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**UNDERSTANDING THE SCARCITY OF WOMEN EXECUTIVES  
IN CORPORATE AMERICA**

**BY**

**KRISTY M. ADAMEC**

**Thesis Advisor**

**Donald N. Lombardi, Ph.D.**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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Seton Hall University**

**2002**

## ABSTRACT

While women continue to enter the workforce in increasing numbers, they are still significantly under-represented at the senior executive level. Women comprise nearly half of the workforce in corporate America, yet hold less than 4% of all senior management positions. There are many barriers to advancement that women face throughout their careers. These factors include internal conflict and self-doubt, external perceptions and gender-based stereotypes, the organizational structure of companies, and gender differences in leadership and communication styles.

This study examines the opinions of 100 working men and women regarding such issues as the glass ceiling, gender roles within organizations, management stereotypes and discrimination, and opportunities to advance into the senior ranks. The purpose of this research is to explore the existing perceptions and beliefs about women in a leadership role, and how those perceptions ultimately impact the progression of women into high-ranking positions. Findings suggest that although traditionally female management traits are becoming more desirable within corporations, women executives are still a rarity and are often more successful when they exhibit traditionally masculine leadership behavior. Gender-specific challenges and possible strategies for advancement are also discussed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

“Realizing that the very image of authority is associated with masculinity makes it easier to understand the images of professional women in our society” (Tannen, 1994, p. 169).

For centuries, women have often been considered the softer, more nurturing sex.

Combining the desire to please everyone with the need to enjoy strong, meaningful relationships, women often put others' needs ahead of their own and sacrifice career advancement in favor of family responsibilities. But there is no mistaking the rise of women working their way through the ranks of major corporations today. The question is, will their so-called feminine traits ever be perceived as valuable in a leadership role? Or do they only act as obstacles for independent women on a mission to have it all (or at least an equal shot at it...)

The above quote represents one of the many factors contributing to the low number of women in top-level positions in corporate America. In fact, very few women make it to the top of the corporate world, and even fewer last (Wells, 2001). To say that there is one, clear reason why this is so would be untrue. While difficult to pinpoint, there are many reasons for this ever-present trend—some simple, some complex.

When discussing the issue of gender, it is important to note that gender-focused development (such as the development studies covered in this research) recognizes gender as an organizing principal of society that affects men and women in all activities and relationships (“Understanding Gender”, 1996). Gender refers to men and women's

roles in a specific society or culture (“Understanding Gender”, 1996). Thus, a person’s gender can consequently influence his or her role in a corporate setting. Gender is said to be a social construct because it is defined, supported and enforced by societal structures and institutions (“Understanding Gender”, 1996).

Given the impact and true nature of gender differences, what is the effect on the low number of female CEO’s? One principle reason, and the point demonstrated in Tannen’s quote, is the value that the corporate culture and American society as a whole place on traditionally masculine leadership qualities. Because of women’s limited exposure of women to high-level positions, the American corporate culture is such that the standards of behavior applied to women are based on roles that do not include being the boss (Tannen, 1994).

Considering the fact that 90 of last year’s Fortune 500 companies did not have a single female corporate officer, one can see the significant under-representation of women in top-level positions (Wells, 2001). Women hold 73% of executive, administrative and managerial positions, but account for less than 3 to 5% of top executive positions nationwide, according to a study by the Women’s Bureau of the US Department of Labor (Wells, 2001). There are currently two female CEO’s of Fortune 500 companies, and of the 1,000 largest companies, only six are run by women (Sharpe, 2000). Even more disconcerting is the fact that, according to a recent study, an estimated 97% of all senior managers in America are male (Oakley, 2000).



Twenty-five years after women first started entering the labor force in great numbers — and trying to be more like men everyday, from wearing power suits to taking up golf — the fact still remains that women are not equally represented in top management. And, although there are conflicting theories about the elusiveness of senior positions to women, most researchers agree that people tend to associate leadership qualities with masculinity (Oakley, 2000).

A group study conducted by Karakowsky and McBey (2001) found that group members with masculine gender role characteristics emerged as leaders in the group significantly more often than those with female gender role characteristics. Karakowsky and McBey (2001) also found that most individuals expect others to perform better at tasks that are appropriate or compatible with their gender. Research has shown that because most professional, managerial and technical jobs have been dominated by men for so long, these positions continue to be perceived as masculine (Karakowsky & McBey, 2001). In effect, women begin their journey of career advancement at the mercy of gender-stereotypical pre-conceived notions.

It has been shown that at the entry level, women and men generally start out in the same place, but that younger female employees confront challenges of balancing home and work that men do not (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). In effect, women generally have to work harder for what is automatically given to men. Assumptions about their ambition, determination and commitment, or resentment of their success, often lead women to come out short on substantial fronts (Estrich, 2000).

One of the most considerable causes to play a role in the low number of female CEO's is the difference between the way that men and women communicate. Sociologists have increasingly realized that gender is a multi-level system that consists not only of roles and identities at the individual level, but also includes ways of behaving and relating to one another at the interactional level, and consequently, at the corporate executive level (Corell, 2001). The difference in gender communication is an unquestionably influential player in perceptions of leadership within a corporate setting. Leadership is often defined as being able to wield influence, be persuasive and craft a strategic view (Wells, 2001). Because women tend to approach their jobs differently than men, that is, more results-focused rather than strategically inclined, they are not always seen as competent leaders (Wells, 2001).

This study will explore the numerous possible explanations for why there are so few female CEO's in corporate America. These aspects will include the differing management and communication styles of men and women, self-perceptions and self-inflicted barriers to women's career advancement, external perceptions of women and leadership and gender-based stereotypes, the impact of the organizational structure and gender-related opportunity and the theory of the "glass ceiling."

### Research Question

Do gender-specific psycho-communication patterns and behaviors limit the progressive career development of women in the modern workplace?

### Subsequent Questions

1. What is the comfort level of women in top executive positions and why?
2. What roles do the organizational structure and the opportunity for advancement play in the under-representation of women in top executive positions?
3. How do others perceive women in corporate leadership positions?
4. What are the existing gender stereotypes that contribute to people's perceptions of a more competent gender?
5. Why are leadership qualities associated with masculinity?
6. Are there existing gender-compatible tasks that establish certain understandings about which gender should be doing which job?
7. What role does the exclusion of women from informal networking play in limiting their moving forward in their careers?
8. What impact do gender-communicative differences have on the organization and society as a whole?
9. Should one gender adapt his or her communication style to the other in order to maintain a more uniform professional style?

## Purpose of the Study

It is evident that the under-representation of women in high-powered corporate positions continues to be one of the central organizing principles of business (Oakley, 2000).

Although there has been some growth in the number of female managers over recent years, the number of female CEO's in large corporations remains extremely low (Oakley, 2000).

While there are many different explanations for this, some realizations become pointedly clear. It is important for organizations to understand where and why gender matters, and for what outcomes (Wharton, 2000). It is also important to eradicate the assumption that traditionally male leadership styles, such as strategic and analytical, and traditional female leadership skills, such as relational, cannot go hand in hand. Often relational skills are seen as a weakness when acted out in a CEO position (Oakley, 2000). When, in fact, in a true leader, analytical skills and relational skills are not separate. The key is integrating them (Wells, 2001).

There is a distinct inequality that exists among men and women in the workplace. In general, female managers do not receive the same salaries and perks as male managers at all levels (Oakley, 2000). This and other corporate practices could cause women to be seen as less competent. The fact that conscious discrimination (as in the past) has given way to unconscious discrimination (as this study indicates) can leave women feeling confused and the people in power feeling that there is little need for change. If the people

in power do not think they are discriminating, they will not see a need to change their behavior or business practices. This and other key issues will be addressed.

It is not disputed that women and men communicate differently. They approach management tasks differently, although many times with similar outcomes (Tannen, 1994). Men are often very direct in style, while women are more “polite” (Tannen, 1994). This difference in styles often puts women at a disadvantage in their interactions with men, because women usually work hard at “saving face” for others. The fact that women often take (and accept) the role of the one seeking advice rather than the one giving it reinforces the expectation that women are less knowledgeable and therefore less competent than men (Tannen, 1994).

These findings lead the author to believe that there are several limitations that women face in their quest for a higher-up position—including limitations that they set for themselves. Studies have shown that girls discover at an early age that they get better results if they phrase their own ideas as suggestions rather than orders (Tannen, 1994). But while these ways of talking make girls, and later women, more likeable, they make women seem less confident and less self-assured in the world of work (Tannen, 1994).

Without question, this is a topic of great relevance to today’s corporate arena. The author will explore not only the significant statistics of the ratio of men to women in top positions, but also the reasons why. The critical point is to see the absence of significant numbers of women in positions of power as a problem (Estrich, 2000). The author will

look at the factors contributing to these low numbers, the impact of these low numbers, and the perceptions of gender roles as they apply to corporate leadership.

### Objectives

While the main objective of this study is to demonstrate the communicative differences between men and women in the workplace, and how those differences ultimately impact a woman's career progression, there are other barriers the study will address. These barriers include stereotypes, social expectations, internal conflicts and organizational limitations. The second objective is to establish the understanding that leadership itself is perceived as a masculine trait by many people in corporate America. If leadership is synonymous with masculinity, is it possible then for a woman to ever really be perceived as a leader in a corporate setting or otherwise?

The third objective is to demonstrate the impact that gender-related stereotypes have on the structure of organizations. Who is making the hiring and promotion decisions? What are the opportunities for women to advance within the company and why? Through extensive research and supporting literature, the author will illustrate the contributing factors to the scarce number of women in CEO positions and how they affect the corporate structure.

