

MEN AND WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Learning Objectives

- 9.1 Describe the challenges faced by minority group members (including women) who attempt to lead
- 9.2 Summarize and compare the concepts of glass ceiling and glass cliff
- 9.3 Explain and manage the major challenges facing majority group members who attempt to lead in an increasingly diverse work context
- 9.4 Appraise oneself in terms of the extent of an inclusive mindset
- 9.5 Identify and manage the paradox of building cultural homogeneity, while allowing for diversity

"Diversity: the art of thinking independently together."

—Malcolm Forbes, publisher of Forbes Magazine

"My senior leadership team is half people who have been at GM for a long time like me, and others who have joined the company in the past five years from different industries, experiences, and countries. You have a better picture of the world. The diversity of thought is where you can make better business decisions."

-Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors

Diversity is a fact of life. To at least some degree, it has been present in societies for thousands of years, and in recent years, it has become increasingly present in organizations. Issues surrounding diversity have been the subject of much research in organizations.\(^1\) Our focus in this chapter is on the implications of diversity regarding leadership. To address this topic, we focus on two types of challenges. First, there are the challenges faced by individuals (e.g., women) who attempt to lead in work settings where the traditional control or power has been centered in others (e.g., men). Second, there are the challenges pertaining largely to inclusiveness that are faced by those

traditional power holders who attempt to lead in an increasingly diverse work setting. In both instances, we do not intend to make any political or ideological statements. Instead, we simply seek to point out the challenges that are faced by both women and men who attempt to lead, as well as solutions to those challenges.

People who attempt to lead can represent different ethnicities, races, and genders. While many of the issues are similar for these different categories, in this chapter we will focus primarily on women in leadership roles in both the examples that we present, as well as the videos associated with this chapter. Our emphasis reflects the frequent concerns in recent times pertaining to what has been termed the glass ceiling and glass cliff, which will be described below. These concerns represent important issues for modern organizations. Indeed, one need only examine how many women are CEOs of Fortune 500 firms in order to start to get a feel for these issues. Specifically, as of May 2018, only 24 of the 500 CEOs (i.e., slightly less than 5 percent) were women.² Obviously, such a low percentage does not come close to the participation rate of women in the workforce.

We begin this chapter with a specific focus on women in leadership roles, and the challenges that they face. We then circle back around to the broader issue of diversity and the importance of all organizational members, including those in leader roles, to have an inclusive mindset.

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN WHO ATTEMPT TO LEAD

Diversity presents challenges for women who attempt to lead in work settings where the traditional control or power has been centered in men. Largely, these challenges involve two metaphors: (1) the glass ceiling and (2) the glass cliff. The glass ceiling describes an invisible, but nevertheless real, barrier that keeps women from rising up to managerial levels in organizations.3 Numerous factors can cause such barriers, such as "old boy" clubs or networks from which managers might be chosen or promoted.

The glass cliff is a newer concept but equally as problematic. The idea is that once a woman is able to break through the glass ceiling, that individual may end up in positions or circumstances in which they fail—or metaphorically fall off the slippery glass cliff. It could be that the individual may have been purposefully put into a higher-level position where the likelihood of failure was high⁴ or, alternatively, simply experience discrimination, sexual harassment, or lack of support once in a leadership position.⁵ Note that discrimination can be overt, versus more subtle. When overt, it could come in the form of a direct challenge to a woman leader's authority. When subtle, it could be seen in microaggressions in communication from men that demean the value or ability of women in leadership roles. But regardless of the reason, the individual ends up failing, and falling off the glass cliff.

Glass ceiling an invisible, but nevertheless real. barrier that keeps women from rising up to managerial levels in organizations.

Glass cliff

a phenomenon whereby once a woman is able to break through the glass ceiling, that individual may end up in positions or circumstances in which they fail.

It is interesting to note that a woman may face multiple glass ceilings and glass cliffs throughout her career. For example, a woman may break through a glass ceiling into middle management and is able to avoid the glass cliff at that level but then faces another glass ceiling or glass cliff at higher levels of management. Next, we address specific challenges that are associated with glass ceilings and cliffs.

