

Gender and Leadership Outline - Draft

By Dr. Kathleen E. Allen

Purpose of this piece:

- To increase our capacity to develop leadership in both men and women.
- To become aware of how gender blindness may hinder our efforts in developing leaders.
- To describe the major developmental domains of men and women and their relationship to leadership development.
- To identify gender related leadership development interventions for men and women.
- To give leaders more options / skills so they have more capacity to work with.

Assumptions about gender and limitations of this work

- The observations in this paper are gender related not gender specific.
- A student's leadership development is mutually shaped by the college context.
- Everything is gendered.
- Awareness of gender related leadership development and issues could increase the quality of student learning.
- Development issues are shaped by generational cohorts
- Our understanding of leadership is gendered and our professional standards can be gendered.
- Evolution makes a difference.

Assumptions about leadership in the 21st century

- It will be practiced in a context of connectivity and integrated networks.
- It will be practiced in a dynamic environment with ongoing change.
- It will require ongoing learning on an individual, group, and organizational level.
- It will require the ability to adapt to a changing environment through increased flexibility and capacity to live with ambiguity.
- It will be practiced within an increasing complex environment requiring synthesis as well as analysis.

Developmental Domains of men and women as they relate to the changing assumptions about leadership.

Connectivity

- Men's developmental issues [autonomy, boundaries, testosterone]
- Women's developmental issues [connectedness, no boundaries, estrogen]

- The double-edged swords for men and women.
 - Men: Autonomy can be an asset as long as it is in concert with relationships.
 - Women: Relationship orientation is an asset in a connected world as long as the identity of the self is not lost.
- The leadership developmental challenge for men and women.
 - Men: to develop and value a relational orientation in a connected world. Because in a networked world, ones value is directly related to ones connection to the network.
 - Women: to develop a sense of boundaries in order to not be subsumed by the connectivity. For example they need to include themselves as one of the people they need to care about. This is about optimizing the tensions between boundaries and connection.

Dynamic environment and influencing change

- Men's developmental issues [action / doing, controlling orientation, bodies that don't change]
- Women's developmental issues [receiving / being, passive, bodies that do change]
- The double-edged swords for men and women.
 - Men: Efficacy is an asset but control strategies for changing people or systems will not work in a connected world of constant change.
 - Women Flexibility in relationship to change is an asset but women will still need to learn to actively influence not just passively adapt to change
- The leadership developmental challenge for men and women
 - Men: to let go of "power over" and move toward "Power with"
 - Women: to let go of "powerlessness" and move toward a self-efficacy

Complexity

- Men's developmental issues [simplify by ignoring or dismissing some connections; minimizes relational variables and contextual variables; brain structure – separated brain hemispheres, simple complexity; this results in behavior that assumes success and can be seen as both arrogant and increased ability to take risks]
- Women's developmental issues [makes things more complex than they sometimes are; everything is embedded in context; brain structure is more connected leading to associative thinking; complex complexity; everything is connected; this results in behavior to be thorough or have a perfectionist orientation driven by a fear of failure or not taking into everything into account which can cause a woman to be overwhelmed by the complexity and like a "deer caught in headlights" trigger a freezing or shutting down of action.]
- The double-edged swords for men and women: Balance between action and analysis is needed.

- Men: may take action and risks but under analyze the situation leading to failure or increased “mopping up” over the long term
- Women may be good at analyzing the relationship and contextual variables but this capacity may overwhelm the individual leading to non-action or a situation where another individual steps in and acts
- The leadership developmental challenge for men and women
 - Men: learn to seek out and understand relationship variables and importance of context when viewing a situation [complex complexity]
 - Women: learn how to identify relevant variables in both relationships and context in order to not over complexify the situation; and increase their capacity for risk taking

Adapting to a changing environment

- Men’s developmental issues [an orientation toward having control over the external environment; use of force; juxtaposed with blaming external forces for failures; internal locus of control; hormones – testosterone; lone ranger archetype]
- Women’s developmental issues [external locus of control; manipulation through indirect control; give up internal power or minimize ones influence over the environment; victim mentality; the paradox is that women change themselves to achieve harmony with the environment but may lose their sense of self when they do it; estrogen effect]
- The double-edged swords for men and women.
 - Women: have the capacity to demonstrate internal learning but don’t always actively influence the external environment
 - Men have the capacity to influence their outer world but don’t always change internally
- Identify the leadership developmental challenge for men and women.
 - Women: learn to recognize and leverage their influence over their external environment and relationships.
 - Men: to acknowledge they don’t have control over things and develop the capacity to influence change organically

On-going Learning on an individual, group, and organizational level

- Men’s developmental issues [learning and communication styles - i.e. don’t ask for directions]
- Women’s developmental issues [learning styles and communication styles - i.e. cooperative learning and relationship oriented communication]
- The double-edged swords for men and women
 - Women: learn and share knowledge by may not try and experiment with it
 - Men try and learn but may not share knowledge
- Identify the leadership developmental challenge for men and women.

- In the 21st century individual and organizational learning will be critical. Trying, learning and sharing will all need to be done within teams and organizations

Systemic thinking

- Men's developmental issues [mechanistic grounded systemic thinking; brain structure; is it just a coincidence that the industrial age was designed by and for men: what does this reveal about how they may think about parts and wholes?]
- Women's developmental issues [associative thinking is more holistic and therefore systemic; brain structure more connected; is it just a coincidence that the knowledge era – driven by mass communications and communication technology – increase the relational, contextual and systemic nature of our work? What does this reveal about the increasing numbers of women in the work force and in leadership positions? Are organization structures that facilitate group work and shared learning connected with the growing number of women who are shaping work life?]
- The double-edged swords for men and women
 - Women: are relational but still exist within hierarchical structures
 - Men are hierarchical but need to think relationally
- Identify the leadership developmental challenge for men and women
 - Women: to feel comfortable with the parts as well as the whole and bring their thinking to the table
 - Men: need to develop systemic – special and relational – awareness; they are not the center of the universe

Suggested gender related leadership development strategies

Men and women have much to teach each other. When co-educational settings are based on respect, openness, and learning the whole organization benefits.