## Limitations

One of the limitations in this study is the fact that the issue of **age** is not addressed. Age can be a decidedly influential factor in an individual's opinion of women in the workplace. It has been shown that in relatively older companies, women have greater difficulty reaching the top positions than in younger corporations. A generational difference and an adherence to an outdated set of beliefs are often the reason that older individuals do not consider women to be effective leaders. If older individuals hold the power in an organization, it is unlikely that a woman will be promoted or hired into an executive role in that organization.

Because this study surveyed professionals that are, for the most part, under 50, the author recognizes that the general age of the respondents probably had an impact on their opinions and perceptions of women in power. Research indicates that people of a younger generation are more accepting of executive women and their leadership styles. This study did not take into account the effect of age on respondents' perceptions and attitudes about women in the workplace.

Also not discussed at length is the **impact of maternity leave** on a woman's career path. This type of interruption during a critical point in a woman's career can seriously hurt her chances for top-rank selection over a male candidate. This study briefly touches on the disparity between men and women when it comes to child-rearing and the established roles in society that label women as "nurturers" and men as "providers", however, it does

not discuss the need for women to take time off from work in order to have children and its role in hindering their career advancement.

The unwillingness of the survey respondents to be completely forthcoming in their answers regarding the issue of women in top-level management also limits this study.

The author acknowledges that while people may feel a certain way about working for a particular gender, it is not always considered acceptable to voice that opinion. Although survey responses were often very different from other research findings, the author attributes some of the disparity to a **socially conscious concern** on the part of the respondents. This may have resulted in slightly skewed data, which can create the illusion that women are not being held back from executive positions.

#### Definition of Terms

Gender Roles Behaviors and attributes expected of individuals on the basis of their being born either female or male.

Gender Stereotypes A set of structured beliefs about the personal attributes of women and men.

Glass ceiling A term used to describe the invisible wall that women hit in their careers, limiting their advancement into the top positions.

Glass Ceiling Commission A 21-member Presidential Commission created in 1991 as part of the Civil Rights Act to investigate the barriers that keep women and people of color from achieving the highest management levels in corporate America.



**High-level position** For the purposes of this paper, a high-level position is defined as an office in the senior level of management within a corporation (vice president or higher).

**Organizational Structure** The setup of an organization in terms of available positions, circle of power and opportunity for advancement.

**Tokenism** The policy or practice of making only a symbolic effort.

CHAPTER II  
THE BARRIERS LIMITING THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN  
INTO SENIOR EXECUTIVE POSITIONS

President of the United States. Highest ranking officer in the army. CEO. Head coach. Captain. Leader. Images of power come already immersed in gender-specific expectations (Tannen, 1994). Each one of these terms conjures up an image in one's head, a subconscious idea of which gender is capable enough to hold these positions of authority. These subconscious images are likely a result of the fact that in throughout history, men have held the powerful positions in America. This fact alone is the driving force behind this study. What is the reason that men have always achieved the most powerful positions, and how is this changing in today's corporate world?

A Long History of Progress. A Long Road Ahead...

There is no question that women have made significant strides into the workforce over the past 100 years. They have enormously narrowed the gap in workforce participation and earnings, and have succeeded in decreasing occupational segregation (Weinstein, 1999). In the early 1900's, it was highly unlikely to find an occupation in which both men and women performed the same job (Weinstein, 1999). Many industries excluded women because they involved heavy labor in dirty working environments. Progress was not defined by whether or not a woman could bring home a paycheck, but rather by whether or not her husband could afford to relieve her of those duties (Weinstein, 1999).

The feeling of most people in the early 1900's, including most women, was that women were central to the development of the family unit and therefore could not trade in that role to be out in the workforce. In an essay written by Lyman Abbot in 1903, the author suggests that women and men are so fundamentally different by nature, the very idea of trying to achieve equality between them was preposterous. Abbot writes:

“And the fundamental fact, without which there could be no family, is the temperamental, inherent and therefore functional difference between the sexes. Because their functions are different, all talk of equality or non-equality is but idle words, without a meaning. Only things which have the same nature and fulfill the same function can be said to be superior or equal to one another” (Abbot, 1903, p.290).

Although this take on male versus female gender roles is almost a century old, its logic is still shared today by some psychologists. In a study conducted by Browne (1998) regarding the existence of the glass ceiling, the researcher contends that basic biological sex differences in personality and temperament account for much of the gender gap and the glass ceiling in the modern labor market. Tannen (1994) maintains that gender differences are extreme and must be dealt with within the workplace. If this is true, if men and women are fundamentally different and therefore incomparable, then is it realistic for women to achieve equality when it comes to climbing the ranks in corporate America?

The answer is a resounding yes. While inherent gender differences most certainly exist, executive-level jobs do not require traits exclusive to one gender. Recent studies have shown that men and women are doing equally effective jobs, but that their approaches are different (Sharpe, 2000). Women tend to be more team-oriented, whereas men are much more autocratic in their leadership styles (Roberts, 2000). As Jane Hill Fleming, a former senior vice president at Sedgwick Inc., notes, “No one way is the right way. But the majority view is generally the right way, and women are not in the majority at the senior ranks.”

When women started to move out of the home and into the working world in the 1970's, the myth of the “me generation” was rampant in the media (Merrick, 2001). Articles focused on the problems caused by the changing life of the working woman—articles based solely on the effect this new trend was having on the woman's family. Those few women who actually made it into the higher ranks in the corporate world were seen as cold, uncaring and even “manly” (Merrick, 2001).

Largely because of the unequal playing field in the workplace, the Glass Ceiling Commission was created in 1991 as part of the Civil Rights Act. The focus of the Commission is to investigate the barriers that keep qualified women and minorities from achieving the highest management levels in corporate America (Redwood, 1995). At the societal level, the glass ceiling is perpetuated through cultural biases that define leadership competence as consisting mainly of masculine characteristics (Frankforter, 1996). The Commission recommends policies, practices and procedures to reduce or

eliminate barriers completely, however, there is still much work to be done and many more barriers to overcome.

And so the struggle continues. Despite well-publicized exceptions to the rule, the American workforce remains undoubtedly sex segregated (Snyder & Verderber, 1992). While women comprise 46% of the workforce, and are expected to make up 48 % by 2005, they mainly work in occupations such as administrative support, sales and service positions (US Department of Labor Women's Bureau, 2000). In fact, women tend to be over-represented in lower organizational levels and underrepresented in high levels (Snyder & Verderber, 1992). Women make up only about 4% of the high-level managerial positions (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). Although it is true that women account for nearly half of the workforce in America, it isn't the top half.

#### Possible Explanations for the Low Number of Female Senior Executives

There are a number of different views that attempt to explain why women are not seen in large numbers in executive positions. One of these views is the person-centered view, which blames the limited progression of women into corporate high-ranking positions on behaviors and factors that are internal to the female gender (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). This can be a result of external expectations for a particular gender, or traits that are inherent to women. As Crampton and Mishra point out, "A major obstacle for women who aspire to achieve a managerial position is the presence of constraints imposed upon them by society, the family and women themselves" (Crampton & Mishra, 1999, p. 87).

The common perceptions of gender roles, or gender stereotyping, is another practice that often causes a barrier for women when it comes to obtaining power. These perceptions include societal pressures such as a woman's obligation to raising her family, as well as the perceptions of a female leader within companies. How do subordinates respond to a woman executive as opposed to a man? The issue of tokenism is another area of concern, as the pressure grows stronger for companies to have a more diverse management group. Are women being promoted based on their skills and capabilities, or simply to fill a quota?

When examining gender roles within corporations, it is important to look at the organizational structure of the company (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). Does the organization encourage the advancement of women and diversity in the workforce? Are there male-dominated networks impermeable to women in the company? If the corporate culture is such that gender-based inequities exist and there are limited advancement opportunities for women, it can send a very clear message as to which gender is more competent.

Lastly, the paucity of women in senior level positions may be a result of the different ways that men and women communicate in a corporate setting. What are the characteristics that are most valued in a leader, and which gender possesses most of these traits? Who gets the recognition in the company and why? Tannen (1994) points out that many promotions are a result of recognition and reward by a member of senior

management, and that the behavior required to get recognized is demonstrated more by men than by women. The differences between the leadership styles of women and men may provide valuable insight into this issue.

#### The Effect of Internal and External Expectations on the Self-perceptions of Women

Sue is a stockbroker at a very prestigious financial firm. She works mainly with men. Because she is just starting out, she does not have the high-level clients that some of her male co-workers have. She has been told that she is "too nice" for the financial business and in turn has begun to lose confidence in her abilities. Her determination to overcome the obstacles that face women in her industry has started to diminish. She thinks it might be easier to pursue another line of work, since she is not willing to try to beat the odds of being a woman and succeeding in the trading world.

This true story is an example of a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the woman does not have high expectations for herself and is therefore not achieving her goal. There is sufficient research suggesting that stereotypes can create expectations about another's behavior, and considerable evidence that expectations can influence behaviors that lead to confirmation of these expectations (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). Simply put, women often live up to others' expectations of how they should behave.

Many women have bought into a self-defeating paradigm: a fear of success, a reluctance to legitimize the exercising of authority, a tendency toward self-minimalization (Merrick,

2001). Stuhlmacher and Walters (1999) uncovered evidence that women perceive themselves to be less entitled to rewards and compensation than men. Merrick (2001) observed that the ultimate consequence of sex stereotypes is that they may become self-fulfilling, causing women to settle for jobs in which they are overqualified rather than pursue jobs that measure up to their qualifications. Snyder and Verderber (1992) uncovered that women's self-referent attitudes have been shown to be related to job and occupational choice, job search, behavioral flexibility, perceptions of work role and job satisfaction. Merrick (2001) believes that women are socialized to be their own worst oppressors.