Attributions of Being a Diversity Hire or Promotion

When a woman is able to break through the glass ceiling, that person may be surrounded by others (e.g., followers, fellow leaders, and so forth) who either subtly or overtly suggest that the reason for the individual's promotion or placement was simply the person's gender. In other words, these others make the attribution (see chapter 7) that the reason for this individual breaking through the glass ceiling is reverse discrimination. If the new leader picks up on these perceptions, the likely outcome is defensiveness, lack of confidence, or the proverbial "chip on the shoulder."

The obvious problem is that the female leader could show her defensiveness or lack of confidence that stem from these attributions and, as a result, have a difficult time leading and influencing. Eventually, the end result could be that the leader slides off, or gets pushed off, the glass cliff. One solution to this challenge is simply for the leader to have a strong self-concept and to reason out in her own mind how she fully deserves her new position, despite the negative attributions of others. In addition, it helps to have a higher-level leader or mentor to reassure the individual of her worth and how she attained her position on merit rather than a bias based on gender or minority status. Indeed, mentors or role models are important for leaders at all levels of management, and may be particularly important for female leaders who are able to break through the glass ceiling.

Perceived Role Incongruity and Stereotyping

Role incongruity involves a situation in which an individual could be perceived to be incongruent with the leadership role because of that person's gender or background. For many people, the prototype that they have in their minds for people in leadership roles, especially in American culture, is one that stresses forcefulness, top-down command and control, decisiveness, and even aggressive behavior at times. In other words, their implicit theory of what leadership is all about is associated with male behavior, which is perhaps not so surprising since men have traditionally, predominantly occupied leadership roles. However, it can be incongruent with ways of leading that are more commonly associated with women. As compared to men, when in leadership roles, women tend to favor a consensual, collaborative, and relationship-building approach. The irony is that increasingly, the more "female" approach may be what is actually necessary to achieve effectiveness in modern work settings.

But nevertheless, prototypes based on ongoing images of the hard-driving leader persist, which can cause perceptions of incongruity for women who attempt to lead.

Role incongruity

a situation in which an individual could be perceived to be incongruent with the leadership role because of that person's gender or background.



It is the so-called backlash effect in which female leaders who behave in more male like or aggressive ways are punished for not being "nice." The upshot of this perceived incongruity is that they may be stereotyped as ineffective or inappropriate for many leadership roles, which, again, can cause lack of acceptance of women in those roles. As a result, women who are already in leadership roles can become defensive, lose confidence, and so forth when exposed to such negative stereotyping. The metaphoric glass cliff phenomenon could then follow.

As an example of perceived role incongruity, an interesting study showed how, as compared to male leaders, female leaders were seen as neither capable nor appropriate for applying strict disciplinary actions to followers.8 In other words, followers (i.e., both men and women) preferred that if disciplinary actions had to be administered to them, they wanted it to be conducted by a male leader. In other words, the old saying "wait until your father gets home" seems to apply to how followers view the application of disciplinary actions. In short, this study reinforces the notion of men being forceful and even aggressive in their leadership role—but not women, who are expected to be more nurturing and understanding.

To meet this challenge, we recommend two key strategies for female leaders. First, women should attempt to develop a situational or contingency stance toward the negative attributions and stereotypes that they might encounter. That is, in some circumstances or contexts, a forceful stance may seem incongruent but nevertheless may be necessary in order to maintain respect and authority. For example, when confronted directly regarding her authority, collaboration and relationship-building may need to take a backseat; instead, the female leader will need to be firm and forceful. In other situations, the female leader might respond more collaboratively with humor or probing questions. For example, if an off-the-cuff, stereotypical comment is made by a male colleague about women, the female leader might respond with a probing question that in a friendly manner attempts to force an explanation as to the validity of the stereotype.9 In this example, the female leader would not attempt to "get in the face" of the male colleague, but at the same time, she does not allow that colleague to simply get away with stereotypical or degrading statements.

Second, and perhaps as a catch-22, responses to stereotyping or challenges to one's authority must be met in an authentic manner. Regardless of a leader's gender, forcefulness or aggressive actions on the part of the leader must be viewed as authentic by followers in order to achieve effectiveness. Indeed, authenticity may be even more of a requirement for female leaders, since forceful or aggressive actions may be seen as incongruent.

