Gender Diversity and Leadership in Tomorrow’s Organisations

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What is ATN WEXDEV?

- Collaborative ATN program to support women into senior management
- Began in 1996 with 125 senior women
- By 2003, high profile university-wide women’s program in 5 universities, with 486 women on national e-mail list
In Australia in 2004:

- 12 (30%) of the 40 Vice-Chancellors in Australia were women (2 in the 5 ATNs)
- 34 (26%) of the 129 Deputy and Pro-Vice-Chancellors were women
- Women were 16% of Professors and 24% of Associate Professors
- Women represented 40% of senior staff in the administration stream.
In NSW schools in 2003:

- Women were 40% of the principals in state primary schools
- Women were 38% of the principals in state secondary schools

Education is changing to reflect gender equity, but not rapidly
Major Research Project

- 2001/2: 4 interviewers conducted 260 interviews with senior male and female managers (top 3 levels in 19 organisations)
- Higher education, private sector - 2 financial institutions - and public sector
- Australia-wide
In Higher Education

• In 5 universities
• 81 interviews (50 women, 31 men) in senior positions (Deans, Directors and above)
• 49 academic, 32 in administrative positions
• 51 in age range 50-59, 9 over 60, only 2 30-39 (both admin) - major changes, generation shift, likely in next few years as people retire
• These institutions have commitment to equity
Questions

• Does presence of women in executive positions have any impact?
• Are there changes to cultures when women are in executive positions?
A Warning:

- Expectations of how women and men managed were understood in deeply gendered ways by both men and women.
- Many saw all women as ‘innately’ more caring, cooperative, nurturing and so on.
- In fact because many women do have different life experiences, education, expectations to men, they MAY have alternative views about their work and how best to accomplish their goals in life.
Stereotypes of Male Leadership Styles

• Traditional leadership is defined as male (eg Leadership Summit)
• Seen as hierarchical, “decisions from on high” (‘Neutron Jack)
• Working long hours
• Competitive and aggressive
• Limited emotional engagement with staff
Stereotypes of Female Leadership Styles

- Collaborative
- Consultative
- Working towards consensus
- Discouraging competitive behaviours
- Creating friendly and co-operative working environment
- Developing and nurturing staff
- ‘Emotional intelligence’
Preliminary Findings:

In higher education:

• Male and female career paths differ – men much more mobile
• Men unaware of impact of gender
• This sample of women (50-59) had experienced overt gender discrimination – many feminist
• Women are ‘reticent’ about promotion applications – require encouragement to apply
• Women may ‘resist’ most senior roles
• ‘Critical mass’ at senior level is important
Collaboration

• Women and men saw women as collaborative, “breaking down silos”
• Decisions made with team “as a cabinet”
• Success and praise were shared – but question-mark about failure
• Women seen as having less ego to preserve, hence able to work in teams
Collaboration

“And anecdotally this university’s culture is much more supportive, much more. It’s less, to use a horrible expression, silo-based than many other institutions. I find talking to my peers, there is much more (collaboration) here. As the VC says, we move as a pack.” (Female administrator)
Consultation

• Female executives committed to getting views from a number of people before making final decisions
• Prepared to listen before putting forward own opinion
Consultation

“I think if you asked the Vice-Chancellor about her management style or one of the other senior women they would all say that they’re inclusive, they tend to want to talk to a lot of people, get a wide range of opinions. I do recognise the final call is with them so they exercise that authority when they need to.”

(Male PVC)
Consensus

• Women were seen as committed to getting results
• Prepared to compromise: “let’s try to work it out”
• Not as ready to blame others or to make stands on points of principle
Consensus: building teams

“I’ve also been responsible for leading a lot of change which has been very difficult for a lot of people. So when this position became vacant it was almost incumbent upon me to act and repay the commitment that people had made to the sorts of change agendas that I had had, so that I would actually apply to be part of the next stage with them.” Female VC

The change agenda at this institution was aimed at building shared values and responsibilities. In mid 2002, the press reported that a reshuffle was designed to bring together decision-makers at the university in cabinet-style meetings and to promote collective responsibility - a move to downplay ‘the significance of the VC’ and ‘the cult of the individual.’
Discouraging Competitive Behaviours