Women have learned, in a sense, not to aspire any higher (Wells, 2001). In addition, women may compare themselves to less successful standards than men because of their limited frame of reference (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). A young man has heroes to model himself after. History books tell stories of men who have triumphed over adversity and emerged victorious (Merrick, 2001). A young woman looks for heroes and finds specific roles to emulate: mother, nurse, teacher, secretary (Merrick, 2001). Although times are changing, for the most part, women do not have the same role models as men and have limited examples to model their success after (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999).

Corell's (2001) found that widely shared cultural beliefs about gender and task competence can bias people's perceptions of their competence at different jobs. When competence at a certain skill is thought to be necessary for a particular career, then



gender differences in the perceptions of that task competence, more so than actual ability, can foster specific expectations and behaviors based on those perceptions (Corell, 2001).

Ridgeway (1997) contends that these gender beliefs are most significant when they shape behavior by affecting people's sense of what others expect of them. Ridgeway (1997) expands this theory by arguing that when males are thought to be more competent at a task than females, both males and females in a situation unconsciously expect more competent performances by men. Fenn (1976) maintains that because women are constantly reminded that their roles include passive behavior and non-assertiveness, women often have a negative image of their own self worth. Statistics show that women do not tend to choose career fields that traditionally have the highest earnings potential, or that are likely to propel them into the top ranks of major corporations (Wells, 2001).

Tannen (1994) describes a situation in which researchers asked a group of incoming college freshman to predict what their grades would be at the end of their first year. Some predictions were made anonymously and some were made publicly. The researchers found that the women predicted lower grades for themselves, but only when they made their predictions publicly. Their private predictions did not differ from the men's. This finding shows that the women did not have a lack of confidence but rather a reluctance to reveal that level of confidence (Tannen, 1994). This finding supports Tannen's (1994) belief that most women are not comfortable with deviating from what is expected of them, and are often their own worst enemy when it comes to progressing in the workplace.

Perception vs. Reality: How Pre-conceived Gender Roles Affect the Progress of Women  
Into Leadership Positions

For centuries, women have been cast in the role of wife, mother, nurturer, and caregiver, but rarely as providers or leaders. In 1903, Abbott argued that the woman is more content in the home, and should not do anything that might detract her energy from taking care of her family. Abbott's view on women who wished to work and take care of their families:

“Can she not do both? No! No more than man can. He cannot be in the market winning the bread, in the forum shaping public policies, and in the home ministering to life. Nor can she. She must choose.” (Abbot, 1903, p. 296)

While times have changed, many of the gender-stereotypes have not. Tannen states, “There is overwhelming evidence from studies in many different fields that people's judgments of others are influenced by appearance and other characteristics that cause us to see them as members of groups about which we have pre-existing assumptions” (Tannen, 1994, p. 193).

Research shows studies on women in executive positions, from a 20-year period following the woman's civil rights agenda in the 1960's and the feminist activism of the 1970's, were spurred by an awareness that men and women were treated differently in the workplace (Merrick, 2001). Researchers found that the underlying causes for this were

that women were systematically excluded in decision-making based on false perceptions, which in turn were based on stereotypes (Merrick, 2001).

Crampton and Mishra (1999) assert that men and masculine traits have a perceived higher value than women and feminine traits. This social outlook carries over into the workplace, where men in power continue to act on old stereotypes and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities (Walkup, 2000). Says Joyce Fletcher, Professor of Management at the Center for Gender in Organizations at Simmons College, "The masculine image of the heroic leader is amazingly resilient, in spite of the needs in today's economy."

As Snyder and Verderber (1992) point out, the traditional stereotypes held by most managers are changing very little. They found male managers' characterizations of men and women in the workplace differ only slightly from those of 20 years ago. And, of course, the vast majority of today's managers are men (Snyder & Verderber, 1992).

Hootsmans (1997) believes that although women have been encouraged to find a place in business and to be role models for the changing world, the underlying corporate culture of a "man's world" has barely budged.

From childhood, girls learn to adapt their speaking style so as not to seem too aggressive, which translates into too certain (Tannen, 1994). Tannen also suggests that many of the ways that women have learned to be likable and feminine are liabilities when it comes to climbing the corporate ladder. Females are often considered dependent, non-aggressive,

non-competitive, empathetic, subjective, intuitive, and indecisive (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). These perceptions can act as obstacles for women trying to get ahead.

According to an extensive study of gender associations conducted by Schein (1975), the researcher found that the following gender-based stereotypes exist with regards to leadership style:

#### Male Stereotypes:

- Aggressive
- Ambitious
- Analytical ability
- Competitive
- Consistent
- Desires responsibility
- Emotionally stable
- Forceful
- Leadership ability
- Logical
- Self-confident
- Objective

#### Female Stereotypes

- Aware of others' feelings
- Cheerful
- Creative
- Helpful
- Humanitarian values
- Intuitive
- Modest
- Sophisticated

To function as a leader is extremely difficult for a woman when people tend to work from the stereotypical belief that women are usually followers (Merrick, 2001). Research on sex-stereotyping in the executive ranks reveals that women are seen as lacking the

characteristics most needed to succeed and, consequently, are often judged as less qualified than men (Martell & Parker, 1998).

All other things being equal, when confronted with a man and woman they do not know in managerial positions, many people assume that the man is the more competent of the two (Tannen, 1994). Stuhlmacher and Walters (1999) suggest that gender itself serves as a cue to one's status. Because men and women are so frequently associated with different levels of status, interactions involving mixed gender combinations often carry the implicit assumption that the man is the more powerful one (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999).

People judge others not only by how they speak, but also by how they are spoken to (Tannen, 1994). If a woman routinely takes the position of the one asking all the questions to make her colleagues feel smart, she will be perceived as a novice who needs to constantly ask for help (Tannen, 1994).

The most common, and arguably the most detrimental, perception of women is that they do not exhibit the traits and behaviors conducive to their being promoted to the senior level (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). According to a recent study, 79% of CEO's agreed that gender stereotypes were among the most identifiable barriers to women's advancement in US corporations (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). These stereotypes included the assumption that women lack career commitment, that they are not tough enough, don't want to work long or unusual hours, are too emotional, won't relocate, lack quantitative and analytical skills and have trouble making decisions (Crampton & Mishra, 1999).

As women move into high-level management in increasing numbers, it has become evident that gender-based stereotypes can and do limit their advancement (Merrick, 2001). The irony of the situation is that when a woman uses strategies of gender reversal and adopts so-called male characteristics, she is likely to face alienation and hostility from her colleagues (Merrick, 2001). Many scholars argue that women who aspire to higher status positions in organizations are most affected by negative stereotypes because these women are violating sex-role expectations (Martell & Parker, 1998). Merrick (2001) uncovered a study in which researchers concluded that individuals who are sex-stereotyped have more negative attitudes toward people who perform cross-sex-stereotypical tasks, such as the tasks performed by women executives.

Interesting to note is that as more women advance into positions of power in corporate America, and their unique leadership skills become more mainstream, men in power have begun to take on traditionally feminine management behavior (Rutherford, 2000). However, this does not mean that these traits are as valued when displayed by women. Even now, when companies are saying that they want the skills women typically bring to the job, businesses often view women as well suited for careers in middle management but not for the top jobs (Sharpe, 2000). As Rutherford states, "Stereotypes of women still act against their acceptance into positions of power, while men's ability to adopt traditionally feminine communication skills means that a woman's supposed advantage may have been leapfrogged" (Rutherford, 2000, p. 331).

## Who's the Boss: The Effect of the Organizational Structure on Advancement Opportunities for Women

Another reason for the low number of women at the senior ranks that should not be overlooked is the practice of corporate discrimination. This occurs as a result of corporate cultures that have been male-dominated for so long, they become barriers for women to rise in the organization (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). Corporate discrimination can be in the form of policies, informal "good old boy's" networks, corporate inequities in opportunities or salaries, or any other practice that ignores and discourages women from seeking top management positions.

Women and men, in their different roles within an organization, often have unequal access to resources and benefits, and different levels of involvement and responsibility in development. Wharton (2000) contends that much gender-related behavior on the job stems from how the company and work distribution is organized rather than the characteristics of the workers. In the past, programs designed to equalize opportunities for women and men have often increased women's work and responsibilities without expanding their decision-making authority or increasing their pay ("Understanding Gender", 1996).

The Equal Pay Act passed in 1963 was intended to do just what it says—require that employees, regardless of their gender, be paid the same amount for doing the same job (Freeman, 1984). In essence, it would have made paying women less than men for

comparable work an unfair practice. However, the Equal Pay Act had no effect on the practice of assigning women and men different jobs based on their sex (Freeman, 1984), a practice some might say is still alive and well today. In some cases, work done primarily by men becomes lower paid and less prestigious when women begin to do it, and typically “women’s work” earns higher pay when done by men (“Understanding Gender”, 1996).

Today, nearly 40 years after the Equal Pay Act was put into place, women are still paid less than men—even when they have similar education, skills and experience (AFL-CIO, 2001). In 1999, women were paid 72 cents for every dollar men received. Over a lifetime of work, the lost 28 cents for every dollar adds up. The average 25-year-old working woman will lose more than \$523,000 to unequal pay during her working life (AFL-CIO, 2001).

The lack of equal salaries for men and women can also mean the lack of equal treatment. What is the work dynamic that qualified women are facing in much of corporate America? One that, while undoubtedly improving, still keeps them in their proverbial place. Studies indicate that women who enter predominately male jobs and work settings typically encounter much more hostility from their coworkers than do men who enter predominately female jobs and work settings (Wharton, 2000).

Even the encouraging trend that women are advancing into senior-level positions in rising numbers can be attributed to the fact that tokenism, the practice of hiring women as



simply a symbolic gesture of “diversity”, is becoming more and more widespread among businesses, rather than a real erosion of the glass ceiling (Frankforter, 1996). Merrick (2001) contends that women in upper management might discover that they are being used to show that the organization has non-discriminating hiring practices. As a result, a woman executive may have to deal with hostility from her colleagues in the workplace who feel they have been forced to work with her to avoid trouble with the powers that be (Merrick, 2001). Crampton and Mishra (1999) assert that although women in upper management are becoming more accepted, many companies place women in these positions to fill quotas and therefore women’s opinions are not valued as much as men’s. Kanter (1977) maintains that, as tokens, women become trapped in stereotypical roles, limiting their chances for successful performance and promotion.

