more systemic ways male advocates can make a difference? For example, what kinds of programs or policies might advocate advance, or have panelists experienced programs or policies that have made a difference for you or would have made a difference if implemented?
  + What has helped you be a more effective advocate, or what advice would you have for others who want to advocate?
  + What do we need to do to inspire more male advocates, to move things forward and accelerate change?
* Discussion Table Reports/Summary (30 mins). Each of the tables will have the opportunity to report out on the discussion that occurred at their tables. The panelists will record key points, ideas, and suggestions and provide these to all participants via email following the session.

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