• Women talked about ethos of cooperation and politeness – "we don’t behave like that here"
• Women seen as less competitive, with "less testosterone"
• Seeking the ‘Queen Bees’: at other times or in other organisations
Discouragement of competitive behaviours

“In terms of the Deans, there have from time to time been some sort of sub-groupings and there’ve been deals and there’s a boys-ness to it that I from time to time find basically pisses me off, but then I usually say something. And if I do it’s usually to make fun of what they’re doing.” (Female Dean)
Friendly & Cooperative Environment

• Women concerned with establishing friendly relations; importance of welcomes
• Open, approachable, able to take criticism, with a sense of humour
• Transparency
Building Relationships

“Anyone you speak to in this university who is a relatively recent arrival will almost certainly comment on that positive aspect of the place, that it is a pleasant place to work, that people do observe the basic kind of levels of courtesy and friendliness.” Male PVC
Developing & Nurturing Staff

- Women committed to staff development – men also see importance of this
- Mentoring and networking
- Showing staff are valued
- Noticing “people issues”
- BUT Emotional over-commitment
Valuing Staff

“I personally liked being Dean. About seventy percent of it is drudgery but what is very fulfilling about such a position is your ability to make things happen for other people, to see the potential that exists in activities and people and to be able to structure the kind of administrative systems and the resources so that you actually enable those things and spark them off.” (Female Dean)
Values

“Education is a wonderful attribute that has the power to change people’s lives forever. So it is very exciting to be working in an organisation which has that potential and to see people coming in, you know, whose lives are transformed by the service the university offers. I think that’s very exciting. And I guess I loved my own time at university and, you know, it is wonderful to be involved in the education field.

So … what I am hearing is values… Very important, very important. Trust is very important. Transparency is very important. And I mean we do find that people say they’ll stay because of that.” (Female DVC)
Transparency

“There’s a high degree of integrity. Most of the people who exercise a reasonable level of influence encourage all sorts of things. It is an openness, it’s a transparency, it’s a fairness and respect. They are what you see, largely. It is not a manipulative or game playing culture. A lot of the senior people - and a good cross-section of the executive - are fairly instinctively collaborative and I think that rubs off in the processes that they support and generate.” (Female DVC)
Caring and Empathy

“Females look at the small items, the small things. If you walk out and the receptionist is crying, I would say a male Dean would just continue walking, but a female Dean is going to notice it and come back later and find out why. Females seem to take more account of the people issues, and it’s the people who keep this place going. So that’s one small example of where I think there is a difference between a male and a female. It’s that we’re involved with the smaller details without allowing it to take us over.” (Female Dean)
Emerging Issues

- Gender roles and deeply-held assumptions about women’s nurturing qualities play themselves out in the workplace: women may be pushed into taking up ‘domestic’ roles eg conflict resolution
- Expectations about these ‘feminine’ qualities may work against women’s appointment to leadership
Changes in Leadership?

- Women are seen by both men and women to bring different styles to leadership
- Most likely if they are in positions of power and in a ‘critical mass’
- Do women change leadership cultures, or are they beneficiaries of changing conceptions of what constitutes leadership?
Leadership hidden from view?

- Uses concepts of ‘post-heroic’ or ‘companionate’ leadership
- Shows women rely on networks
Leadership at all levels

• ‘Glue work’ necessary to organisations
• Collaborative, everyday work is leadership
• Relational skills are important to ensure that tasks get done
Some Styles of Leadership Not Valued

Advantages enjoyed by men in the workforce and in individual workplaces are seen as normal and accepted, reinforcing organisational cultures based on male working styles and affirming importance of ‘male’ leadership styles.

Ideology is concentration of power

How does leadership relate to change?

Amanda Sinclair: Journey around Leadership
Challenges to creating leadership change

• Pressures on organisations – financial, entrepreneurial, managerial
• Pressures of work – globalisation, long hours, technology
• How to get balance between work /personal life – flexibility still in the future
• How to hold on to integrity of self?