When somebody takes a job, that person is entering a world that is already functioning (Tannen, 1994). The existing corporate culture of a company can determine the path of women to the senior ranks. Experts argue that women often lack the specific types of valuable work experience and bottom-line business knowledge necessary to develop the track record they need to secure the top spots in corporate management (Wells, 2001). The problem starts with the fact that most women get stuck in jobs that involve human resources or public relations—posts that rarely lead to the top (Sharpe, 2000). By establishing certain work roles, jobs, and occupations as appropriate for one gender and off limits to another, corporate cultural practices establish understandings about who should engage in what type of work (Wharton, 2000). It appears that executive settings

have adapted gender stereotypes along with the rest of the American culture (Merrick, 2001).

In general, workplaces that have previously had men in positions of power have already established masculine leadership styles as the norm (Tannen, 1994). In this sense, women, with their different communication and leadership styles, are starting out at a disadvantage (Tannen, 1994). The positions individuals hold within organizations shape the traits and behaviors they exhibit, as well as how they are perceived. Because women often secure positions that have titles with little real power or supervisory authority, for example, "director" instead of "vice president," they have trouble gaining acceptance as valuable, legitimate leaders (Crampton & Mishra, 1999).

Corporate climates that alienate and isolate women further limit women's career advancement. One of these internal barriers is the exclusion of women from informal male networks in the workplace. Critical contacts and discussions often take place on the golf course, at sporting events, or other informal extracurricular activities. Women are usually left out of such plans, therefore missing out on access to privileged information and essential opportunities to network (Crampton & Mishra, 1999).

Oakley (2000) claims that for women seeking a promotion to an executive position, their minority status within the company often makes it difficult to tap into the information they need from certain sources and networks, creating yet another obstacle in their path toward advancement. While there are many possible reasons for this exclusive behavior,

the outcome is usually the same. Women who do not seek out networking opportunities are unlikely to gain the influence needed for a promotion (Tannen, 1994).

This kind of influence is also acquired by having a mentor. "Mentoring" is a system by which a younger person, new to the organization, has a supporter who is established in the organization to bring him or her up through the ranks (Tannen, 1994). However, Crampton and Mishra (1999) found that mentoring opportunities are often limited for women, which results in a lack of access to important information. Tannen (1994) asserts that it is likely the older person will be male (having joined the organization when there were few or no women in it) and that he will be drawn to someone who reminds him of himself at that stage, who would also probably be male. Consequently, more males will be promoted to higher positions because they are able to take advantage of the various perks of mentorship, such as nominations for promotions and access to information networks (Crampton & Mishra, 1999).

Will women executives ever really become "one of the boys" to the extent that their male counterparts forget their sex and treat them as complete equals? Some researchers think it is simply a matter of who is making the hiring and promotion decisions (Wells, 2001).

Ellen L. Shuck, senior consultant at Hagburg Consulting, asks, "Who's choosing the CEO at most companies? The board of directors, which mainly tends to be white males. We're not yet gender blind. And with few women in the really top spots, there's not enough of a critical mass to exert change."

### Male vs. Female Leadership Styles: Which is More Effective?

“When decisions are made about promotion to management positions, the qualities sought are a high level of competence, decisiveness, and ability to lead. If it is men, or mostly men, who are making decisions about promotions—as it usually is—they are likely to misinterpret women’s ways of talking as showing indecisiveness, inability to assume authority, and even incompetence” (Tannen, 1994, p.136).

There are a number of different characteristics and traits that companies look for in a leader, such as aggressiveness, strength, assertiveness, confidence, and the necessary skills for the job. These qualities by themselves may not be gender specific, however, one must consider the reality that men and women can exhibit similar traits but provoke different reactions from others. Tannen (1994) suggests that when a woman adapts her communication style to be more like a man’s, she is seen as overly aggressive and bossy.

It is not disputed that men and women approach leadership differently. What continues to be an ever-present issue in the topic of corporate leadership is the question of effectiveness. While there is no real evidence to suggest that any one style is better than the other, there is still an undoubted advantage to applying a masculine style when it comes to getting promoted (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). Men and women communicate differently, both verbally and non-verbally, and consequently women are perceived as less empowering (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). However, if the approach is

different but the outcome is successful in both cases, is it fair to judge one sex as being more competent than the other?

While it may not be fair, it certainly happens. And it happens because of society's expectations of both genders. In fact, Sharpe (2000) discovered that male CEO's and vice presidents got high marks from their bosses when they were forceful and assertive and lower scores if they were cooperative and empathetic. The opposite was true for women. Female CEO's were downgraded for being assertive and got better feedback overall when they were cooperative (Sharpe, 2000). Sharpe (2000) concludes that even at the highest levels, bosses are still evaluating people in the most stereotypical ways. Ridgeway (1997) denotes that the use of a more lenient standard to judge men in leadership positions causes men to be perceived as having more task ability than women, even when both genders perform at the same level.

In corporate life, women are less likely than men to engage in behaviors that are self-promoting (Oakley, 2000). Women are supposed to be humble—to emphasize the ways that they are just like everyone else and to play down the things that make them special (Tannen, 1994). A woman who does this well comes across as lacking confidence. By talking in ways that seem appropriate to women to avoid sounding arrogant, women can inadvertently lessen their chances of being recognized for their accomplishments (Tannen, 1994).

Men are brought up to act in the opposite manner. They are expected to put themselves forward and to emphasize the qualities that make them look good (Tannen, 1994). What is considered a beneficial and sought-after trait in a leader is an acceptable behavior for a man, but not for a woman. Since the promotion of managers up the corporate ladder often depends on a person's skill in expressing his or her own authority, women are less likely to be recognized because they are generally less self-promoting than men (Oakley, 2000). According to a study conducted by Management Research Group, women managers are also more results-oriented at work, while their male counterparts engage in more business analysis and strategic planning (Wells, 2001). This study concluded that, in general, men were better at getting recognition for their efforts while women were better at focusing on the work and getting it done (Wells, 2001).

One of the most common communicative differences between men and women, which can have a great impact on a woman's ability to move ahead within a company, is that women often come across as too nice, or too gentle, to ever be respected as a leader. They are believed to employ more inadequate leadership practices than men in similar situations (Merrick, 2001). Male leaders have been shown to perceive themselves as strictly enforcing deadlines, demands and orders more so than female leaders (Merrick, 2001). Merrick (2001) makes the point that the success of the male leadership style may be based on a *perceived* dominance and a *perceived* ability to be in control of situations, while the success of female leadership style is based on models of participation and consideration.

Crampton and Mishra (1999) found that successful women attribute their leadership style to personal characteristics such as charisma, personal contacts and interpersonal skills rather than a more hierarchal model. Men are more likely to characterize their leadership style as a series of transactions between themselves and their subordinates (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). This type of leadership involves exchanging rewards for services or dispensing punishment for inadequate performance (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). These findings could mean that executive women are achieving more intangible outcomes, fostering better relationships or reaching quicker solutions than men, and just not being recognized because of it (Stulmacher & Walters, 1999).

One behavioral issue affecting the lack of women in CEO positions is a woman's gender identity, which describes her tendency to weigh decisions based on emotional impact and feelings, tendencies that may be seen as weaknesses when acted out in an executive position (Oakley, 2000). Additionally, most women like to talk issues out as a whole group, while men are more individualistic and don't necessarily like to work in teams (Roberts, 2000). When a woman deems it necessary to take a group consensus before making a decision, she is often interpreted as indecisive and unable to make a decision without taking other people's input into consideration (Tannen, 1994).

The most obvious communicative difference between men and women is their different styles of speaking, which ultimately can positively or negatively affect their perceived value as a leader. Overall, women have a "softer" manner of speaking (Tannen, 1994). They often ask a lot of questions, which can be perceived as a lack of knowledge

(Tannen, 1994). Women tend to be less specific than men and use longer sentences when they speak, which can result in their point being lost (Tannen, 1994). A direct style of speaking is seen as more powerful, more businesslike and more successful in terms of leadership in the corporate arena (Frankforter, 1996).

It is necessary to have a direct manner of speaking to be an effective negotiator (Tannen, 1994). Men usually have less difficulty with negotiations and asking for raises because they are not conditioned to shy away from self-promotion (Tannen, 1994). In a broad sense, negotiation involves an individual's attempt to acquire organizational privileges and resources (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). It is estimated that managers and executives spend as much as 20% of their time in negotiations (Baron, 1989). Therefore, negotiation is a fundamental skill that must be learned by any individual seeking to occupy a position of power, status and responsibility (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999).

In a negotiation skills study conducted by Stuhlmacher and Walters (1999), the researchers report that the women in their study made less use of tactics such as threats, put-downs and positional commitments; showed less interest in the bargaining task; spoke less and displayed more self-doubt than the men. The men were found to use more clarifications, initiations, self-disclosures and interruptions (Stuhlmacher & Walters 1999).

Based on speaking style alone (without taking into account numerous other communicative and pre-conceived gender-based stereotypes), men are almost always



more successful when negotiating for a raise or other privilege (Stuhlmacher & Walters 1999). Tannen (1994) suggests that since women do not feel comfortable “blowing their own horn”, they often negotiate raises in terms of fairness (i.e. by identifying another coworker at the same level who earns more) than by triumphing their own accomplishments. This tactic is not usually effective in a negotiation setting.

