



EGM/2015/Report

## Equal Representation of Women through the Lens of Leadership and Organizational Culture

Expert Group Meeting

Organized by

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women  
(UN Women)

In collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

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\* The views expressed in this document are those of the experts and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations.

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## I. Executive Summary

The UN General Assembly has called upon the United Nations system to advance its work towards achieving the goal of gender balance in staffing at all levels, as women continue to be underrepresented within top UN leadership. Yet, to measure and advance gender equality and the empowerment of women, it is necessary to look beyond numbers, though they are the most evident indicators. These efforts must also be reexamined through the lens of leadership and organizational culture, prerequisites to sustained equality in all its aspects, including the representation of women.

Experts worldwide increasingly acknowledge that regardless of how many systems and policies are put into place, enacting an organizational cultural shift that enables the meaningful representation of women is predicated on effective leadership. Along with this comes recognition of the need for proactive strategies to develop leaders with the skills, capacity and awareness to meet the strategic objectives of gender mainstreaming.

Institutional practices that strengthen leadership capacity for and through an inclusive and enabling organizational culture may contribute to a more effective strategy to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women across the UN system. The landmark United Nations Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), preparing for its second phase of development under the leadership of UN Women, provides a unified accountability framework through which these practices can be promulgated.

Given this understanding, UN Women, in collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) convened an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on advancing the equal representation of women in the workplace through the lens of leadership and organizational culture. The objective of the meeting was to assist the United Nations in exploring the most current and reliable research, analysis and good practices on the topic. The EGM's findings concerning leadership and organizational culture fitting the purpose of gender equality are discussed at length in this report. The resulting recommendations offer concrete strategies for UN Women to incorporate leadership into the next phase of UN-SWAP performance indicators, as they pertain to the status of women and their equal representation in the United Nations system.

### A. Impact of Leadership and Organizational Culture on Gender Equality in the Workplace

“Leadership and advancing gender equality are interconnected, as the very nature of gender mainstreaming requires organizational change that ultimately calls for effective leadership<sup>1</sup>.”

- UNDP Gender Equality Seal

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP Gender Equality Seal, “Leadership fitting the purpose of gender equality: “Next Generation,” prepared for UN Women Expert Group Meeting, 6 – 8, October 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

For the purpose of his report, leadership can be defined comprehensively as a process by which an individual can direct, guide and influence the behavior and work of others to achieve a common goal.

The concept of leadership is very subjective and researchers have theorized for many years what makes leaders effective. Initial research examined leadership as inherent in particular individuals, based on their personal/innate traits. Theorists later shifted their studies towards specific behaviors of a leader (i.e. leadership styles) as the best predictor of his or her leadership success. Others have gone further to say that there is no one best style of leadership. Rather, it depends on the specific needs of a particular situation or organizational context.

While there is no absolute formula for the perfect leader and each theory has its uses and limitations, experts have been able to draw from various theories to identify core traits and behaviors most fitting the purpose of gender equality. Personal qualities identified include passion, honesty, open-mindedness, adaptability and emotional intelligence. Also identified were behaviors associated with transformational, distributed and inclusive styles of leadership, as well as facilitative leadership and adaptive leadership.

No one organization or individual practices a particular style 100%; however, understanding these different approaches to leadership will enable gender champions to develop resilience in the way they assert leadership for the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment. It also provides a framework of competencies that can inform efforts to develop the leadership capacity of employees at every level to support organizational change for gender equality.

Organizational culture is defined as the set of beliefs, assumptions, norms and values that are shared by members of an organization and is influenced by its past, environment, and industry<sup>2</sup>. Significant research demonstrates that organizational culture can either help or hinder progress towards gender equality goals. Beyond behaviors and policies, leadership for gender equality must become embedded into the culture, structures and systems of the organization, reinforced as a core value lived every day by the leadership on down. In addition, in order for leaders to effectively champion gender equality, they must possess the required knowledge and skills to contribute to an organizational culture that is diverse, inclusive and supportive of women's and men's personal and professional development.

These findings, revealing the complex nature of gender-transformation change, point to the need for leadership capacity development and organizational change to be reexamined in order to support the transformation necessary for sustained equality in the workplace, including the representation of women.

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony H. Normore & Cristina Trinidad, C., "Leadership and gender: a dangerous liaison?" *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 26 No. 7, 2005 pp. 574-590. Accessed October 30, 2015, <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/01437730510624601>.

## B. Recommended Workplace Strategies

Drawing from EGM findings, following is a summary of recommended workplace strategies which aim to prepare leaders within the UN system with the skills, awareness and support needed to meet the strategic objectives of gender equality. The various tools, techniques, and types of knowledge proposed should form part of any comprehensive capacity development plan fitting the purpose of gender equality, including increasing the representation of women at all ranks.

- **Distributed Leadership Capacity Development:** Develop leadership capacity for gender equality at three main levels: i) senior managers; ii) gender focal points; and iii) staff in general.
- **Formal Training:** Incorporate gender equality considerations into leadership training and leadership into gender-specific modules using a long-term transformative learning approach.
- **Awareness-Raising on Unconscious Bias:** Educate men and women about conscious and unconscious bias, not only in their attitudes, but in their internal organizational practices and assumptions which might have a differential impact on male and female staff careers.
- **Mentorship, Coaching, and Sponsorship:** Offer special programs to support the career advancement of women, which may include women's mentoring, coaching, women-specific training and/or development of informal women's networks.
- **Organizational Culture:** Proactively embed the mutually reinforcing values of leadership development and gender equality into the culture of an organization, starting with the commitment and consistent messaging of senior executives. Extend buy-in for gender equality.
- **Performance Evaluation:** Monitor, evaluate, and recognize the performance of leaders in promoting gender equality and inclusive leadership through formal and informal accountability mechanisms.

These proactive strategies will help organizations to meet the prerequisites of gender parity by supporting inclusive and transformative leadership practices and an organizational culture fitting the purposes of gender equality,

## II. Report on Equal Representation of Women through the Lens of Leadership and Organizational Culture

This report provides information on the mutually reinforcing elements of leadership and organizational culture to promote sustained equality in the workplace, including the representation of women. It summarizes EGM findings, building upon discussions, individual papers and research prepared by the experts on specific issues for the meeting, and good practices successfully implemented within the UN and at other organizations worldwide.

### A. Introduction

A central part of UN Women's mandate is to lead, promote and coordinate the accountability of the United Nations system's work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. This includes supporting UN system entities to make progress towards the General Assembly goal of gender parity in staffing, of which organizational culture constitutes a fundamental component.

While progress has been made within the UN in achieving this goal, the pace has been slow. In 1995, the United Nations General Assembly called for 50/50 gender balance at all levels of the United Nations Secretariat by the year 2000. However, fifteen years after the target date, women continue to be underrepresented within top UN leadership. Despite the fact that women make up 41.8% of the whole organization, the percentage of women decreases the higher up the ranks. Though the UN has attained or exceeded parity within lower level positions (P-1 and P-2), representation remains under 35% in senior level positions<sup>3</sup>.

A new target date for gender parity within the UN has been set to 2030; yet, without concerted effort to advance the pace of change, at the current rate, according to UN Women, it may take until 2041 just to reach parity in P-3 levels.

The implications of maintaining this gender gap are far reaching. Not only does the United Nations fail to live up to its own mandate for gender equality; it also fails to benefit from the unique perspectives, values and abilities that come with women's full participation at all levels of decision-making and governance. Moreover, it sends a discouraging message to women within the UN of their own chances of career advancement, and to men and women around the world, who look to the UN as a standard-setting organization.

While sex-disaggregated data on staffing is the most evident indicator for gender equality and the empowerment of women, to more effectively measure and advance transformative gender change within the UN system, it is necessary to look beyond numbers. These efforts must also be reexamined through the lens of leadership and organizational culture, prerequisites to sustained equality in all its aspects, including the representation of women.

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<sup>3</sup> UN Women, Coordination Division. Progress towards Gender Parity in the United Nations System, Summary of SG Report A/69/346, 2015. Accessed October 28, 2015, [Link](#).

Increasing research has shown that regardless of how many systems and policies are put into place, enacting an organizational cultural shift that enables the meaningful representation of women is predicated on effective leadership. With this comes recognition of the need for proactive strategies to develop leaders with the skills, capacity and awareness needed to meet the strategic objectives of gender mainstreaming, as well as an enabling culture that allows all employees to succeed.

In order to contribute to a deeper understanding of leadership, its link to organizational culture, and its relevance to the General Assembly goal of 50/50 gender parity in staffing at all levels by 2030, UN Women, in collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), convened an expert group meeting (EGM) from 6 to 8 October, 2015 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The meeting was attended by a range of independent experts with significant experience supporting gender equality initiatives within the United Nations, as well as in the government, non-profit and private sectors. In addition, approximately 70 representatives from 40 agencies attended the meeting.

The EGM sought to foster collegial support and strong partnerships to leverage and lead change for gender equality and the empowerment of women throughout the UN system. To contribute to this goal, experts were assigned to facilitate constructive dialogue; provide cutting-edge research and analysis; and identify good practices related to developing leadership and an organizational culture fitting the purpose of gender equality and overall inclusion in the workplace.

Based on EGM findings, this report makes recommendations to develop institutional practices to strengthen leadership and organizational culture fitting the purpose of gender equality and the empowerment of women throughout the UN system. Recommendations focus on the core components of a comprehensive leadership capacity development plan for gender equality. They also set a path forward to integrate these lessons on leadership into the second phase of the landmark United Nations Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP)<sup>4</sup>.

“Today, more than ever, urgent and sustained action is needed to transform the structures, institutions and norms – economic, political and social – that are holding back progress on gender equality. These systemic changes must be deep and irreversible.”

- Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka Under-Secretary-General Executive Director, UN Women

available at: [“BEIJING + 20: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE The Representation of Women and the United Nations system.”](#)

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<sup>4</sup> Adopted in 2012, the UN-SWAP provides a unified accountability framework for the United Nations to achieve its goals for gender equality and the empowerment of women. It outlines 15 agreed performance indicators focused on gender balance in staffing, including human resources, gender architecture and organizational culture.

## B. The Interconnection between Leadership and Gender Equality

According to the UNDP Gender Equality Seal (2015), “**leadership and advancing gender equality are inter-connected, as the very nature of gender mainstreaming requires organizational change that ultimately calls for effective leadership.**” At the same time, gender equality has been framed as an instigator for leadership, supporting not just gender equality in itself, but all efforts towards progress, innovation and social change.

For the purpose of this report, **leadership** can be defined as a process by which an individual can influence the behavior and work of others to achieve a common goal.

**Gender mainstreaming** can be described as the means by which leaders achieve the goal of gender equality. This includes taking actions to improve gender balance among staff.

In beginning a discussion on the leadership needed within the UN for effective gender mainstreaming, experts began by examining *what* ideas, values and processes are being mainstreamed in gender mainstreaming, including:

- **Women as decision-makers** about social values and development directions (agenda-setting)
- Gender equality is recognized as **not just a “women’s issue” but a societal one**
- Gender equality goals **influence mainstream economic and social policies** that deliver major resources
- **Gender equality is pursued from the center** rather than from the margins
- The legitimacy of **gender equality and women’s empowerment as fundamental values**

The ability to mainstream such ideas, values and processes within an organization depends highly on effective leadership. Within the context of the UN’s efforts to mainstream gender equality considerations, experts began by observing *how* individuals within UN entities are promoting gender mainstreaming through the practice of leadership fitting the purpose of gender equality. The following section summarizes these observations, drawing lessons from leadership theory.

## C. Leadership Fitting the Purpose of Gender Equality

### a. Leadership Theory

**Experts agree that change management is key to leadership fitting the purpose of gender equality, yet the concept of how leaders effectively direct such change is very subjective.**

There are various theories to explain how and what makes successful leaders excel in what they do. Three core leadership theories provide a basis for this analysis: trait theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory. There is no absolute formula for the perfect leader; however, following the

notion that leaders are made rather than born, these theories can provide insights into how we assess and develop leaders to promote the goal of gender equality.

## 1. Trait Theory – What Type of Person Makes a Good Leader?

The trait theory, one of the earliest theories on leadership, focuses on the observable personal/innate traits of leaders – both successful and unsuccessful, to predict leadership effectiveness.

Drawing from this theory, EGM findings identified the following traits, displayed by effective gender champions within the UN, as most fitting the purpose of gender equality<sup>5</sup>:

- Gravitas/charisma/commands respect
- Passionate
- Honest
- Open-minded
- Strategic
- Genuine/authentic
- Adaptable
- Courageous and convicted
- People-centered and committed to serving others and humanity
- Self-aware/emotionally intelligent

While the trait theory can offer a useful benchmark against which observable leadership traits of an individual can be assessed and developed, it fails to take into account the impact of the situation on leadership behavior and effectiveness, including gender bias, as will be elaborated further later.

“A certain type of individual looks for purpose over power. There is a power in this. Let us prove that what we do is good for all. **Leadership without purpose can bring raw power. Leadership with purpose can bring revolution.**”

- Aparna Mehrotra, Senior Adviser and Focal Point for Women in the UN system at UN Women

## 2. Behavioral Theory – What does a Good Leader Do?

The behavioral theory of leadership, also known as “The style approach to leadership” examines what leaders do and how they act. As opposed to trait theory, which sees leadership as inherent,

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<sup>5</sup> EGM experts and participants identified leadership qualities and behaviors most fitting the purpose of gender equality within the UN system through small group discussion, observational research from UNDP’s Gender Equality Seal and preliminary results from a mapping and needs assessment conducted by the UN Women Training Centre on existing leadership capacity development initiatives and organizational needs within the UN.

it focuses on leadership as a pre-defined set of behaviors that can be learned like any other behavior.

While leadership behavior undoubtedly affects performance, and the behavioral theory may help people to develop particular leadership behaviors, it offers little guidance as to what constitutes effective leadership in different situations.

### 3. Contingency Theory – How Does the Situation Influence Good Leadership?

In contrast, the contingency theory, also known as the situational theory, examines leadership behavior according to the context. It requires the leader to evaluate and adapt to the organizational context in determining the best way to apply leadership. It assumes that there is no one single profile of an effective leader. Instead, leaders should evaluate the needs of the organizational context and adapt their leadership style accordingly.

### 4. A Gender Analysis of Leadership Theories

In an effort to explain gender disparities in career advancement, many theorists have focused on the examination of differences in leadership styles between men and women using the trait and behavioral theories. Their results appear inconclusive. Some theorists argue that there are no differences in the leadership styles employed by men and women. Others have found that women on average adopt a more democratic or participative style, while men typically display a more autocratic or directive style<sup>6</sup>.

Regardless of these non-conclusive findings, by not taking into account situational impact on leadership, such **over-emphasis on sex differences in explaining women's lower status in the workplace, may reduce the complexity of gender inequities to simplistic notions absent of gender and power dynamics**<sup>7</sup>. In order to understand leadership differences in a more nuanced fashion, many theorists are therefore shifting to the contingency theory. One such prominent example is the research of Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who examined settings in which women were trying to succeed. In her analysis, she attributed women's behavior and challenges not to innate gender differences but to their relative lack of power and token status in most organizations<sup>8</sup>.

#### b. Leadership Styles Fitting the Purpose of Gender Equality

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Moran, "Gender Differences in Leadership," *Library Trends*, Vol. 40, No. 3, Winter 1992, pp. 475-91, accessed October 28, 2015,

[https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/7791/librarytrendsv40i3h\\_opt.pdf?sequence=1](https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/7791/librarytrendsv40i3h_opt.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>7</sup> Sharon Buckmaster, "Leadership and Gender: Let Me Count the Ways," Depth Paper KA9, Fielding Graduate Institute, May 20, 2004, accessed October 1, 2015,

<http://www.futureworksconsulting.com/resources/ka9leadership.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, New York: Basic Books, 1977.

A valuable lesson learned from the contingency theory is not only that organizational culture can impact the effectiveness of leaders (particularly women), but also that leaders should adapt their style to the needs of the people and the organization they are leading, and the particular demands of the situation.

**With regards to the demands of promoting gender equality, and meeting the needs of women in the workplace, experts identified transformational, distributed and inclusive leadership styles as most fitting.** Other fitting leadership styles recognized included facilitative leadership and adaptive leadership.

While each style may emphasize somewhat different approaches to leadership, there is significant cross-over between these various styles, which are largely influenced by feminist movements. A common thread across them all is that they are all based on the values of equality, inclusion and social change.

### 1. Transformational Leadership Style:

EGM findings revealed that **transformative leadership is essential to leading the transformational change process required of gender mainstreaming.**

**Transformational leaders seek to unite people around a vision and social values.** They shape organizational culture, corral followers, and lead by example. They articulate a clear vision, act optimistically and enthusiastically, show confidence in their followers and help them reach their potential. These leaders communicate well, verbally and nonverbally to explain values, give feedback and offer coaching to their followers.

**This type of leadership focuses on the social and political context and on social change, with the goal of enhancing equity.** It also focuses on social betterment and the reshaping of one's knowledge.

Many participants observed a gradual push for leadership within their respective entities. They identified the following transformative leadership behaviors exhibited by gender champions within the UN system:

- Intentionally lead a **transformative** agenda
- Promote a **long-term vision** about management and gender equality and why it is important for the organization
- **Manage and scales up organizational change**
- **Translate gender equality concepts into programs and interventions**
- **Remove obstacles/processes/systems** that conflict with needed change
- Intervene when people are denied opportunities & **actively seeks to redistribute power**
- **“Practice what you preach”**— emulate gender equality in one's own life
- **Hold themselves and others accountable**
- Proactively **invest in the leadership** of women (particularly young women)

- **Emphasize the path and results**
- Build a **sense of purpose** (offering something beyond individual performance)
- Adopt a **holistic and multidisciplinary perspective**

Recognizing the need for leaders to transform expectations and consistent messaging regarding a gender-sensitive, inclusive and balanced organizational culture, they also identified the following relevant behaviors:

- Through consistent means and messages, create an **enabling environment for gender equality and other sensitive issues to be raised**
- **Align gender equality agenda** to the agenda of the organization
- **Value work-life balance:** allow flexible work schedules, judging people by output rather than the rigid time schedule at one's desk

Experts recognized the need for UN-SWAP to be supported by transformative leadership from the top, though this transformative process must also trickle down from headquarters to the country level. This link with the field level needs to be enhanced to take advantage of synergies.

## 2. Distributed Leadership Style:

**Distributed leadership is applied to all organizational levels and dissociated from hierarchy.** This style challenges glorification of an individual “heroic” leader (more prevalent in transformational leadership). Rather than focus on an individual leader, trait, activity, or feature of the situation, leadership is seen more systemically, as a collective social process emerging through the interactions of multiple actor<sup>9</sup>.

Participants recognized the notion promoted by this theory that **leadership is not linked to grade**, as people at lower grades also affect change. Nonetheless, power, influence and hierarchy do matter, particularly within the UN system. This dynamic can produce tension. While those in positions of power have the potential to catalyze real change for gender equality, such potential is often not realized.

Despite such challenges, participants were able to identify effective behaviors exhibited by gender champions in the UN associated with distributed leadership:

- Focus on **relationship building** (i.e., building allies/networking; collegial approaches; team-based management)
- Promote **multilayered/distributed** leadership and the value of collective (flat structure, allowing interconnections, diluting silos and boundaries among programs, etc.)