As an additional note, problems with perceived role incongruity are not the sole domain of female leaders. They can also occur for leaders with certain ethnic backgrounds. For example, individuals with Asian backgrounds have found difficulty breaking into leadership roles in American firms, as well as maintaining those positions once attained. 10 In other words, the glass ceiling and glass cliff both may apply to people with Asian ethnic backgrounds. Possible reasons for such difficulties can again include perceived role incongruity. The hard-driving, forceful, and direct prototype of effective leadership that has developed over time in North American culture is based on traditional behaviors that are associated with White men. People with Asian backgrounds, both men and women, oftentimes are not congruent with this prototype. That is, they are often more circumspect, less forceful, and less direct in leadership roles. Indeed, such individuals may be pigeonholed as technical experts, analytical types, and so forth—but not as leaders. Not surprisingly, they either do not obtain leadership positions or may have a hard time holding on to them once attained. Again, such incongruities are not based on actual role requirements but, rather, on others' (e.g., majority group members') perceptions of what personal qualities are required in leadership roles.

CHALLENGES FOR MALE LEADERS IN AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE ENVIRONMENT

Traditionally, power, control, and influence in most North American organizations have resided in men, specifically White men. As suggested above, we make no attribution here as to exactly how or why power, control, and influence in organizations has traditionally tended to reside with White men. For the most part, we will leave such an analysis to historians, sociologists, political analysts, anthropologists, and so forth. Our goal is to simply take this tradition as a given and move forward in terms of addressing the challenges faced by men who attempt to lead in an increasingly diverse environment. These challenges largely boil down to three issues: (1) lack of an inclusive mindset; (2) maximizing the benefits of diversity, while reducing its potential downside; and (3) dealing with the paradox of building cultural homogeneity, while allowing for diversity.

Lack of an Inclusive Mindset

We all have different orientations toward diversity, which can ultimately affect how we attempt to lead others who have different backgrounds (i.e., different in terms of ethnicity, age, gender, and so forth). We suggest that before proceeding further, you go to the Appendix of this chapter and complete the Inclusive Mindset scale. As you will see, there are three dimensions associated with having an inclusive mindset: (1) *curiosity* regarding others from diverse backgrounds, (2) *engaging* people from diverse backgrounds, and (3) *courage* and *commitment* to diversity.

As shown in Table 9.1, the three dimensions of an inclusive mindset largely boil down to three levels of inclusiveness and associated behaviors with each level. ¹¹ At the lowest level, a leader would tend to minimize differences. The leader would not really be curious about how people from different backgrounds could think, perceive, or act in different ways and, instead, simply tends to avoid people who are different, while surrounding himself with those who are similar. At a more moderate level of inclusiveness, the leader has some degree of acceptance of others who are different but does not really embrace the value of diversity or show much curiosity regarding different

ways of thinking, perceiving, and acting that might be based on diversity. Finally, at the highest level of inclusivity, the leader proactively takes an interest in those with different backgrounds and attempts to engage in interpersonal interactions with them. Perhaps most importantly, a proactive orientation toward diversity suggests that the leader would monitor and attempt to rectify situations in which he encounters attitudes or behavior that would run counter to the valuing of diversity.

So why should an inclusive orientation or mindset matter for an individual who is attempting to lead in an increasingly diverse environment? Let's take an example that is likely to occur quite often. Perhaps a work team has been traditionally composed of middle-aged men. Because of retirement or some other reason for turnover, a member of the team departs the organization and is replaced by a young woman. This individual is substantially different from others in the team, not only in age but also in terms of gender. 12 At a team meeting, one established member even jokes about the new member, "You know, you remind me of my daughter." Or even worse, an established member might make a sexually harassing comment, such as "I hope that you always wear such sexy dresses to work." Then, as the meeting progresses, and the team is attempting to solve various issues that it faces, the new team member attempts to speak up and provide input at times. But her input is repeatedly greeted with a lack of eye contact and various team members cutting her off before she can finish communicating her thoughts.