There are a number of female communicative traits that call women’s competence into question throughout their professional career. And while many of today’s corporations are opting towards a more female style of communication, this type of leadership is often confined to more “public image” sectors of the business such as advertising, marketing, human resources and public relations. Perhaps the real question is not which style is more effective, but rather, how long will it take before both styles are seen as equally competent?

CHAPTER III  
A SURVEY SEEKING THE OPINIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN ON THE ISSUES  
OF GENDER-SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP STYLES IN CORPORATIONS

Description of the Survey

The survey included nine statements that were measured using the Likert scale: a survey system based on a five-point measurement mechanism. The five possible answers on the rating scale consisted of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The statements were based on research findings, personal experience within the workplace and general knowledge about gender differences in communication. There was also a separate section for comments. Each statement had a general viewpoint about men and women as leaders in the workplace. The author's intention was to gain a better perspective on how men and women are perceived in executive roles, and which communication styles are seen as the most effective in a leadership position.

Sample

The sample used for this survey was chosen in order to gain the most accurate assessment of how men and women are really viewed in a corporate setting. The survey was distributed to 250 adults between the ages of 22-57 who work in corporate offices. Each of these individuals has personal experience with working for or with men and women, and some are currently in executive positions and are facing barriers or successes relevant

to those discussed in this study. The survey was completed and returned by 180 people. Those responses were then broken down into a random selection of 50 men and 50 women for an equal representation of both genders.

### Purpose of the Survey

The author's intention was to assess the different perceptions and attitudes that men and women have toward differing styles of leadership within their offices. Do men feel uncomfortable having a woman for a boss? Do women feel that they have equal opportunities to advance? Do the majority of people see the existence of the glass ceiling as a reality, and something that should be further investigated? The survey was also intended to gage the relevancy of the author's research findings and to support or challenge those findings. The survey responses allow for unique input and differing perspectives on this very pertinent topic to professionals.

### Analyzing the Results of the Study

The survey was posted on the web to make it easy to fill out and return, and to ensure the highest response rate possible. Individuals were e-mailed a link to the survey and when they were finished filling the survey out, they would click on the "Done" button and the results were immediately e-mailed to the author. Each of the respondents answered all nine questions, and many included helpful and insightful comments in the space provided. Once the completed surveys reached 180, the author tallied the results based on

male versus female responses using the five-point scale. The author measured the results by first assessing the answers by male and female separately, then by looking at the differences between the two genders to gauge their different attitudes.

Statement 1: Men generally make better bosses than women because men tend to be more assertive.

For this statement, there were 2 male respondents (4%) and 0 female respondents who strongly agreed. Two total respondents (2%) strongly agreed with this statement. There were 10 male respondents (20%) and 6 female respondents (12%) who agreed with this statement. Sixteen total respondents (16%) indicated that they agreed with this statement. Eight men (16%) who took the survey and 3 women (6%) took a neutral position. A total of 11 respondents (11%) were neutral for this statement. Twenty-four men (48%) and 27 women (54%) disagreed with this statement. Fifty-one total respondents (51%) disagreed with this statement. Six men (12%) and 14 women (28%) strongly disagreed with this statement. A total of 20 respondents (20%) strongly disagreed with Statement 1.

Since the majority of respondents (71%) responded with either disagree or strongly disagree, it can be concluded that there is not a strong belief among working professionals, both men and women, that men make better bosses because they are more assertive.

Statement 2: For the most part, men ask fewer questions than women, therefore men seem more competent.

The responses for this statement indicated that 1 male respondent (2%) and 0 female respondents strongly agreed. A total of one respondent (1%) strongly agreed with this statement. Ten male respondents (20%) and 7 female respondents (14%) agreed with the statement. Overall, 17 respondents (17%) agreed with this statement. Seven men (14%) and 4 women (8%) took a neutral position. Twenty-two men (44%) and 27 women (54%) disagreed with this statement. Collectively, 49 respondents (49%) disagreed with this statement. Eleven men (22%) and 12 women (24%) strongly disagreed with this statement. A total of 23 respondents (23%) strongly disagreed with this statement.

Given that the majority of respondents, both men and women, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, it can be concluded that most people do not perceive women to ask more questions than men, and consequently, do not see women as less competent.

**Statement 3: Women are generally less comfortable than men in a leadership role.**

One male respondent (2%) and 0 female respondents strongly agreed with this statement. A total of one respondent (1%) strongly agreed with this statement. Nine men (18%) and ten women (20%) agreed with statement 3. Overall, 19 respondents (19%) agreed with statement 3. Four men (8%) and 6 women (12%) took a neutral stance on this statement. Ten respondents total (10%) were neutral. Thirty-one men (62%) and 27 women (54%) disagreed with this statement. A total of 58 respondents (58%) disagreed with this

statement. Five men (10%) and 7 women (14%) strongly disagreed with statement 3. In total, 12 respondents (12%) strongly disagreed.

Since the majority of respondents (70%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, it can be concluded that most professionals, including both men and women, do not perceive women to be less comfortable in a leadership role.

Statement 4: Women generally make more effective bosses than men because women connect with their employees on a personal level.

One man (2%) and 2 women (4%) strongly agreed with Statement 4. A total of 3 respondents (3%) strongly agreed with this statement. Eight men (16%) and 14 women (28%) agreed with this statement. Overall, 22 respondents (22%) agreed with statement 4. Ten men (20%) and 12 women (24%) remained neutral. Twenty-two respondents (22%) took a neutral position. Twenty-five men (50%) and twenty-one women (42%) disagreed with this statement. A total of 46 respondents (46%) disagreed with statement 4. Six men (12%) and 1 woman (2%) strongly disagreed with this statement, totaling 7 respondents (7%) who strongly disagreed.

Given that over half of the respondents (53%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, it can be concluded that men and women do not think the women are more effective bosses because they connect with others on a personal level. However, it is important to note that many respondents were apprehensive to answer this question (22% remained neutral), and 28% of women agreed with this statement.

Statement 5: I would feel uncomfortable having a woman as my boss.

There were no respondents who strongly agreed with this statement. Five men (10%) and 6 women (12%) agreed with statement five. Eleven respondents (11%) in total agreed with this statement. There were no neutral male responses and 3 neutral female responses (6%). A total of 3 respondents (3%) remained neutral. Twenty-one men (42%) and 14 women (28%) disagreed with statement 5. Collectively, 35 respondents (35%) disagreed. Finally, 24 men (48%) and 27 women (54%) strongly disagreed with this statement, totaling 51 respondents (51%) who strongly disagreed.

These results clearly indicate that the majority of professionals (86%), both men and women, do not feel uncomfortable working for a woman.

Statement 6: For the most part, women have the same opportunities as men to move ahead in the corporate world.

Two men (4%) and 0 women strongly agreed to this statement, totaling 2 respondents (2%) who strongly agreed. Twenty-two men (44%) and 9 women (18%) agreed to this statement. Overall, 31 respondents (31%) agreed to this statement. Six men (12%) and 3 women (6%) took a neutral position. A total of 9 respondents (9%) remained neutral. Sixteen men (32%) disagreed with statement 6, as did 21 women (42%). A total of 37 respondents (37%) disagreed with this statement. Four men (8%) and 16 women (32%) strongly disagreed to this statement. In total, 20 respondents (20%) strongly disagreed.

Given the fact that the majority of the women (74%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, it can be inferred that the majority of women do not feel that there are equal advancement opportunities for both genders. Conversely, nearly half of the male respondents (44%, with another 12% remaining neutral) believed that women do have the same advancement opportunities. This leads the author to believe that this particular viewpoint is gender specific.

Statement 7: Overall, it is better for my boss to be command respect rather than to be nice.

For this statement, there were 14 male respondents (28%) and 8 female respondents (16%) who strongly agreed. Twenty-two total respondents (22%) strongly agreed with this statement. There were 25 male respondents (50%) and 24 female respondents (48%) who agreed with this statement. Forty-nine total respondents (49%) indicated that they agreed with this statement. Four men (8%) who took the survey and 5 women (10%) took a neutral position. A total of 9 respondents (9%) were neutral for this statement. Seven men (14%) and 11 women (22%) disagreed with this statement. Eighteen total respondents (18%) disagreed with this statement. Zero men and 2 women (4%) strongly disagreed with this statement. A total of 2 respondents (2%) strongly disagreed with statement 7.

Since the majority of men and women (71%) either agree or strongly agree to this statement, it can be concluded that most professionals believe it is more important for a leader to be respected than to be liked.



Statement 8: There is such a thing as the "glass ceiling" that hinders the advancement of women in the corporate world.

The responses for this statement indicate 2 male respondents (4%) and 10 female respondents (20%) strongly agreed. A total of 12 respondents (12%) strongly agreed with this statement. Thirteen male respondents (26%) and 28 female respondents (56%) agreed with the statement. Overall, 41 respondents (41%) agreed with this statement. Twelve men (24%) and 3 women (6%) took a neutral position. Eighteen men (36%) and 7 women (14%) disagreed with this statement. Collectively, 25 respondents (25%) disagreed with this statement. Six men (12%) and 1 woman (2%) strongly disagreed with this statement. A total of 7 respondents (7%) strongly disagreed with this statement.

Looking at these responses, the majority of women (76%) either agree or strongly agree that the glass ceiling is a reality for women in the workforce. Almost half of the male respondents (48%, with another 24% remaining neutral) disagreed with this statement. This leads the author to believe that the male respondents do not believe that the glass ceiling exists, or are not as familiar with the theory and were therefore hesitant to answer.

Statement 9: In general, my company encourages the advancement of women through policies such as equal pay for men and women.

Fifteen male respondents (30%) and 11 female respondents (22%) strongly agreed with this statement. A total of 26 respondents (26%) strongly agreed with this statement. Twenty-seven men (54%) and 22 women (44%) agreed with statement 9. Overall, 49

respondents (49%) agreed with statement 9. Seven men (14%) and 9 women (18%) took a neutral stance on this statement. Sixteen respondents total (16%) were neutral. One man (2%) and 8 women (16%) disagreed with this statement. A total of 9 respondents (9%) disagreed with this statement. Zero men and 1 woman (2%) strongly disagreed with statement 9. In total, 1 respondent (1%) strongly disagreed.