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<sup>9</sup> Bolden, Richard, “Distributed Leadership in Organizations: A Review of Theory and Research,” *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 13, 251–269, 2011, accessed October 8, 2015, [https://www.mnsu.edu/activities/leadership/distributed\\_leadership.pdf](https://www.mnsu.edu/activities/leadership/distributed_leadership.pdf).

UN Women in particular already has demonstrated the positive impact distributed leadership can produce towards gender equality through its active network of gender focal points in UN offices, specialized agencies, funds and programs throughout the system.

It was agreed that sustained equality cannot take place unless everyone contributes to this long-term change process. This includes senior executives, who should be regularly included in communications to gender focal points related to decision making on UN-SWAP.

One participant likened this to the “IKEA effect,” referencing the extra care people take to prevent their IKEA furniture from breaking once they have worked together to build it. In terms of UN-SWAP, the participant noted, **“When people are participating in the process—coming up with templates and tools - they will own the product.”**

### 3. Inclusive Leadership Style:

**An inclusive leader aims to create an environment to drive equality through inclusiveness and adaptability—**keys to the success of today’s organization<sup>10</sup>. They act as a catalyst to ensure diversity of thinking in an organization, which is gaining prominence as a disruptive force needed to break through the status quo.

There has been a shift in recent management writing from traditional hierarchical and authoritarian management, and its top down chain of command, towards supporting a more democratic and participative style of leadership<sup>11</sup>. This shift points to **inclusion as the new paradigm of leadership**, defining the inclusive leader as someone who is intellectually curious, culturally agile, and collaborative<sup>12</sup>.

According to cultural historian Riane Eisler, **the workplace is transforming into a more human, people-centered place, where women’s leadership can finally be at home**<sup>13</sup>. As a case in point, surveys of 64,000 citizens in 25 nations conducted by social theorist John Gerzema reveal that some of the most innovative people (men and women) are breaking away from traditional leadership structures and are deploying what are considered feminine strengths and values to recover from an economic and social crisis and create a more hopeful future (coined, the Athena Doctrine). Around the world, he found people informally adopting more a flexible, collaborative and nurturing style, which emphasizes cooperation, long-term thinking and flexibility<sup>14</sup>. These

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<sup>10</sup> Deloitte, “Inclusive leadership will a hug do?” Human Capital, Deloitte Australia Point of View, 2011, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/human-capital/deloitte-au-hc-diversity-inclusive-leadership-hug-0312.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Moran, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Wendy Mackey Jones, Professional Women’s Network Amsterdam, 2014, accessed October 10, 2015, <http://www.pwnamsterdam.net/working-groups/inclusive-leadership>.

<sup>13</sup> Riane Eisler, Women, men, and management: Redesigning our future, *Futures*, 23 (I), 1-18, 1991.

<sup>14</sup> John Gerzema, “What It Takes to Get There Is Not What It Takes to Lead,” *Huffington Post*, October 17, 2013, accessed October 30, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-gerzema/what-it-takes-to-get-ther\\_b\\_4115966.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-gerzema/what-it-takes-to-get-ther_b_4115966.html).

transformative styles also break away from authoritarian or transactional leadership, which tends to operate within the confines and limits of the existing culture<sup>15</sup>.

There is growing recognition that **inclusive leadership is not only most effective in adapting to today's fast paced global economy; it also is conducive to the complementary goal of fostering women's advancement**. Research has shown that in organizational structures that are more collaborative versus top down hierarchical, more women emerge as leaders. For example, in her recent study in *Organization Science*, Professor Raina Brands contends that male leaders are perceived as more charismatic (i.e., inspirational and motivating) in centralized networks, where there is a "clear pecking orders and stratification of status and power." In contrast, in more cohesive and less hierarchical leadership model, where "everyone goes to everybody else for advice," female leaders are seen as more charismatic than men<sup>16</sup>.

Demonstrating some push towards inclusive leadership within the UN, EGM findings identified the following behaviors exhibited by effective gender champions within the UN system:

- Go beyond top-down approaches to leadership, by instead **fostering inclusion and collaboration and a collective vision**
- **Motivate** and **reward** their staff for inclusive behavior by praising those who work together to make change happen
- Remain **involved on a day to day basis** with the gender focal team

#### 4. Facilitative Leadership Style:

EGM findings also identified **facilitative leadership as an emerging leadership paradigm contributing to equality efforts in organizations, governments and institutions**. Facilitative leadership is a co-creative leadership model that pushes leaders to be effective at facilitating deep collaboration, ensuring that all parties involved, including leaders, are undergoing transformations through the work in which they are engaging<sup>17</sup>.

Participants observed the following behaviors used by gender champions at the UN that fall within facilitative leadership, among other fitting leadership styles:

- **Create spaces for people to engage in dialogue, rather than debate**
- **Transparent** in sharing the why and what is being done for gender equality
- Give **good feedback**
- **Listen well** to input and advice

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectation*. New York: The Free Press, 1985.

<sup>16</sup> Rachel Sugar, "Why the future of work is looking brighter for women," Business Insider, June 12, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/demise-of-traditional-corporate-structures-shake-up-whos-on-top-2015-6>.

<sup>17</sup> Ten Directions, "What is Facilitative Leadership? 2014, accessed October 15, 2015, <https://tendirections.com/facilitative-leadership/>.

## 5. Adaptive Leadership Style:

A promising model now used by the United Nations System Staff College and the United Nations Development Group is **adaptive leadership**, which emerged from more than thirty years of research at Harvard University by Dr. Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky.

Adaptive Leadership, according to Cambridge Leadership Associates, is “a practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. **It is being able, both individually and collectively, to take on the gradual but meaningful process of change.** It is about diagnosing the essential from the expendable and bringing about a real challenge to the status quo<sup>18</sup>.”

EGM findings identified within the UN the following adaptive leadership behaviors utilized by gender champions:

- Promote **innovation**, groundbreaking ideas, etc.
- Practice **continuous and agile learning and improvement**

### c. Resiliency in Leadership Styles for Gender Equality

Experts recognized the complementary nature of these different leadership styles, noting that while **UN gender focal points are part of distributed leadership, there is also a need to complement this with transformative, facilitative and adaptive leadership**— developing, pushing and engaging others towards a vision of inclusion. Understanding these different approaches to leadership will enable gender champions to develop resilience in choosing the right style to assert leadership for the cause of gender equality that is right for each situation.

While there is no perfect leadership style, experts agreed that **neither transactional leadership (promoting compliance through rewards and punishment) nor authoritarian leadership (dictating policies and procedures) will be effective for this cause.**

### d. Cultural Shifts in Leadership for Change:

Beyond gender champions, increasing research shows that the skills and qualities of the before mentioned styles of leadership are required of all leaders to ensure the effectiveness and success within their organization. As it may be, **the abilities socially ascribed to women and generally**

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<sup>18</sup> Cambridge Leadership Associates, “What is Adaptive Leadership?” 2015, accessed October 10, 2015, <http://cambridge-leadership.com/adaptive-leadership/>.

understood as feminine (i.e., empathy, capacity for listening, relational ability), happen to be those increasingly associated with our understanding of good leadership.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, despite rhetoric supporting the needs for the organizational cultural shifts described above, there is ample evidence showing that many organizations struggle to put it into practice. This has been attributed to the fact that **new models require changing old ways of thinking, as well as to subtle issues of gender and power.**<sup>20</sup>

According to Historian James MacGregor Burns, **some of this breakdown of ridged gender role stereotypes shaping our understanding and practice of leadership will also naturally occur as more women are accepted as leaders.**<sup>21</sup> This, he argues, will enable men to change their leadership styles, because the option will be available to them.

For organizations like the United Nations, seeking to be at the cutting edge of innovation and social change, standing on the sidelines for such organizational and cultural change to organically happen is not an option. In the face of increasing pressure to advance the pace of change towards sustained equality within the UN, **a proactive and comprehensive capacity development strategy that fosters and rewards leadership styles fitting the purpose of gender equality is essential.**

#### D. Core Elements of Leadership Capacity Development for Gender Equality

The before mentioned assessment of leadership qualities and behaviors/styles provide a useful framework of competencies and approaches that can inform efforts to evaluate and build the capacity of leaders to meet the purpose of gender equality.

Drawing primarily from the transformative and distributive leadership styles, experts recognized leadership capacity development **as an ongoing transformative process to raise awareness and change behaviors of leaders at every level over a prolonged period of time.** This process must be reinforced by political buy in and commitment from senior leadership, as well as an enabling environment that supports processes of change and transformation.

According to a 2015 review of corporate gender equality evaluations in the UN System, conducted by UN Women with UNEG, Evalpartners and Evalgender, **limited capacity is a main hindering factor to gender equality.** The review also found **that capacity assessment has not been systematically conducted in gender equality evaluations.** Such results affirmed **the need for greater assessment of the effectiveness of leadership capacity development strategies employed throughout the United Nations.**

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<sup>19</sup> Center for Gender in Organizations (CGO). (2002). "The Greatly Exaggerated Demise of Heroic Leadership: Gender, Power, and the Myth of the Female Advantage." CGO Insights Briefing Note, Number 13, Simmons School of Management, Boston, MA, [link](#).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.

Recognizing this need, experts identified the following core elements, including various tools and techniques, and types of knowledge, through which any comprehensive capacity development plan for gender equality should be developed and evaluated.

- a. Distributed Leadership Capacity Development
- b. Formal Training
- c. Awareness-Raising on Unconscious Bias
- d. Mentorship, Coaching, and Sponsorship
- e. Organizational Culture
- f. Performance Evaluation

#### a. Distributed Leadership Capacity Development

**According to EGM findings, leadership capacity for gender equality must be developed at three main levels: i) senior executives; ii) gender focal points; and iii) staff in general.**

Drawing upon lessons learned from the distributed leadership practices of UN-SWAP, following is a summary of institutional challenges and forward strategies that UN entities have employed or could employ to further empower managers and staff throughout the United Nations to take ownership on issues related to gender and inclusion.