Table 9.1 Three Levels of an Inclusive Orientation toward Diversity	
Level of Inclusiveness	Indicative Behaviors
Proactive Inclusiveness	 takes an active and respectful interest in people from diverse backgrounds actively attempts to engage in interpersonal interactions with people who come from backgrounds that are different from his or her own clearly monitors and confronts attitudes or behaviors that run counter to the valuing of diversity
Moderate Acceptance	 shows a moderate degree of curiosity about people from different backgrounds shows some acceptance of people from diverse backgrounds but does not go out of her or his way to embrace or engage with them tends to stay silent when non-inclusiveness is observed or diversity is undervalued
Minimization of Differences	 shows little curiosity regarding learning about people from different backgrounds trivializes the importance of cultural or ethnic differences, at least in terms of potential effects of diversity on work settings tends to associate only with people who are like him or her in terms of ethnic backgrounds, age group, gender, and so forth

There can be a number of reasons for such team dynamics. One key explanation is stereotyping, which occurs when an individual holds rigid and often negative beliefs directed toward a group of people. In the above example, the middle-aged, male team members may largely stereotype the young woman as naive or just another "millennial." Moreover, the usurping of power may be at play whereby the older men are attempting to put the new member "in her place." The upshot is that her input is dismissed or ignored, and she is not given the same respect that is afforded to other team members.

Regardless of the reason, team dynamics of this nature reflects the subtle (or even not so subtle), but unfair and even counterproductive, power differences that can accompany diversity. If such dynamics were to continue, a host of negative outcomes could occur. For example, there could be frustration on the part of the new team member, to the point where she essentially "shuts down" during team meetings. In terms of productivity and innovation, the new team member may be able to view the team's problems from a different vantage or framework. If she is effectively shut down, the team will not be able to take advantage of her potentially helpful or new ideas. Further, the new member may begin to withdraw or become the type of alienated follower that we considered in chapter 4.

In the above example, a leader who minimizes differences in individuals' backgrounds may not even perceive these team dynamics. That is, the leader will not be attuned to the possibility that the new addition to the team is being talked over and even potentially disrespected (e.g., "you remind me of my daughter"). On the other hand, a leader with a proactive orientation toward inclusiveness would be sensitive to the display of such subtle power differences. This person would lead-by-example by identifying these displays when they occur, attempting to reduce any such behavior in the team, and taking a personal interest in the views of the female group member. Overall, he would attempt to instill the norm or value in the team that despite differences in gender or backgrounds, all team members and their ideas are to be respected.

Maximizing the Benefits of Diversity, While Reducing Its Potential Downside

It is clear from prior research that diversity provides benefits to teams and an organization as a whole.¹³ Specifically, diversity makes for a more in-depth basis for problem-solving and decision-making. This occurs because of how diversity is associated with a broader base of perspectives and experiences. In addition, diversity tends to minimize the risk of groupthink occurring, which we considered in chapter 8.

At the same time, the effective leader of diversity will recognize that there is at least a potential downside to diversity, which should be avoided or minimized. Diversity can add stress and more potential for destructive conflict in a team. When people from different backgrounds come together, there is more potential for misunderstandings, stereotyping, and distrust. To use a term from chapter 8 and team development, the likelihood of remaining or reverting back to the *storming* stage gets enhanced. Accordingly,

the obvious challenge for the leader is to simultaneously maximize the benefits that diversity yields, while minimizing its potential downside effects.

A good first step is for the leader to have an inclusive mindset as described above. Such a leader will not only look for how diversity can provide value, but will also be in tune with how problems with diversity can form yet be alleviated. By having an inclusive mindset, the example that the leader sets relays the message to other team members that inappropriate actions toward a female or ethnic group member, whether intentional or more subtle, are not to be tolerated. At the same time, the inclusive leader will be sensitive toward other group members (e.g., White men) who may believe that reverse discrimination could be at play. Reverse discrimination occurs when favorable actions (e.g., hiring, promotion, and work assignments) toward group members who are in the minority are perceived to be unfair or unwarranted by group members who are in the majority. It is the job of the leader to assure these majority group members that favorable or supportive actions toward those in the minority are not due to reverse discrimination but, rather, due to the merit of these minority group members.