Since the majority of both men and women respondents (75%) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, it can be concluded that most people believe their company does promote equal policies for men and women. It is interesting to note, however, that 18% of women either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement as opposed to just 2% of men.

### Conclusion

The survey provided valuable insight into this study. While many facets of the research findings proved accurate, there were also some surprising revelations in the survey responses. The results also provide an interesting look at the issue from both women's and men's perspective. Many people offered their own comments and personal experiences, which gave the study additional dimension. The issue of gender in the workplace, and how it consequently affects hiring and promotion decisions, is a very relevant and significant one for most professionals. That relevance is reflected in the responses of the survey. Most of the individuals had very strong feelings about the different points being discussed.

CHAPTER IV  
LOOKING AT THE FACTS: A COMPARISON OF MALE AND FEMALE  
LEADERSHIP STYLES

While the research clearly indicates the existence and often prevalence of the glass ceiling in corporate America, this study reveals that the trend may be changing—or, at least, that people’s perceptions may be changing. And as perception becomes reality, and women are seen as more capable, more competent and more commanding of the respect that has eluded them, perhaps they will eventually break the glass ceiling and equal the number of male executives in American corporations.

Follow the Leader: Which Gender Gets Higher Marks in a Position of Power?

Results from this study show that most professionals are looking for a strong leader who has both strategic and personal skills. Specifically, many female respondents indicated that women make better bosses because they connect with their employees on an emotional and personal level. However, the majority of respondents did not agree with this theory. And, according to Tannen (1994), while women may think they are getting their message across by trying to please their employees and avoid conflict, they may be better served by being more direct and decisive in their leadership.

Taking this theory one step further, many respondents revealed that they did not prefer female bosses because women tend to act on their emotions more often than men. As one female respondent notes: "To be an executive in the business world requires thoughts and actions that are logical and sound. In my experience, women tend to act on the basis of emotion and take things too personally." This belief is consistent with Tannen's (1994) finding that women often take criticism to heart, believing that if their co-workers do not like their ideas, it is a reflection on them personally.

However, the steadfast image of the masculine leader may well be just a stereotype in itself, given the changing views of the professional world. And the reasons for the gross under-representation of women in executive positions are likely to morph into the benefits to corporations of promoting a diverse leadership standard. By evaluating the results of this study, the defined lines of man vs. woman in the workplace are beginning to change into effective leader vs. non-effective leader.

Merrick (2001) contends that the masculine-oriented leader may be coming under fire in today's place of business. A case study by Powell and Butterfield (1981) based on stereotypical traits defined by gender placed many traditionally feminine characteristics higher in the hierarchy of positive attributes than most male characteristics. This finding, while uncovered 20 years ago, is finally making an impact on today's executive world, in the form of changing perceptions and practices.

Frankforter (1996) suggests that the presence of female executives in corporations may enable firms to: manage diversity in their product and labor markets, provide mentors and role models for other high-performing women in the organization, and satisfy social justice concerns. Frankforter (1996) also argues that while leadership has primarily been defined in masculine terms, eventually market, legal and other forces may harm firms that continue to bar women from top management.

The results of this study also indicate the impact of the slow realization that women possess equally beneficial communicative and leadership skills. Many of the respondents do not see women's communicative differences, such as asking more questions or speaking in a less assertive manner, as a weakness in an executive position. Notes one male respondent, "I work in a mostly female department, and I am surrounded by women all day. I think women are the ones who are more assertive and likely to get what they want."

This contradicts the findings of the majority of researchers who argue that women often exhibit traits that are not conducive to getting what they want, such as willingness to accept blame, an over-eagerness to please everyone and an indirect style of speaking (Crampton & Mishra, 1999; Frankforter, 1996; Tannen, 1994; Terborg, 1977). However, it seems that more and more professionals' perceptions are changing, and in turn, they may begin to see the stronger characteristics of women that make them effective leaders. As Hootsman claims, "Women's abilities are not what will prevent them from entering senior management. Acceptance of them will" (Hootsman, 1997, p.196).

In a study conducted by Davies and Sally (1998) among nine female corporate presidents and CEO's, the researchers found that the importance of networks and peer similarities played a large role in fostering their success and acceptance. The women strategically attempted to network and maintain their high-status positions through such measures as modifying speech or behavior (Davies & Sally, 1998). Additional research suggests that executive men have a general discomfort with their female colleagues, and that women therefore must carefully manage their relationships with men (Mitchell, 2000). As one female survey respondent states, "I have worked for a couple of women bosses who were great—firm, knowledgeable and capable. In my opinion, the problem wasn't them, but rather the employees who seemed to have a hard time taking orders from a woman. A strong male boss is considered assertive, while a strong female boss is considered a witch."

Perhaps the fact that women often adapt their communication styles to be more like men is the reason why many of the professionals surveyed do not see women's communication styles as a problem—perhaps it is because the women who have the most power are communicating and leading in a traditionally masculine style. Hootsman (1997) believes that women need to face reality, be aware of the obstacles they are up against, recognize and evaluate the differences in male and female leadership styles and then develop their own ways to address their situations differently. Several female survey respondents commented that in order to overcome advancement barriers, women must exceed performance expectations, develop skills that make them indispensable to the

company and seek out highly visible assignments. This is consistent with Tannen's (1994) research in which she found that recognition is one of the most common factors in a person's being promoted.

While almost all of the respondents in this study disagreed with the statement that they would be uncomfortable having a woman as a boss, research and other evidence indicate otherwise. From the author's perspective, although there is quantitative evidence that most professionals do not have a gender preference when it comes to their superior, there is a strong qualitative inference that the opposite may be true. According to survey findings by Glamour Magazine, a publication with a predominantly female readership, 70% of respondents said that they preferred a male boss, while only 30% preferred a female boss (O'Connor, 2001).

Because of a presumed socially conscious bias that exists, the author believes that many respondents of this study's survey were not entirely forthcoming in their quantitative answers. However, many of the comments provided validated previous findings that people prefer male characteristics in a boss. One female respondent claims, "I think men make better bosses. They are better at making big decisions because they don't base them on emotions. It is human nature that women communicate more on an emotional level." Another female respondent agrees, "I prefer a male boss. Men are more easygoing and do not play games. I also think that women usually have an agenda and they feel like they need to prove a point."

That is not to say that women are only one way and men are only another. This study was conducted on the basis of previous research and an established understanding of female leadership traits in general. Roberts (2000) describes women as having superior intuitive, nurturing and team-building skills. While most of this study's respondents thought it was more important for an executive to be respected than to be nice, many commented that it is difficult for managers to gain respect if they are not nice to their subordinates. One female respondent states, "I think that in order to advance in a career, you need to be respected before you need to be nice. But obviously it makes for a better workplace for everyone if you have both."

Given the research concerning the leadership traits of both genders, one could conclude that because women are more focused on having a good relationship with their subordinates and men are likely to take a more analytical, businesslike approach (Crampton & Mishra, 1999), women may be at an advantage for being able to gain the respect of their employees. One female survey respondent notes, "While women have certainly moved ahead in the corporate world, there still seems to be an abundance of men, both qualified and not, in senior management positions. Communication style has to include the willingness to share information and encourage feedback and opinions. I feel women are more apt to be good listeners."

An interesting finding of the study is that it seems as though many professionals have become accustomed to seeing women in positions of power. Contrary to the results of a study by Martell and Parker (1998), which found a strong positive relationship between



descriptions of men and successful managers and virtually no relationship between descriptions of women and successful managers, this study reveals that many professionals view women as very successful in powerful roles. In fact, the majority of this study's respondents indicated that they do not think women are less comfortable in a leadership role.

There are advantages to both leadership styles. However, when one looks at the numbers and sees that men still significantly outnumber women in executive roles, even today, it is clear that there is still a huge gender gap in the business world. Crampton and Mishra (1999) use the example of a school setting. In schools, women teach and men plan, organize, direct and control. This example carries through most corporations. Women work well for organizations as middle managers, but the men are the ones with the real authority and decision-making power (Crampton & Mishra, 1999).

#### Slow But Steady: The Glass Ceiling is Not Shattered Yet

Research has shown that while women have achieved virtual equality with men when it comes to entering organizations, within five to six years, their careers begin to lag behind those of their male counterparts (Blake, 2001). What is this invisible wall that women seem to hit, blocking them from advancing beyond middle management? Many know it as the glass ceiling. But others blame the phenomenon on the fact that women are often having children at the same critical time that men are advancing in corporations. This view suggests that the glass ceiling is based on nothing more than a simple fact of life.

The behavioral and social expectations of women greatly impact the existence and the effect of the glass ceiling. Jacqueline Jones, Truman professor of history at Brandeis University, states:

“You start in the home where things have not changed all that much. There is still ‘woman’s work.’ And until that whole notion disappears, until childcare and drudge work are shared equally by men, all else is secondary. What happens in the home conditions what women do in the workplace and the constraints they face.”

Unfortunately, the majority of the burden of child rearing is still placed on the mother, which imposes additional responsibility on a career woman that is not usually faced by a man (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). It is harder on women in top positions than men, because the support system for women and men is different, both at home and at work (Roberts, 2000).

The choice to have children is something that many women come up against on their quest to the top. It has been noted that the orientations women have been socialized to adopt toward themselves, their families and their careers are considered to be contrary to the demands of top management positions (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). Applying this theory to a corporate setting, one male survey respondent states, “Women most often create their own glass ceiling. If an executive job is being offered and the two applicants have similar strengths, the employer should look at the details. If one candidate has a

high probability of time out and the other does not, why shouldn't the employer make the obvious choice?"