#### 1. Senior executives

Effective leadership development for gender equality requires the active commitment and engagement of senior leaders, who set and fund priorities. Senior leaders, including appointed UN leaders, need to be prepared to take a transformative leadership approach to the gender equality agenda, taking ownership through active dedication of their time and resources.

According to EGM experts and participants, appointed leaders may have greater power, though they are only there for a fixed term on rotation, and may be less inclined to champion the UN-SWAP agenda. These appointed officials can either enable or disable the efforts of UN-SWAP. Therefore, **it was recommended that Member States assess gender-sensitive and inclusive leadership qualities among their political appointees before filling such posts.**

Experts also recognized the need to implement new ways of learning and engagement for senior executives. One participant suggested bringing high-level people to address UN top leadership to get their appreciation and buy-in on the work being done around the UN-SWAP. One opportunity to do this could be at meetings between Under Secretaries and the Secretary General.

## 2. Gender focal points

Investment in the capacity of UN gender focal points, assigned to support staff in gender mainstreaming, is an important investment towards the goal of gender equality.

In many cases, gender focal points are primarily women, drawn overwhelmingly from the junior cadre of staff and are not necessarily specialists. Despite their leadership potential and commitment to drive change, gender focal points must overcome many externally imposed obstacles. In particular, EGM experts and participants observed that gender focal points often face resistance from senior and UN external leaders at the top, who are appointed by Member States at different levels.

In line with overall efforts to support the advancement of high-potential women and men at every stage of their career, **gender focal points require opportunities for professional development throughout their term of office, including access to advice and support from gender specialists in other parts of the Secretariat.** UN Women, by providing ongoing technical support and resources to gender focal points, and holding nine UN-SWAP meetings on various topics, has championed this cause.

Gender focal points and other gender champions in particular require greater authority and political savvy to build internal alliances while also working through challenges with external appointed UN leadership. One UN entity sought to address this by giving a P-5 full-time responsibility to work on the UN-SWAP.

Another strategy to invest in the leadership of gender focal points is succession planning—ensuring that there are people in place to take on the UN-SWAP advocacy role. This requires getting younger people involved and people across departments.

## 3. Staff in general

Individual and collective transformation towards gender equality requires that all staff develop the necessary skills, awareness and behaviors to effectively contribute to an inclusive environment that promotes gender equality. EGM discussions therefore focused on **how to leverage leaders no matter where they are in the organization's ranks to have some positive effect**, as well as how to prepare/groom promising future leaders who have potential to be transformative leaders for gender equality and parity.

Within the UN system, investing in such internal leadership can also help maintain continuity towards the gender equality agenda regardless of turnover in executive leadership. For example, one UN entity reported that it took two years to get the support of the Executive Director to the UN-SWAP because the person in this role rotated every three to five years. To address this, the entity recognized the need for HR to invest in internal leadership by engaging the thirty long-term staff members at the P-4 and P-5 levels as change agents.

Other strategies to engage staff across other areas include facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration on UN-SWAP (for example, finance leads were invited to join gender focal points at a UN-SWAP training on gender budgeting).

Various UN entities are also seeking to inform more people about issues of gender and inclusion using **different outreach and communication strategies that support UN-SWAP** in a straightforward and attractive way. This may include engaging promotional materials, social media strategies, open-access webinars and briefings with relevant data on gender at large conferences. Such strategies help to ensure that gender is always on the agenda.

## **b. Formal Training**

The UN Women Training Centre conducted a review of how training for gender equality has evolved from the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, in order to develop strategies for moving forward in this field. The review found that since the Beijing Platform, **training has been an important “tool and strategy to effect individual and collective transformation towards gender equality** through consciousness raising, empowering learning, knowledge building and skill development<sup>22</sup>”. UN-SWAP has affirmed this view by requiring all UN bodies to provide on-going mandatory training for all levels of staff at HQ, regional and country offices.

**To prepare leaders to meet the transformative goals of gender equality, experts agreed that the approach to training for gender equality itself must be transformative.** A long-term transformative approach to learning goes beyond knowledge and skills to involve a shift in mental models and personal beliefs—contributing to a personal commitment towards a vision of gender equality. **It also makes a distinction between leadership and management** (though the two roles cannot be easily separated). Management involves such tasks as planning, organizing, focusing on systems and structures, whereas leadership requires motivating, inspiring, innovating people for change and inspiring trust.

**Such a distinction is particularly significant given the humanity/people component of promoting organizational change for gender equality in the workplace,** which must be managed regardless of how many systems and policies are put into place. “It is people pulling the levers,” stated one expert.

While progress has been made in this area, experts agreed that **more attention is needed on what the UN does with respect to management development from a perspective of transformative leadership for gender equality.**

UN training models still have a long way to go in reflecting a transformative new approach to leadership. Experts observed that **most training in the UN is still highly transactional/management-based.** For years, the UN has followed the same approach to management development, focusing

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<sup>22</sup> UN Woman Training Centre, “Training for Gender Equality 20 Years On,” 2015, accessed October 30, 2015, [Link](#).

primarily on a five-day leadership training for UN staff who want to be managers. Stated one participant, “training isn’t the final solution. We need a long-term behavioral change process, rather than short-term diluted interventions with no follow-up.”

Fortunately, experts recognized that **UN agencies are increasingly switching towards a more long-term approach towards grooming leaders.** They are identifying high potential junior leaders and giving them a range of experiences to raise their awareness and prepare them in a managerial role, so they can exercise leadership effectively.

Among various UN entities employing this long-term approach towards training for gender equality, experts identified the following effective training strategies:

- Develop and support communities of change
- Build personal commitment towards a vision of gender equality by helping leaders to relate their own experience to the issue
- Provide multiple opportunities/spaces for reflection
- Reconvene groups at regular intervals over a prolonged period of time
- Offer courses that enable face to face interaction
- Accommodate different learning styles by offering a variety of learning strands/modules (e.g., face to face, online coaching, shadowing, self-directed, other)
- Offer ongoing support over a long-term timeframe, as change takes time

These transformative learning approaches should be applied to integrate leadership into gender-specific training modules, as well as to integrate gender equality considerations into existing leadership trainings throughout the United Nations system.

### c. Awareness-Raising on Unconscious Bias

#### 1. Gender Bias in the Workplace

Throughout the EGM, participants recognized the powerful influence of social ingrained gender roles and expectations, which tends to frame women through the lens of their reproductive role while viewing men through their leadership. Such gender bias, according to researchers Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb, “erects powerful but subtle and often invisible barriers for women that arise from cultural assumptions and organizational structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently benefit men while putting women at a disadvantage.”<sup>23</sup> **Despite policies and systems in place for gender equality and the empowerment of women, the desired behavior change towards gender equality will not take place until instances of gender bias in the workplace are interrupted and transformed.**

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<sup>23</sup> Herminia Ibarra, Robin J. Ely, Deborah M. Kolb, “Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers,” *Harvard Business Review*, September, 2013, accessed October 1, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2013/09/women-rising-the-unseen-barriers>.

Even with more women than ever in top leadership positions worldwide, leader stereotypes remain predominantly masculine<sup>24</sup>. In turn, according to Robin Ely, Harvard Business School professor, assumptions about women's leadership and performance are often based on gender stereotypes rather than facts<sup>25</sup>. According to research by Raina Brands, an assistant professor of organizational behavior at London Business School: "Even if men and women behave the same, there is still this attribution bias. We just tend to think of men as better leaders."<sup>26</sup> This subtle bias can manifest itself in many ways, including in hiring and promotions. As noted the expert noted: "Despite diversity efforts, people are still hiring mini-me's."

Reports from women's associations within the UN, external civil society groups and UN offices themselves indicate that the United Nations is far from impervious to this occurrence. **There is plenty of evidence documenting slower promotions and fewer prestigious awards or appointments for women within the UN**<sup>27</sup>.

There are **three key components to combat unconscious bias** in the workplace: i) **education** (i.e., learning about the potential of unconscious bias); ii) **accountability** (e.g., accountability measures like the UN Gender Marker); and iii) **structures/processes** (e.g., when conducting interviews, how do we look at performance management?). While each component is essential, **awareness-raising on unconscious bias is an essential first step, and critical to any comprehensive leadership capacity development plan for gender equality.**

## 2. Education on Unconscious Bias

Blind spots on the presence of gender bias deter organizations from taking a look within to uncover the real obstacles to gender diversity. It is therefore critical that organizations **educate men and women about conscious and unconscious bias, not only in their attitudes, but in their internal practices and assumptions, which might have a differential impact on men and women's careers**<sup>28</sup>. Such education can be done through direct management training, as well as an organization-wide message that gender bias is unacceptable. It must help men and women to reexamine how they and their colleagues hire, assign work, evaluate, and promote female employees to identify factors perpetuating gender bias. Once identified, leaders must be able to identify ways to disrupt such instances of bias at different stages of the employee life cycle.

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<sup>24</sup> Ioana M. Latu, Marianne Schmid Mast, Joris Lammers, Dario Bombari, "Successful Female Leaders Empower Women's Behavior in Leadership Tasks." *Harvard Business Review*, 2013, accessed October 2, 2015, <http://gap.hks.harvard.edu/successful-female-leaders-empower-womens-behavior-leadership-tasks>.

<sup>25</sup> Katie Johnston, "Harvard aims to take on gender bias with new initiative," *Boston Globe*, May 19, 2015, accessed October 28, 2015, [link](#).

<sup>26</sup> Sugar, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Donald Steinberg, "The United Nations and Women: Walking the Walk on Empowerment?" International Crisis Group, 2010, [Link](#).

<sup>28</sup> Ernst & Young, "Women fast forward. The time for gender parity is now," 2015, accessed October 1, 2015, [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-women-fast-forward-thought-leadership/\\$FILE/ey-women-fast-forward-thought-leadership.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-women-fast-forward-thought-leadership/$FILE/ey-women-fast-forward-thought-leadership.pdf).