Paradox: Building Cultural Homogeneity, While Allowing for Diversity

As emphasized repeatedly in this book, effective leadership is largely about dealing with paradoxes. When it comes to leading diversity, a key paradox is balancing the leader's desire to create a homogeneous team or organizational culture with the desire to embrace diversity. Leaders strive to get their followers on the same page when it comes to things like values and norms. For example, customer support and service may be a key value for a lot of leaders, and they attempt to make it an integral part of the culture for all team members. In other words, they try to build a strong, unified culture in the teams or organizations that they lead because of the cohesiveness and sense of purpose that follows. 14 On the other hand, in the spirit of embracing diversity, leaders also want to allow for individual differences between employees based on their backgrounds, personalities, styles, and gender. Kevin Johnson, the NBA All-Star and former mayor of Sacramento, California, offered a suggestion when he said, "Stick to your principles, but abandon your assumptions."15 Marine Corps General James Mattis said the same thing slightly differently: "Don't apologize for your values, but don't assume that they are right." 16

Thus, the way to reconcile this paradox is to stress the end goal or value, while simultaneously allowing employees to uniquely pursue that goal or value. For example, again consider the value/goal of customer service and support, which has been a theme of Southwest Airlines since its inception. Southwest allows employees to pursue customer service and support in their own unique ways. Some employees may use humor in an attempt to brighten the flying experience of customers, while others are more reserved but, nevertheless, helpful to customers in solving problems or making for a satisfying flying experience.¹⁷ Moreover, given the increasingly diverse customer base of many organizations, having diverse employees can help a firm to better understand and adjust its practices to satisfy customer demands.

Reverse discrimination

occurs when favorable actions (e.g., hiring, promotion, and work assignments) toward group members who are in the minority are perceived to be unfair or unwarranted by group members who are in the majority.

VIDEOS FOR THIS CHAPTER

The videos for this chapter all deal with women in leadership roles and the challenges and opportunities that they have faced in various situations. Some of these challenges pertain to overt confrontations involving their authority, while others are more subtle or casual but, nevertheless, degrading, stereotypical statements that are made by male colleagues. To a large extent, the context dictates how the female leaders in the videos reacted to these challenges. A common denominator with all of these leaders is that they seem authentic and, as such, provide good role models of female leaders. In addition, some of these videos show leaders who acknowledge the positive side of being a woman in leadership roles.

Video Case 9.1 "Power Challenge"

Dena Braeger, a captain in the U.S. Army, describes a situation where she is directly confronted by a subordinate, regarding her gender in relation to her leadership role.

Video Case 9.2 "Gender Stereotypes"

Maria Eitel, a vice president in the Nike corporation, describes an instance in which she confronts a gender stereotype on the part of one of her peers. The stereotype is not directed at her personally, although it still could be viewed as offensive.

Video Case 9.3 "Pecking Order Games"

This video features Michell Clayman, who is an investor, entrepreneur (i.e., partner of New Amsterdam Partners), and philanthropist. She describes situations that she has encountered as a female leader in the financial services industry, as well as how she has dealt with those challenges.

Video Case 9.4 "Navigating in an Alpha World"

Robin Richards Donahoe is a female leader in the venture capital industry. She describes a comment that was made toward her by a powerful male colleague at a major event that could have easily pushed her off the glass cliff. She also describes how she dealt with the comment.

Capstone Video 9.5 "Developing Behaviors to Thrive"

Dana Bloom, management consultant, talks about the advantages of being a woman in a leadership role, especially if the woman comes off as authentic.

Capstone Video 9.6 "Advantages of Being a Woman"

Michell Clayman also speaks to some advantages of being a woman in leadership positions.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have focused on the challenges faced by both majority and minority (or female) leaders who are attempting to lead in increasingly diverse work contexts in North America. Although the nature of these challenges largely differs, they highlight the importance of considering diversity in attempting to understand effective leadership. In addition, we should note that although most of the examples presented here involve female leaders, phenomena such as the glass ceiling and glass cliff are also relevant to various ethnic groups and races. In the next chapter, we continue with considerations of diversity. However, our focus will turn to the international context and global leadership.