According to Weinstein (1999), less than 20% of college-graduate women born between 1944 and 1954 actually achieved both career and family by their early 40's. Additionally, a 1991 US Department of Labor survey on the effects of the glass ceiling found that many male managers automatically assume that women who have children simply would not be interested in being considered for promotions or assignments that require long hours (Snyder & Verderber, 1992). In studies among 100 successful women conducted by Sylvia Ann Hewlett, author of "Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children," findings revealed that the more successful a woman is, the less likely she is to have children (Belkin, 2002). Conversely, Hewlett discovered that the more successful a man is, the more likely he is to have children (Belkin, 2002). The fact is, the modern labor market is inflexible—it does not offer many jobs that are structured to allow a woman to do both (Weinstein, 1999).

The question as to whether or not the glass ceiling exists in today's labor market was met with differing reactions from men and women. Responses supported Martell and Parker's (1998) finding that male executives believe the organizational obstacles responsible for limiting women's progress have been dismantled, and as a result, women are no longer seriously disadvantaged in their bid for the executive suite. Nearly half of this survey's male respondents believe that women have the same opportunities as men to move ahead in the corporate world. One man surveyed refers to specific high-profile women in

power. "Women are definitely given an equal chance to advance in the workplace," he comments. "Recently we have seen many women become CEO's of top companies. Some of the most notable are Patricia Russo of Lucent Technologies, Carly Fiorina of Hewlett Packard, Andrea Jung of Avon Products, and Meg Whitman of eBay. I believe that, for the most part, gender discrimination is a thing of the past."

The women surveyed responded quite differently than the men when asked whether or not they believe a glass ceiling exists. Nearly 75% of the female respondents did not agree that women have the same opportunities as men to succeed in the corporate world. "I have worked in different companies with different cultures," notes one female respondent. "I've found that it was very rare to have a women in a higher-up position. The most common mix has been an all-female department with a male boss." Another female surveyed states, "I have been with my company for 10 years, and have been trying to get the same bonus payments and salary as men that are at the same level, without success. It's not fair."

Is the glass ceiling a reality? Are the opportunities there? And if so, are women simply just not taking advantage of them? A study by Crampton and Mishra (1999) found that, on average, men exhibited lower ambition in terms of bidding for promotion than women and had worse performance scores, yet men were offered more promotions per year of service than women, often due to the building of informal networks within the organization. However, networking opportunities have long eluded women in corporate America (Tannen, 1994). In addition, Wells (2001) suggests there is a definite disparity

that persists between the large number of women who are managers and the much smaller percentage that become top corporate officers.

The Glass Ceiling Commission found that at the executive level, women are still confronting myths about their qualifications and abilities (Redwood, 1995). The Commission's findings indicate that senior-level women earn an average of \$102,000 less in annual compensation than male executives, even though they put in the same long hours, are willing to relocate and rarely take leaves of absences except for maternity (Redwood, 1995). Validating this finding, one female survey respondent states, "In my company the most recent promotions were both women, but the four highest positions in the company are held by men. The two women who were promoted are still a step below the fourth lowest position held by the men."

In fact, a study conducted by Lyness and Judiesch (1999) found that women are more likely to be promoted into top management positions than to be hired into them, and that women in higher-level positions receive fewer promotions than women in lower-level positions. Simply stated, women often follow a somewhat equal path to their male counterparts through the corporate ranks, however, they fall short when they get trapped within the confines of middle management. This finding clearly indicates the existence of a glass ceiling for women. And while each corporate setting may present different challenges for women, the consequences are universal (Hootsman, 1997). Women consistently fail to reach equality to men at the senior ranks.

The vast majority of female survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that there is such a thing as the glass ceiling, which hinders the advancement of women in the corporate world, while the majority of male respondents either disagreed or remained neutral on this point. The author concludes that because men are not affected by the existence of the glass ceiling in the same ways that women are, men may not be as familiar with the concept and its significant role in the structure of organizations. The author finds it interesting to note that there was only one female respondent who strongly disagreed that a glass ceiling limits the advancement of women into high-level positions. The response to this statement, along with countless research findings and observations, signifies that while the glass ceiling is an abstract and intangible concept to some, it is very real to the women in corporate America who have been affected by its barriers.

#### Leadership: A Quality That Knows No Gender

The few women in corporate America who have made it to the top ranks have crafted their own unique style of leadership to succeed. This can also be said of most men at the senior level. And while men and women have differing communication styles and ways of managing others, it is becoming evident that leadership is not resigned to one gender, nor is it exclusively reserved for those people who are the CEO's or the vice presidents. Nominal leaders may be ranked at the top, but there are decidedly more professionals in corporate America who exhibit the same traits that those surveyed indicated are most valuable in a leader.

Issues such as politics, prejudices and gender discrimination can block women from advancing within the corporate arena, but these issues have little bearing on a person's inherent leadership ability. One male survey respondent comments, "Some of the strongest leaders I have had the pleasure to deal with are women. It is my experience that leadership is not so much a skill that can be learned, as it is a quality that's source is character—which is gender neutral. Courage, compassion and humility come to mind as important leadership traits."

For the purposes of this study, the author focuses on the effect of gender-specific biases within organizations, and, while there are considerably more companies beginning to hire and promote women, why female leadership styles continue to be seen as less productive and less desirable than men's. Certainly, based on the responses from the women in this study as well as supplemental research, women are keenly aware that they inhabit a different reality at the office than men. They have to work harder, adapt their speaking style, their management style and their lifestyle in order to succeed (Sharpe, 2000). The reality remains that when male executives are asked to characterize the styles of both male and female managers, they describe female managers as less analytical, less emotionally stable, less consistent and less competent than their male counterparts (Oakley, 2000).

While it is true that the traditionally masculine leadership style is still the most valued and the most credible in corporate America, women's style of leadership is becoming a sought-after standard for many companies looking to retain good employees. Douglas

Elix, head of IBM's Global Services division, says, "Women think through decisions better than men, are more collaborative and seek less personal glory. Instead of being motivated by self-interest, women are more driven by what they can do for the company." Other experts agree that women are especially skilled in the areas needed to succeed in the global information age, where teamwork and partnering are so important (Sharpe, 2000). As organizational structures are flattening and requiring more participative management, some researchers suggest women have a natural style that will enable them to better manage in these new corporate environments (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). However, companies often undercut these strengths by assuming that people skills are not business skills, when in fact, they can be equally beneficial (Sharpe, 2000).

The problem is that old habits die hard, and in the biggest companies, change is often met with resistance. Because men have held the powerful positions for so long, corporate America has become accustomed to the image of the male leader, the male CEO, the male president, and in turn, people judge leadership based on existing male standards. The common assumption is that the lower the status held by a person, the more likely that person is to yield to influence (Merrick, 2001). Because men usually have a higher status in organizations, people infer that most women will yield to the influence of their male counterparts (Merrick, 2001). Men are judged as more dominant, influential and more effective whereas women are regarded as submissive, conforming and easily influenced—undesirable traits in a senior level manager (Merrick, 2001). Is this a result of pre-existing gender-based stereotypes, or simply an honest account of management performance among men and women?



While arguments can be made for both sides of the issue, research shows there is no defining leadership standard that indicates one gender is more competent than the other (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). The real issues are the external perceptions of others, which can influence the self-perceptions of women, and the lack of opportunity for women to advance within organizations. This study does not call into question the knowledge and leadership ability of women (nor the leadership ability of men), but rather, why their abilities are not as respected or as valued, and why women seem to be judged on an entirely different scale than their male counterparts. According to a large-scale study of senior women executives by Catalyst, most of the women surveyed directly or indirectly confirm the difficulty in competing and excelling in a male-dominated and male-structured world ("Study of Women Executives Released", 1996).

Leadership may be a gender-neutral characteristic, however, in order to succeed as a leader in corporate America, one must be able to powerfully influence others. If there are people in the organization who will never view a woman as powerful, then her leadership ability is irrelevant. Most researchers attribute lingering stereotypes and biases about both sexes to the fact that there are so many men in senior-level positions, rather than a reflection on women's actual capacity to be leaders.

There have been numerous studies indicating that women often rank higher than men on significant fronts in the workplace. An analysis of 58,000 managers conducted by Personnel Decisions International Corp. in Minneapolis, MN, found that women scored

higher in 20 of 23 management areas (Wells, 2001). A similar study of 425 high-level executives, executed by Hagberg Consulting Group in Foster City, CA, revealed women were rated higher than their male counterparts in 42 of the 52 skills measured (Wells, 2001). These findings are not uncommon, therefore begging the question: If women are so well suited to become company leaders, why aren't more of them moving to the top?

Given the research and the results of this study, it appears there are several contributing factors to the absence of women at the senior ranks. Labor statistics, workforce demographics, management stereotypes and discrimination, self-perceptions and basic facts of life all play a part in the elusiveness of corporate leadership to women (Wells, 2001). None of these reasons, however, suggests that women are inferior to men when it comes to corporate management, even though their motivation may be different. Tannen (1990) contends that women are motivated by maintaining relationships, while men are motivated by competition and status. And therein lies the perception that women are not out for the top positions and that men make more competent leaders.

The author concludes that traditionally male leadership characteristics and traditionally female characteristics are beginning to blend into a different style, one that is truly gender neutral. The ideal leadership approach is one that incorporates assertiveness and attentiveness, strategic and relational skills. While it is nearly impossible to ignore the obvious communication and other inherent differences between men and women, the author believes that many companies are beginning to recognize that a true leader works to enhance the overall growth of the company, regardless of his or her gender.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

For a wide variety of reasons, few women make it to the top of the corporate world. Research demonstrates that there is a strong under-representation of women in the top four occupations: chair, CEO, vice chair, and president (Bertrand & Hallock, 2001). As discussed in the previous chapters, leadership is not necessarily synonymous with being the boss. However, senior management within organizations is often associated with power. If women continue to be held back from the senior ranks, then it is unlikely they will ever be viewed as powerful within corporations. Through academic and personal research, the author concludes the problem is not that women are incapable of effective leadership.