Parallel skill sets related to education on unconscious bias includes emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and awareness of micro-aggressions:

- According to psychologist David Goleman, a successful strategy to equalize the gender gap in leadership is to build on women’s leadership strengths, and men’s. Data shows that women on average test higher for emotional intelligence than man; however among the top ten percent of performers, such gender differences largely disappear<sup>29</sup>. **Helping high potential men and women early to develop their emotional intelligence-based leadership competencies, as well as the other before-mentioned qualities, may increase the leadership pool while also advancing gender parity.**
- **Developing mindfulness, recognized as a core leadership competency, is also a useful strategy.** When stress increases, one’s empathy decreases. In turn, one’s ability to recognize unconscious bias also decreases. Research has shown that learning mindfulness and how to quiet the brain before taking action can in fact help reduce unconscious bias.
- **Micro-aggressions are subtle practices that may erode women’s motivation to remain in the workplace and limit their chances for career advancement**<sup>30</sup>. Classic examples may include a woman’s comment being ignored in a meeting or someone who looks exactly like others in the organization being hired<sup>31</sup>. Education on unconscious bias should teach leaders to identify and interrupt such micro-aggressions, as well as to use micro-affirmations (e.g., listening, asking questions, using someone’s name, and maintaining a positive tone of voice) which can have a positive effect on women’s advancement.

Such education is very important with middle managers, as **men’s involvement as middle managers is central to the success of gender parity initiatives**.<sup>32</sup> They must be able to understand and call out situations of gender bias, and help colleagues to recognize whether their assessment of employees may be influenced by a gendered perception.

It is also particularly helpful in building the leadership capacity of women. Research has affirmed that most women are unaware when they have been personally victims of gender discrimination and may deny it even when it is objectively true. According to researchers from Boston University and Brandeis University, “if women don’t realize that the playing field is uneven, they tend to stop speaking up and may even blame themselves for losing out on promotions<sup>33</sup>.”

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<sup>29</sup> David Goleman, “Another Way to Lean In,” December 9, 2013, <http://www.danielgoleman.info/daniel-goleman-another-way-to-lean-in/>.

<sup>30</sup> Elisabeth Kelan, “Linchpin – Men, Middle Manager and Gender Inclusive Leadership,” Cranfield University School of Management, 2015, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/dinamic-content/research/Linchpin.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Avivah Wittenberg-Cox & Alison Maitland, *Why Women Mean Business*, Chichester: Jossey-Bass, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Kelan, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Johnston, 2015.

Additional research has shown that **subtle gender bias disrupts the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader**<sup>34</sup>. In addition to educating women on gender bias, to develop leadership identity among women, they also recommend anchoring women’s development efforts in a sense of leadership purpose rather than in how women are perceived.

### 3. Unconscious Bias Programs within the UN

**Numerous UN entities have taken the first step in incorporating unconscious bias work by having an unconscious bias program at some level in their organization.** These include World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), the International Trade Centre (ITC), United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

UN Women is also tackling these challenges from other angles, including efforts to engage men and boys through Barber Shops that gather senior male managers across the UN system to examine gender discriminatory practices and possible counter-measures.

In addition to the increasing number of UN entities incorporating unconscious bias training into their UN-SWAP efforts, it is also promising to see the UN starting to work on these issues through the United Nations' Global Compact WEP, which just launched a call to action on unconscious bias. **The Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs) call on companies to take steps to uncover, raise awareness about, address and reduce unconscious biases throughout their organization, including at the management and leadership levels**<sup>35</sup>.

#### d. Mentorship, Coaching and Sponsorship

In order to combat the effects of gender bias, and support the equal representation of women, EGM participants reviewed women’s mentoring, coaching, and sponsorship as powerful leadership development strategies. **Such special measures to improve the status of women are essential to building a strong pipeline of upwardly mobile women in the workforce.**

Described as “a low-cost, informal means for increasing job satisfaction, motivation and career aspirations” in a report of the UN Secretary-General<sup>36</sup>, women’s mentoring is a relationship-oriented program that seeks to connect women with senior professionals. Mentors provide their mentees advice, guidance and support on challenging career development issues. Coaching is more task-oriented, and involves a content expert (coach) offering one-one-one support to enhance or acquire skills or acquiring new professional skills. Sponsorship, on the other hand,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEP), “WEPs Materials,” 2015, accessed October 10, 2015, <http://www.ipa-involve.com/news/addressing-unconscious-bias-in-the-workplace/>.

<sup>36</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system, A/69/346, 2014, accessed October 30, 2015, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/346&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/346&Lang=E).

involves a powerfully positioned champion who can proactively advocate for a women's professional advancement.

Increasing numbers of UN entities have begun piloting women's mentorship programs to assist women staff members with their career development. While mentors can be male or female, there are particular benefits to pairing women with successful female mentors, particularly those in historically male-dominated fields such as science and technology. Studies confirm that **exposing women to successful women leaders who disprove negative gender stereotypes positively effects women's performance and self-evaluations while eliminating the gender performance gap**<sup>37</sup>.

**Helping to set women up for success through these special measures also helps to combat what researchers have been calling "the glass cliff."** This invisible form of gender bias, validated by research over the last ten years, shows that women are thrust into desperate situations of power without sufficient support with high expectation that they will fail, generating "proof" that women can't handle responsibility<sup>38</sup>.

In terms of sponsorship, experts agree that when HR recognizes rising female talent, it behooves them to invest in their successful advancement. According to one expert, "Research is saying that women are over mentored and under sponsored." Women and people of color and ethnic minorities, in particular, tend to excel when they have sponsors.

While sponsorship in the UN context is particularly sensitive due to protocol around recruitment, there are still parallel networks that can benefit women's advancement in a similar way. "Networked people are being promoted and you need to be plugged into those networks," stated the expert.

WMO's Gender Day at Congress offered one positive example of building such networks. WMO organized a breakfast to pilot a leadership workshop showing that women excel at change management. It addressed not only WMO staff, but also women leaders in WMO's constituencies. The session discussed how women tend to be more collaborative and give credit, which makes them appear less as leaders. They also discussed family roles and pressures, the challenges of self-doubt among women, and gender bias.

#### **e. Organizational Culture**

In order for the above mentioned components of a comprehensive leadership capacity development plan to work, **organizations must intentionally embed the mutually reinforcing values of leadership development and gender equality into the culture of an organization.**

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<sup>37</sup> Bombari, Lammers, Latu, Mast, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Clive Thompson, "Women in Power are Set up to Fail," *New York Times*, December 12, 2008, accessed October 10, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/14/magazine/14Ideas-section4B-t-006.html>.

Organizational culture is defined as the set of beliefs, assumptions, norms and values that are shared by members of an organization and is influenced by its past, environment, and industry<sup>39</sup>.

An organizational culture that promotes gender equality must therefore be reinforced by the commitment and consistent messaging of senior executives — to set the tone at the top. According to experts at the Gender Economics Lab, gender equality “must be a core value that is lived every day by the leadership on down<sup>40</sup>. When we focus on changing behaviors and not on changing the culture, we don’t go far enough to effect a lasting change.”

**An organizational culture supportive of gender equality must also address the more subtle unconscious gender bias embedded within an organization’s culture and work norms** – identified as a primary cause of women’s persistent underrepresentation in leadership roles<sup>41</sup>.

EGM participants reviewed the following ways that organizational culture matters to leadership:

- Can help or hinder progress toward accomplishing gender equality goals
- Explains key patterns within organizations
- Affects the success of any management change
- Impacts the individual empowerment of workers and their collective commitment
- Affects styles of leadership and impact on leaders’ behaviors and their effectiveness

Thus, an organization that embeds leadership development for gender equality into its culture must create an environment that not only interrupts gender bias through gender-sensitive skill building and performance evaluation, but also makes both men and women feel supported, encouraged and recognized in their professional development and career advancement.

## **1. Findings on Organizational Culture within the UN (OHCHR example)**

Significant research identifying the cultural and organizational barriers that continue to hinder women’s advancement exists has been conducted within the private sector, though very little has done on the UN. **The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) therefore conducted a survey in June 2015 over four weeks on gender and organizational culture.** The survey sought to examine what blocks people and the organizational culture from being more transformative. About thirty percent of OHCHR staff participated. Seventy volunteers also took part in focus groups.

The OHCHR survey revealed notable findings relating to the perceived lack of equal career opportunities between women and men, in particular when children come in the equation; the prevalence of unconscious bias related to the perceived higher competency of men by hiring

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<sup>39</sup> Normore & Trinidad, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Gender Economics Lab, “Five Mistakes Most Companies Make When Designing Gender Diversity Programs,” 2015, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.gendereconomicslab.com/category/archives/>.

<sup>41</sup> Center for Gender in Organizations, 2002.

managers; and the tendency of self-imposed limits set by women. In addition, findings revealed that the majority of respondents perceived men and women to generally have different leadership styles, while also recognizing that regardless of style, gender-sensitivity is necessary for good leadership. These findings validate the need to **bring and maintain more women at leadership positions and equip male and female leaders with gender-sensitive leadership skills.**

The OHCHR survey offers a valuable template for other UN entities to follow in assessing issues of gender as it pertains to their organizational culture. To aid in this replication and adaptation, OHCHR has developed a module with their methodology. In addition, UN Women has prepared, through an extensive consultation process, templates for organizational and exits surveys that can be used across the UN system to gather organizational culture.

## 2. Work Life Balance and Expectations

Numerous global studies are beginning to challenge the notion that gender balance in the workplace is due to an ambition gap between men and women. Instead, studies are pointing to the impact of organizational culture and implicit expectations related to work life balance.