DEFINITIONS OF BOLDED TERMS

Glass ceiling 127 Glass cliff 127

Role incongruity 128

Reverse

discrimination 133

Appendix

Inclusive Mindset²

For each question below, please rate yourself using _8. I have the ability to listen and the following scale: communicate with people from diverse backgrounds. 1 = not at allI hold others to account for non-inclusive 2 = rarelybehaviors. 3 =maybe sometimes 10. I want individuals from different 4 =for the most part backgrounds to feel that their uniqueness 5 =to a large extent or always is known and appreciated. 11. I challenge entrenched organizational 1. I take an active interest in learning about attitudes and practices that promote other cultures and ethnicities. the notion that everybody has to be the 2. I am naturally a curious person, and I look same. to learn new things about people. 12. I clearly and authentically articulate the 3. I listen attentively when a person from value of diversity and inclusion. a background different from my own is voicing a point of view. **Scoring**. The following dimensions and items are _4. I engage in respectful and curious assessed in this scale: questioning to better understand the Curiosity regarding others from diverse backgrounds, viewpoints of people from backgrounds items 1-4 that are different from my own. Engaging people from diverse backgrounds, items 5. I am comfortable engaging with people who are different from me. Courage and Commitment to diversity, items 9–12 6. I anticipate and take appropriate action to address team conflict that seems to be based For each of these dimensions add up your ratings on differences in people's backgrounds. and divide by 4. A score of 4 or more on a dimension would represent a high score. A score between 3 and 7. I try to create a safe environment 4 would be moderate. A score of less than 3 would where people from all backgrounds feel be low. comfortable to speak up.

² A longer version of this measure was initially derived by Pierre Balthazard at California State University-Sacramento.

ENDNOTES

- 1. See Harrison, D. A., & Klein, J. K. (2007). What's the difference? Diversity constructs as separation, variety, or disparity in organizations. Academy of Management Review, 32, 1199-1228. Also see van Knippenberg, D., & Schippers, M. C. (2007). Work group diversity. Annual Review of Psychology, 58, 515-541.
- 2. See http://fortune.com/2017/06/07/fortune-500women-ceos/
- 3. For example, see Lyness, K. S., & Thompson, D. E. (2000). Climbing the corporate ladder: Do female and male executives follow the same route? Journal of Applied Psychology, 85, 86-101.
- 4. See, for example, Bruckmüller, S., & Branscombe, N. R. (2011). How women end up on the "glass cliff." Harvard Business Review, January-February.
- 5. See for example, Cook, A., & Glass, C. (2013). Glass cliffs and organizational saviors: Barriers to minority leadership in work organizations? Social Problems, 60(2), 168-187.
- 6. For more information about implicit theories of leadership, see Offerman, L. R., Kennedy, J. K., Jr., & Wirtz, P. W. (1994). Implicit leadership theories: Content, structure, and generalizability. Leadership Quarterly, 5, 43-58.
- 7. See Rosener, J. B. (1995). America's competitive secret: Women managers. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 8. See Atwater, L. E., Carey, J., & Waldman, D. A. (2001). Gender and discipline in the workplace: Wait until your father gets home. Journal of Management, 27, 537–561.
- 9. We should note that sometimes the more subtle stereotypical or casual degrading statements that female

- or other minority leaders may encounter are often referred to as microaggressions.
- 10. See Hyun, J. (2005). Breaking the bamboo ceiling: Career strategies for Asians. New York: Harper Collins.
- 11. Similar models have been used to describe how individuals view diversity. For example, the following article deals with levels of diversity awareness: Bennett, M. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10, 179-196.
- 12. When individuals within a team differ on multiple aspects of diversity, there is the potential for what is known as a team faultline. For more information, see Li, J. T., & Hambrick, D. C. (2007). Factional groups: A new vantage on demographic faultlines, conflict, and disintegration in work teams. Academy of Management Journal, 48, 794-813.
- See Woolley, A., & Malone, T. (2011). What makes a team smarter? More women. Harvard Business Review, June, 32-33. See also Richard, O. C. (2000). Racial diversity, business strategy, and firm performance: A resource-based view. Academy of Management Journal, 43, 164-177.
- 14. See Arogyaswamy, B., & Byles, C. M. (1987). Organizational culture: Internal and external fits. Journal of Management, 13, 647-659.
- 15. Personal communication.
- 16. Personal communication.
- 17. See Gittell, J. H. (2003). The Southwest Airlines way. New York: McGraw-Hill.