For example, a recent study by Lean In and McKinsey of 118 companies and 80,000 employees affirmed that **women and men have equal ambition<sup>42</sup>. When women are asked what they want, it is opportunities for advancement and a work environment that will support them.** Yet, despite relevant work life balance policies, 90% of people felt that if they took a flexible work arrangement available to them, it might impede their progress. Above all, the research showed that **the main reason women leave the workplace is in fact about expectations in the work place.**

Participants throughout the EGM raised the related concern of **creating an enabling environment for those with caretaker responsibilities, particularly women, as they tend to have more responsibility in the home sphere.** In addition to parents with children, experts recognized that depending on the age, older Generation Xers and baby boomers may also have the responsibilities of taking care of other people in their family (aging parents), yet such care is not covered in employee benefits. **These concerns were linked with a big drop of women from P-4 positions upwards.**

Research has revealed that **both men and women consider their family lives and relationships the most important features of their lives<sup>43</sup>.** In addition, “Research from the Working Mother Research Institute and Ernst & Young LLP found that men with access to flex scheduling say they are happier and more productive, have higher morale and loyalty, and maintain better relationships with co-workers than peers who are forced to work traditional schedules<sup>44</sup>”. According to Anne-Marie

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<sup>42</sup> Lean In and McKinsey & Company, *Women in the Workforce 2015, 2015*, accessed October 10, 2015, [http://womenintheworkplace.com/ui/pdfs/Women\\_in\\_the\\_Workplace\\_2015.pdf](http://womenintheworkplace.com/ui/pdfs/Women_in_the_Workplace_2015.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Colleen Ammerman and Robin J. Ely, “Discussing Gender Diversity,” *Live Mint*, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, [link](#).

<sup>44</sup> Gender Economics Lab, 2015.

Slaughter, men want work life balance to care for their family, but don't dare say: **"If we don't changes those roles for men, men will not be able to support women in the way that they support men, and we'll never be able to get to real equality<sup>45</sup>".** She says that the way to address this is by looking at organizations from a well-being perspective.

To address these challenges, experts agreed that leaders need to show by example by respecting family responsibilities and showing that it is possible for both women and men to have work-life balance.

### 3. Violence against Women and the Workplace

For entities to exceed UN-SWAP's performance indicator on organizational culture, senior managers should demonstrate public leadership on an organizational culture supportive of gender equality and women's empowerment through promotion and implementation of relevant policies to ensure an environment free of discrimination, harassment and abuse of power, including sexual harassment.

Yet, despite such requirements, **no UN entity has sufficient policies addressing violence against women (VAW).** UN Women organized an Expert Group Meeting on the subject in 2011, resulting in a circular with legal language related to VAW. However, greater follow-up is needed to finalize a comprehensive policy on the issue. A meeting in Malta in October 2015 with clinicians working on VAW will take place. A ready-made policy will be circulated with an invitation to organizations to volunteer to pilot/promulgate it.

### 4. Gender Sensitivity beyond the Gender Binary

Another important component of a gender inclusive organizational culture is to ensure **a safe and supportive environment that supports people of any sexual orientation and gender identity to transition to bigger professional roles.** This requires going beyond the gender binary by not treating men and women as homogenous groups, and by taking into account issues of sexual orientation and gender identity within the larger gender equality agenda.

This cause has been codified within multiple United Nations Resolutions on sexual orientation and gender identity. **It has been championed by the Free & Equal Initiative, a UN campaign for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality led by the UN Human Rights Office<sup>46</sup>.** The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) has also taken the lead in offering guidance to improve human rights and gender equality responsive evaluation in the UN system.

To begin incorporating these concerns into UN-SWAP initiatives on organizational culture for gender parity, one participant suggested the creation of safe "identity workspaces." Issues of

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<sup>45</sup> *Washington Post*, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Free & Equal Initiative, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <https://www.unfe.org/>.

sexual orientation and gender identity can also be incorporated into education and diversity and unconscious bias among staff.

#### f. Gender-Responsive Performance Evaluation

**One important element of ensuring that gender equality and leadership development is embedded in organizational culture is to include gender inclusive leadership in regular performance evaluation.** This helps to formalize the organization's commitment to gender equality and ensure that gender remains high on the agenda throughout the year.

Performance evaluations can help to track, analyze and monitor individual action to support efforts towards gender parity, and a gender-sensitive and balanced work environment. This can include mandatory goals for managers on their accountability for gender parity and work-life balance, and evaluation of efforts to empower women; challenge working practices; champion and defend gender initiatives; and call out bias. Such requirements can be included in job descriptions, career development and performance management frameworks.

In the case of the UN-SWAP, EGM participants discussed **adding a performance indicator on monitoring and evaluation of the performance of leaders in promoting gender equality and inclusive leadership.** This could primarily be used as a developmental tool for professional level staff starting anywhere from P-3 and above. For staff being selected for promotion, considerations should also include competencies related to promoting gender equality. In this way, people may be eager to be assessed during their development to prepare them for promotion. Assessment can take place using 360 feedback of managers, ensuring a confidential and constructive feedback process.

Not only should leaders be evaluated for their performance in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, **recognition and reward for excellence and innovation in this area should also be part of the ongoing performance management system.** One positive example of such recognition is UNDP's Gender Equality Seal, which recognizes the good performance of UNDP country offices in delivering transformational gender equality results. Performance is measured according to a set of minimum quality standards at UNDP and UN-System wide level and international frameworks around gender mainstreaming (including UN-SWAP). The Seal is used as a voluntary capacity development and oversight tool to incentivize leadership and empower managers. Fifty country offices are currently engaged in the Seal.

#### E. Recommendations

Based on EGM findings, the following recommended workplace strategies aim to prepare leaders within the UN system with the skills, awareness and support needed to meet the strategic objectives of gender equality. The various tools and techniques, and types of knowledge proposed should form part of any comprehensive capacity development plan to support gender equality and the empowerment of women in the workplace, includes increasing the representation of women at all ranks.

## DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

**Recommendation 1: Develop leadership capacity for gender equality at three main levels: i) senior managers; ii) gender focal points; and iii) staff in general.**

- Invest in the leadership potential of gender focal points by offering regular opportunities for professional development, access to advice and support from gender specialists. Where possible, enhance the authority of gender focal points by hiring them at a higher rank. Also seek to ensure younger staff members are involved and staff across functions and departments are part of succession planning for gender focal points.
- Assess the gender-sensitive and inclusive leadership qualities of political appointments before filling such posts. Seek opportunities to bring in high-level staff to address UN top leadership to get their appreciation and buy-in on the work being doing around UN-SWAP.
- Invest in internal leadership by engaging long-term staff as change agents for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Facilitate opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration on UN-SWAP and raise public visibility of gender and inclusion issues through engaging outreach and communication strategies.

## FORMAL TRAINING

**Recommendation 2: Incorporate gender equality considerations into leadership training and leadership into gender-specific modules using a long-term transformative learning approach.**

- Support a move away from transactional/management training based towards transformative leadership capacity development across the UN system.
- Utilize leadership training provided by UN Women Training Centre to help leaders to understand how to implement and monitor gender equality work.
- Equip male and female leaders at all levels with gender-sensitive leadership skills.
- Build training programs to ensure that leaders can develop defined core competencies.
- Frame leadership development as part of a long-term structural and cultural change process rather than as a program.

## AWARENESS-RAISING ON UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

**Recommendation 3: Educate men and women about conscious and unconscious bias, not only in their attitudes, but in their internal organizational practices and assumptions which might have a differential impact on male and female staff careers.**

- Offer unconscious bias sessions to manager and staff, with particular focus on middle managers and female staff.
- Offer unconscious bias sessions to the CEB in the spring session.
- Build policies and processes to reexamine how organizations hire, assign work, evaluate, and promote employees to identify and disrupt instances of bias at different stages of the employee life cycle.
- Incorporate issues of sexual orientation and gender identity into education on diversity and unconscious bias.

#### MENTORSHIP, COACHING, AND SPONSORSHIP

**Recommendation 4: Offer special programs to support the career advancement of women, which may include women’s mentoring, coaching, women-specific training and/or development of informal women’s networks.**

- Encourage entities to develop women’s mentorship and coaching programs, anchoring women’s development efforts in a sense of leadership purpose rather than in how women are perceived.
- Work with HR networks to identify high potential junior leaders and giving them a range of experiences to prepare them in a managerial role, so they can exercise leadership effectively.
- Encourage entities to develop informal women’s networks to promote, strengthen and advance the profile of women at all levels.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

**Recommendation 5: Proactively embed the mutually reinforcing values of leadership development and gender equality into the culture of an organization, starting with the commitment and consistent messaging of senior executives. Extend buy-in for gender equality.**

- Conduct and analyze organizational surveys and exit interviews with regards to gender and organizational culture, including implicit expectations related to work-life balance, instances of gender bias, and perceptions on opportunities and obstacles for professional advancement.
- Train and encourage senior executives to lead by example in addressing subtle unconscious gender bias embedded within an organization’s culture and work norms.
- Engage men through workshops that gather senior male managers to examine gender discriminatory practices and possible counter-measures.
- Promote and implement comprehensive policies addressing violence against women in the workplace.
- Move beyond binary men/women categories in measuring gender equality and gender parity by integrating the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity.

- Promote LGBT-friendly environments by supporting faculty and staff, developing curricula, and advocating for policy change, program development, and creations of safe “identity workspaces.”

## PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

### **Recommendation 6: Monitor, evaluate, and recognize the performance of leaders in promoting gender equality and inclusive leadership through formal and informal accountability mechanisms.**

- Include specific indicators on leadership in the next generation of UN-SWAP, the system-wide accountability mechanism for gender equality.
  - Leadership could be considered either a main category or sub category, perhaps by developing an indicator for inclusive leadership under organizational culture.
  - Develop a common definition for leadership.
  - Develop agreed leadership skills/competencies needed.
  - Encourage entities to reexamine how they hire, assign work, evaluate, and promote female employees to identify factors perpetuating gender bias, and opportunities to interrupt them.
  - Include an indicator increasing the number of applications from women and the number of women short-listed to open UN positions at all level.
- Add an indicator on monitoring and evaluation of the performance of leaders in promoting gender equality and inclusive leadership.
  - Establish a competency based appraisal related to promoting gender equality. This could be applied to recruitment, hiring and promotion—ensuring that people meet core competencies for people management before being assigned to manage people.
  - It could be used as a developmental tool for senior leadership (P-5 or P-6 leaders and above) to prepare them for promotion.
  - Assessment could take place using 360 feedback of managers, ensuring confidentiality, so there’s a way to give feedback in a constructive way.
  - Assess gender-sensitive leadership qualities among political appointees as well.
- Engage the Working Group on Performance Management in the HR network to work on gender responsive management for their own performance indicators, to push this from multiple angles and places within the UN system.

## **F. Conclusion**

Reexamining representation of women in the workforce through the lens of leadership and organizational culture is key to advancing United Nations’ goal towards sustained equality in all its aspects. By promoting leadership styles most fitting the purpose of gender equality, organizations will not only benefit from increased women’s representation, but also an a work culture that enables greater productivity, innovation and social change. A long-term transformative approach to gender-sensitive leadership through training and awareness raising (e.g. gender integration in

leadership programs; leadership integration into gender training modules; women-specific training and mentoring and training on unconscious bias) is essential to any capacity development plan. Accountability measures, including performance evaluations, are also needed to monitor, evaluate and recognize the individual actions towards promoting gender equality and an inclusive organizational culture.

While many organizations around the world have made some progress in their quest for gender equality and the empowerment of women, for most, the goal of 50/50 gender parity remain a distant reality. As a global standard setter, the United Nations, by examining and implementing these changes within its leadership practices and organizational culture, is uniquely placed to set the road map for gender equality worldwide.

### III. Annex

#### Annex A: EGM Agenda



Expert Group Meeting  
Leadership & Gender Parity  
Co-hosted by WMO and UN Women  
*World Meteorological Organization (WMO)*  
*Geneva, 6-8 October 2015*

#### Agenda

##### Tuesday, 6 October 2015

##### UN-SWAP Performance Indicators 10 Gender Architecture and Parity & 11 Organizational Culture

14.30-17.00	1 – Unconscious bias and inclusive workplace (Tanya Odom, external expert)
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##### Wednesday, 7 October 2015

9.00-9.15	2 – Why a session on leadership? (UN Women)
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9.15-9.45	3 – Gender mainstreaming as a change management process towards gender equality (UNDP)
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9.45-11.00	4 – Types of organizations and leaderships fitting the purpose of gender equality (Natalia Navarro Olivan, UNDP expert)
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11.00-11.15	<i>Coffee Break</i>
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10.30-12.30	5 – Types of organizations and leadership fitting the purpose of gender equality (cont'd) (Natalia Navarro Olivan, UNDP expert)
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12.30-13.30	<i>Lunch Break</i>
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13.30-14.00	6 – Sharing the preliminary findings from a Survey on Leadership applied to the UN system (Sarah Murison, external expert)
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14.00-15.30	7 – Challenges and opportunities for UN-SWAP implementation linked to leadership (UNDP and Natalia Navarro Olivan, UNDP expert)
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15.30-15.45	<i>Coffee Break</i>
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15.45-17.00	8 – Sharing lessons learnt from UN entities/private sector on leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Findings of the organizational survey at OHCHR</li></ul>
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	(UN entities, external consultants)
17.00-17.30	9 – Wrap-up of Day (UNDP, UN Women)

Thursday, 8 October 2015

9.00-10.00	10 – Miscellaneous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of gender equality and mainstreaming policies: lessons learnt</li> <li>• Monitoring policy implementation: the case of WMO</li> <li>• UN-SWAP Performance Indicator 5, Evaluation: update</li> <li>• Lessons learnt in UN-SWAP implementation: IAEA</li> </ul> (UN Women, UN entities)
10.00-11.00	11 – UN-SWAP next steps (Tony Beck, external expert)
11.00-11.15	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11.15-12.45	12 – UN-SWAP next steps (continued) (Tony Beck, external expert)
12.45-13.00	13 – Closing (Dr Elena Manaenkova, Assistant Secretary-General, WMO and Aparna Mehrotra, UN Women)

## **Annex B: Background Paper: Foundations of Leadership for Gender Equality**

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

In collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

### **Expert Group Meeting**

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Geneva, Switzerland

6-8 October 2015

## **FOUNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP FOR GENDER EQUALITY**

Background paper prepared by:

Danielle Goldberg<sup>47</sup>  
United States

(Background paper prepared by UN Women, for the Expert Group Meeting on Leadership, 6 – 8, October 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.)

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<sup>47</sup> The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

## FOUNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP FOR GENDER EQUALITY

### INTRODUCTION

As champions for gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the world, the United Nations strives to be representative of those ideals within its own ranks. While progress has been made in achieving this goal, the pace has been slow. In 1994, the United General Assembly called for 50/50 gender balance at all levels of the United Nations Secretariat by the year 2000. However, fifteen years after the target date, women continue to be underrepresented within top UN leadership. While the UN has attained or exceeded parity within lower level positions (P-1 and P-2), representation remains under 35% in senior level positions (UN Women, 2015).

The implications of this gender gap are far reaching. Not only does the United Nations fail to live up to its own mandate for gender equality; it also fails to benefit from the unique perspectives, values and abilities that come with women's full participation at all levels of decision-making and governance. Moreover, it sends a discouraging message to women within the UN of their own chances of career advancement, and to men and women around the world, who look to the UN as a standard-setting organization.

The United Nations joins the ranks of many organizations which have instituted aspirational goals for gender parity, as well as significant investments in time and money, with underwhelming results. A significant body of research exists identifying the cultural and organizational barriers that continue to hinder women's advancement, as well as proven strategies to promote a robust pipeline of upwardly mobile women in the workforce.

In preparation for the Expert Group Meeting in Geneva (6 – 8 October, 2015), this background paper will review some of the most pertinent areas of research related to gender parity and leadership, which may help set the path forward in making the changes necessary to close the gap between policy and practice for 50/50 gender parity within the UN system.

### ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

In order to achieve gender parity, certain prerequisites are required. Beyond a focus on policies, numbers and behaviors, gender equality must become imbedded into the culture of an organization. It must be reinforced by leadership and commitment of senior executives -- to set the tone at the top, reinforced by consistent messages, and efforts to ensure women are well-represented and visible in senior leadership positions (Retention of Women in Law Task Force, 2009). According to experts at the Gender Economics Lab (2015), "It must be a core value that is lived every day by the leadership on down. When we focus on changing behaviors and not on changing the culture, we don't go far enough to effect a lasting change." Numerous studies have confirmed the critical role that an inclusive supportive organizational culture plays in supporting or hindering efforts to advance women's leadership:

- McKinsey & Company (2014) conducted a gender diversity survey of 1,421 global executives. The study found that despite the ambitions of women executives (like men) to make personal sacrifices to secure top management positions, many did not feel confident that the corporate culture would support their rise. Findings indicated that “a favorable environment and collective, cultural factors weighed twice as heavily as individual factors in determining how confident women felt about reaching top management.”
- A global survey of 400 companies by Ernst and Young (2015) also identified a supportive organizational culture as a top enabler of women’s acceleration within the workplace. Respondents also affirmed the need an active CEO who visibly supports the advancement of women. “That attitude cascades throughout and manifests in a myriad of programs that support women and help combat unconscious bias (which men in our study cited as the number one barrier for women in the workplace, and women ranked as number two).”

Significant research suggests that to achieve an organizational culture that embraces gender equality, a holistic multi-year approach is needed towards organizational transformation from the top down (Gender Economics Lab, 2015).

## **INTERRUPTING GENDER BIAS**

Numerous studies affirm that organizational transformation for gender equality can only be achieved if organizations address the more subtle unconscious gender bias embedded within an organization’s culture and work norms – identified as a primary cause of women’s persistent underrepresentation in leadership roles (Center for Gender in Organization, 2011). “This bias erects powerful but subtle and often invisible barriers for women that arise from cultural assumptions and organizational structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently benefit men while putting women at a disadvantage” (Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2013). Classic examples may include a woman’s comment being ignored in a meeting or someone who looks exactly like others in the organization being hired (Wittenberg-Cox & Maitland, 2008). Such subtle practices may erode women’s motivation to remain in the workplace and limit their chances for career advancement (Kelan, 2015).

Even with more women than ever in top leadership positions worldwide, leader stereotypes remain predominantly masculine (Bombari, Lammers, Latu, Mast, 2013). In turn, according to Robin Ely, Harvard Business School professor, assumptions about women’s leadership and performance are often based on gender stereotypes rather than facts (Johnston, 2015). According to research by Raina Brands, an assistant professor of organizational behavior at London Business School, “Even if men and women behave the same, there’s still this attribution bias. We just tend to think of men as better leaders” (Sugar, 2015). Moreover, because women do not fit into the stereotypical mold of a leader, “women are often expected to behave like their male counterparts rather than enhancing their roles with the new and varied talents and fresh perspectives they might bring” (Shavlik & Touchton, 1988).

The subtle nature of gender bias in today's workforce can be even more insidious in undermining women's rise to top positions. According to a study by Bain and Co. of 1,800, two-thirds of the male and one-third of the female respondents thought that promotions to executive and board levels are equally attainable by both sexes (Center for Gender in Organizations, 2011). Such perceptions deter organizations from taking a look within to uncover the real obstacles to gender diversity at the top place. They also place the onus entirely on women's shoulders, perpetuating the narrative that they do not have what it takes to secure leadership roles. A recent book by researchers from Boston University and Brandeis University affirmed this concern, observing that "If women don't realize that the playing field is uneven, they tend to stop speaking up and may even blame themselves for losing out on promotions." (Johnson, 2015).

Various proven strategies have been outlined in the literature to counteract unconscious gender bias and create an environment that better enables women to succeed in the workplace:

- According Ernst & Young (2015) and many others, organizations must educate men and women about conscious and unconscious bias, not only in their attitudes, but in their internal practices and assumptions which might have a differential impact on men and women's careers. This can both through direct management training, and through an organization wide message that gender bias is unacceptable.
- Kelan (2015) affirms that men's involvement as middle managers is central to the success gender parity initiatives. Managers, for example, must understand and call out situations of gender bias, including helping colleagues to recognize whether their assessment of employees may be influenced by a gendered perception. Also, showing gender inclusive leadership ideally should be part of performance evaluation to formalize this commitment.
- Rather than focus on amorphous culture change initiatives, Professor Joan C. Williams (2012) advises organizations to first reexamine how they hire, assign work, evaluate, and promote female employees to identify factors perpetuating gender bias. She then recommends adoption of a new model she calls "bias interrupters." These are small steps that can be quickly implemented and tested in order to generate evidence-based feedback to assess whether the strategy has produced the desired culture change. For example, executives at Google observed that women were nominated less for promotions. They offered workshop to train and encourage women to nominate themselves for promotions, which results in an elimination of the gender disparity. A variety of other effective practices are offered by the Gender Intelligence Group (2015).
- Studies confirm that exposing women to successful women leaders who disprove negative gender stereotypes positively effects women's performance and self-evaluations while eliminating the gender performance gap (Bombari, Lammers, Latu, Mast, 2013).
- Ibarra, Ely and Kolb (2013) reference a significant research showing that subtle gender bias disrupts the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader. To develop leadership

identity among women, they recommend anchoring women's development efforts in a sense of leadership purpose rather than in how women are perceived.

- According to psychologist David Goleman (2013), a successful strategy to equalize the gender gap in leadership is to build on women's strengths, and men's. Data shows that women on average, test higher for emotional intelligence than man; however among the top ten percentage of performers, such gender differences largely disappear. Helping high potential men and women early to develop their emotional intelligence-based leadership competencies may increase the leadership pool while also advancing gender parity.

It is important to note that gender norms and stereotypes do not only impact women. There is a growing awareness by many males that their options and personal development have also been limited by gender norms about what is proper male behavior (Moran, 2002). Moreover, many of the work balance issues, while associated with concerns held by women, also affect men. For example, stereotypical assumptions suggest that women have a unique desire to put family first. Yet research revealed that both men and women consider their family lives and relationships the most important features of their lives (Ammerman & Ely, 2015). In addition, "research from the Working Mother Research Institute and Ernst & Young LLP found that men with access to flex scheduling say they are happier and more productive, have higher morale and loyalty, and maintain better relationships with co-workers than peers who are forced to work traditional schedules" (Gender Economics Lab, 2015). Thus, by uncovering the real obstacles to gender diversity at the top, organizations can take measures to create a more inclusive organizational culture that increases retention, career advancement and high morale for the entire workforce.

## LEADERSHIP STYLES

In an effort to explain gender disparities in career advancement, many theorists have focused on the examination of differences in leadership styles between men and women. The results appear inconclusive. Some theorists argue that there are no gender differences in the leadership styles employed by men and women. Others agree that gender differences in leadership styles do exist and that men often use a more task-oriented approach, while women, on average, rely on a leadership style heavily based on quality of interpersonal leader-follower relationships (Merchant, 2012). Still others both prove and refute this stereotypical view of women, showing that women were more concerned with both maintenance of interpersonal relationships *and* task accomplishment (Moran, 1992). Perhaps the strongest difference found, according to Moran (1992), was that women on average adopted a more democratic or participative style, while men typically adopt a more autocratic or directive style.

According to Buckmaster (2004), such overemphasis on sex differences in explaining women's lower status in the workplace may reduce the complexity of gender inequities to simplistic notions absent of gender and power dynamics. In order to understand leadership differences in a more nuanced fashion, many theorists are shifting from the traditional theory of leadership, (as inherent traits people possess), to a situational notion of leadership. Perhaps the best known proponent of the situational variable hypothesis is management guru Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977). In her book

*Men and Women of the Corporation*, Kanter examined settings in which women were trying to succeed. In her analysis, she attributed women's behavior and challenges not to innate gender differences but to their relative lack of power and token status in most organizations.

Considering the impact of organizational culture on leadership styles of men and women, the real issue is in identifying and promulgating the skills and qualities required of all leaders to ensure the effectiveness and success of the organization. As it may be, the traits socially ascribed to women and generally understood as feminine (i.e., empathy, capacity for listening, relational ability), happen to be those increasingly associated with our understanding of good leadership (Center for Gender in Organizations, 2002). This includes a significant shift in recent management writing from traditional hierarchical and authoritarian management, and its top down chain of command, towards a more democratic, distributive and participative style of leadership (Moran, 1992). This shift points to inclusion as the new paradigm of leadership, defining the inclusive leader as someone who is intellectually curious, culturally agile, and collaborative (Jones, 2014). An inclusive leader acts as a catalyst to ensure diversity of thinking in organization, which is gaining prominence as a disruptive force need to break through the status quo -- key to the adaptability and success of today's organizations (Deloitte, 2012).

Many women have taken the lead in such transformational and effective organizational changes in the workplace. For example Helgensen (1990), who interviewed some of America's most successful women leaders, found that many employed innovative organizational structures and strategies that were more like "webs of inclusion" than hierarchies of exclusion. These "webs" allow for more points of information sharing than the vertical communication flows of traditional hierarchical structures. Thus, she has argued that "in the Information Age, the value of the old pyramid is being questioned as being too bureaucratic, lumbering and muscle-bound for a fast-changing global economy and far too expensive as well" (quoted in Eisler, 1991).

According to Eisler (1991), the workplace is transforming into a more human, people-centered place, where women's leadership can finally be at home. As a case in point, according to surveys of 64,000 citizens in 25 nations by social theorist John Gerzema, some of the most innovative people (men and women) are breaking away from traditional leadership structures and are deploying what are considered feminine strengths and values to recover from an economic and social crisis and create a more hopeful future (coined, the Athena Doctrine). Around the world, he found people informally adopting more a flexible, collaborative and nurturing style, which emphasizes cooperation, long-term thinking and flexibility (Gerzema, 2012). These transformative styles also break away from authoritarian or transactional leadership, which according to Bass (1985), tends to operate within the confines and limits of the existing culture.

There is growing recognition that participative and inclusive leadership is not only most effective in adapting to today's fast paced global economy; it also is conducive to the complementary goal of fostering women's advancement. Research has shown that in organizational structures that are more collaborative versus top down hierarchical, more women emerge as leaders. In her recent study in "Organization Science," Professor Raina Bruns contends that male leaders are perceived as more charismatic (i.e., inspirational and motivating) in centralized networks, where there is a

“clear pecking orders and stratification of status and power.” In contrast, in more cohesive less hierarchical leadership model, where “everyone goes to everybody else for advice,” female leaders are seen as more charismatic than men (Sugar, 2015).

According to Burns (1978), some of this breakdown of ridged gender role stereotypes shaping our understanding and practice of leadership will naturally occur as more women are accepted as leaders. This, he argues, will enable men to change their leadership styles, because the option will be available to them. Such a phenomenon may help to understand current generational shifts in leadership styles. Studies by the Intelligence Group of millennials, for example, have found 79% would want that boss to serve more as a coach or mentor and 88% prefer a collaborative work-culture rather than a competitive one (Gender Economics Lab 2015). This is particularly true among Generation Y women (born between 1980 and 1994). A study on generational shifts by Hudson (2014) revealed that this new generation of women is highly socially confident, ambitious, and people-focused. Hudson concludes that this combination “encourages young women to be confident in establishing and building relationships with their colleagues, direct reports and stakeholders.”

Despite rhetoric supporting the organizational cultural shifts described above, there is ample evidence showing that organizations struggle to put it into practice. This has been attributed both to the fact that new models require changing old ways of thinking, as well as to subtle issues of gender and power (Center for Gender in Organizations, 2002).

According to Brown (1992), as trends change, good leaders must be able to develop the skills that enable them to alter aspects of their culture in order to improve their organizational performance. As more organizations and companies recognize and work towards the goals of promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, executive leaders have the opportunity to help men and women come together to create a new more inclusive culture – one that supports different career paths, career paces and leadership styles for everyone (Ernst & Young, 2015).

In order to champion this cultural shift, research on best leadership practices among senior executives identifies the need for top leaders to build ownership, communicate, lead by example, and initiate and drive culture change (Kelan & Wratil, 2015). This follows the understanding that “if the organization is to be faithful to its philosophy and mission, its leader's style must be consistent with them” (Community Tool Box, 2015). Thus, to be consistent with the philosophy and mission of gender equality, men and women at all levels of leadership must undergo an inside-out process for change. It begins with increased self-awareness and shared responsibility among all leaders from the top down. It is affirmed by participatory and inclusive practices and organizational norms that allow all men and women to meaningfully contribute to the success of an organization at every level of decision-making.

## CONCLUSION

To achieve the goal of gender equality in organizations, it is a political and practical imperative to increase the ranks of women, particularly in senior leadership positions. The efficient use of

women's talent pool is a key driver to the UN's success and harnessing their talent ensures the realization of both men's and women's professional promise. Only with equal representation of women at all levels can gender equality be fully embedded within an organization's culture, and the proven benefits of women's equal participation realized. Efforts to implement such gender change requires personal commitment and concrete action from the top down to interrupt unconscious gender bias and create a workplace environment conducive to women's advancement. Likewise, special measures to identify and promulgate leadership styles proven to effectively attain and sustain gender equality are fundamental. While many organizations around the world have made some progress in their quest for gender equality, for most, the goal of 50/50 gender parity remain a distant reality. As a global standard setter, the United Nations, by examining and implementing these changes within its organizational culture, is uniquely placed to set the road map for gender equality worldwide.

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