The problem lies in the existing gender-based stereotypes that brand women as less competent; it lies in the societal pressures that women face to do it all and have it all with little or no support; it lies in the informal corporate networks that continue to exclude women and bar them from gaining valuable information; it lies in women themselves who doubt their own abilities and seek out less challenging positions to avoid additional pressure; and it lies in the historical pattern of corporate America, which has consistently left women behind in the tracks of a male-dominated culture.

The subject of women's progression in the workplace is a complex one, with many sides and many explanations. A comprehensive study by Ragins and Sundstrom (1989)

provided a model of over 30 unique factors that potentially affect sex-segregation at the organizational level. Individuals' gender inevitably factors into their opinions and theories about the under-representation of women in high-level positions. Although the research clearly indicates that things are changing for the better, the changes are not keeping pace with the rapid rate with which women are entering the work force. Opportunity, job flexibility and corporate open-mindedness are just a few of the factors that help encourage women to advance beyond middle management. These and other social practices will need to become more common and more accessible before women will be able to achieve the high-level positions as frequently as men.

#### A Review of Women's Path to the Top and the Barriers They Face

In a world where a person's economic power can determine not only one's corporate standing but also one's social status, earning a senior corporate officer position is often (though not always) the ultimate goal for professionals. And for women, the quest to achieve that goal is usually met with a much harsher reality than for men. Women who do actually make it to the top often face criticism regarding their leadership styles and practices, since the masculine leadership style has been the norm for so long in corporate America.

The problems start long before women even come close to being promoted or hired into a senior executive position. Self-inflicted inhibitions and roadblocks to success have long affected women's career advancement. Women have been shown to have internal barriers

that need to be addressed. They need to develop the confidence and appropriate skills and attitudes needed to success in business (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). Tapping into their fullest potential requires women to first understand the forces operating within organizations that may impede their progress.

The organization itself can block women from advancing if it engages in practices that intentionally make it difficult for women to work there. From the beginning, during the interview and hiring process, women are held to a different set of expectations than those of their male counterparts. Selection and job placement favor those persons who are serious about a career (Fenn, 1976). Women are not typically perceived to be leaders or career-oriented. As a result, women often come up short in staffing decisions (Merrick, 2001). They are placed in subordinate positions with lower salaries, making it difficult to yield any influence within the company.

This inequality within corporate structures can result in a significantly more challenging road to the top for women. Considerable evidence suggests that women have less access to organizational resources such as pay, promotion and status (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999). The disparity underscores the need to investigate how gender differences in the workplace ultimately affect women's careers. Wells (2001) suggests that if women perceive there to be pay or promotion inequality within their companies, they are more likely than men to look outside their current employer for a better job rather than fighting for a raise or promotion. The author strongly believes that it is important to understand the impact of gender differences in organizations and the benefits of a diverse workforce,

and to move forward towards creating and sustaining more opportunities for women to advance.

Throughout their professional careers, women must work harder to achieve what is automatically given to men: respect. In a study by Davies and Sally (1998), the researchers confirm that there is a strong relationship between peer similarities and success in elite positions. Women confront challenges such as the cultural expectations of what behavior is considered competent, as well as the availability of opportunities to demonstrate competent behavior (Hayes, Crocker & Kowalski, 1999). Their exclusion from such informal office activities as discussions about sports, golf outings and mentors gives women little opportunity to network. Without networking, women are usually unable to gain access to important information that could help them get promoted. The absence of such opportunities is a definite factor in women's difficult quest to senior management.

Once women are able to reach the ranks of middle management, they are faced with an entirely new set of obstacles. Now they must deal with a certain level of leadership, discipline and managerial skills, as well as the perceptions of their subordinates, colleagues and superiors. Many researchers have found that men are less comfortable working under a woman and more comfortable working for another man (Merrick, 2001). This reasoning could be why more women are not promoted to the top. And, because most senior managers are men, the pattern is self-perpetuating (Merrick, 2001). In fact,

research suggests that women are often not recognized and developed, or promoted into executive positions (Mitchell, 2000).

Men and women can and do hold similar positions of power within corporations with equal success. However, holding the same position does not mean that each gender is subject to the same scrutiny and standards. When women do make it into that elusive “inner circle” at the top, they often encounter a different set of issues and expectations than those faced by men (Mitchell, 2000). Take Carly Fiorina, the chief executive of Hewlett Packard, who, like most CEO’s of large corporations, frequently uses the company’s private jets to travel (Lohr, 2002). However, Fiorina was singled out and criticized for being too extravagant and too “fond of corporate luxury” (Lohr, 2002).

The double standard that is applied to many female executives is a product of gender-based stereotypes that have been in existence for many years. Part of the reason that women in positions of authority are judged based on their gender is that the very notion of authority is associated with masculinity (Tannen, 1994). Even in these times of great change, when women are advancing at faster rates and accounting for nearly half of the American workforce, men still seem to be able to hold on to the most powerful positions in organizations (Rutherford, 1999). Many researchers predict that the obstacles related to the existence of the glass ceiling will continue to hinder women’s progress toward top management for the next several decades (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). In a Fortune Magazine study, 201 chief executives were surveyed from the nations leading companies. Only 16 indicated that it was likely they would have a female CEO within the next ten

years, while only 18% thought it was likely to happen within the next 20 years (Crampton & Mishra, 1999).

It is the author's conclusion that the difficulties women face on their way to the top are unique to their gender, clearly defined and likely to become less common as others' perceptions change. Women who have broken through the glass ceiling have recognized that effective leaders don't come from one mold. In the past, women leaders have modeled their leadership styles after successful male managers (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). Now it seems, based on significant research and the results of this study, that powerful women are no longer as rare as they used to be. Women are becoming more comfortable with leadership and management, and taking the steps they need to obtain such positions.

#### The Best of Both Worlds: Celebrating Diversity in Leadership

Companies are starting to realize the value of having women in top management. A study by Frankforter (1996) found that the glass ceiling has become more permeable over time, with more women successfully attaining corporate officer positions than in the past. One of the biggest problems that women face upon entering the workforce is that they enter a male economy, a male work culture and organizations structured to meet the situations of men. Until the workforce changes to accommodate that there is now a society in which men and women both participate full time, and both hold powerful positions, the goal of



equality is unattainable. Furthermore, if companies are not receptive to change, they run the risk of losing excellent female employees.

People in power within corporations need to realize that not all women have the same leadership style, just as not all men have the same leadership style. What are considered traditionally masculine or traditionally feminine leadership traits may actually combine to create the ideal leader: a leader who is competitive yet understanding, aggressive yet concerned about others. A true integration of both gender-characteristics may well be the future of corporate leadership.

While it is true that there are differences between men and women when it comes to managerial and leadership styles, communication and decision-making, there does not appear to be one superior style specific to one gender. In order to attain the greatest benefits, companies should harness and celebrate these differences instead of isolating them. As Crampton and Mishra state, "Perhaps researchers, organizations and managers need to spend less time focusing on the differences between male and female managerial styles and more time studying exactly which managerial behaviors are effective in improving morale, productivity and work conditions, regardless of gender" (Crampton & Mishra, 1999, p.103).

### Looking Toward the Future

In a perfect world, women and men would earn the same salaries for doing the same job. They would have the same opportunities to attain those jobs. And they would be seen as equally effective in the same roles. However, the reality is that change is necessary. The male-dominated corporate culture of decades ago that still holds strong among the highest ranked corporate officers needs to change. Society's expectations of a woman's role in the workforce being secondary to a woman's role in the home need to change. Women's self-inflicted doubt, blame and apprehension about going for the highest positions within corporations needs to change. And finally, people's perceptions of which gender is more powerful and which gender makes the better leader need to change.

The author concludes that change is slowly coming about. In a refreshingly more promising viewpoint than what the research uncovered, results of this particular study showed that women are making great strides in the professional world. While their communication and leadership styles may be different, women and men are beginning to be seen as equally effective leaders. As previous research has clearly demonstrated, perceptions become reality when dealing with this issue. If their peers and subordinates perceive women as valuable in a leadership position, the opportunities will arise for women to achieve high-ranking corporate offices.

In the end, it takes a lot more than competence and high performance evaluations to make it to the top. There are many more factors that come into play when the selection process

for the senior-level positions takes place. Women may be able to prove themselves as strong, assertive leaders through their actions and bottom-line results, however, unlike men they do not start out with this advantage. Until that simple fact changes and men and women begin their professional careers on an equal playing field, the barriers that limit the advancement of women will continue to exist.

According to Sharpe (2000), companies say they want collaborative leaders, but they still hold strong beliefs that top managers need to be heroic figures. Interpersonal skills may be recognized as important, but they aren't yet seen as necessities for the CEO positions. Women continue to be seen as lacking what it takes to succeed in executive levels of management. And as long as these perceptions prevail over their real leadership ability, women will remain a rarity in the top company positions.

There are many theories that attempt to explain the current under-representation of women in executive roles. The "pipeline theory" argues that the paucity of women executives is a result of past discrimination, and that as more women enter the ranks of middle management, the glass ceiling will eventually shatter (Martell & Parker, 1998). However, Martell and Parker's (1998) study supported a "lack of fit" explanation, suggesting that a mere increase in the number of women moving through the workforce is unlikely to have an effect on the near absence of women in the executive suite.

"Lack of fit." This phrase is perhaps the best summation of the single most challenging barrier that women face in their road to the top. Their communication styles do not fit

workplace and women in positions of power more so than any of the author's previous research. And there is significant research in support of women as equally effective leaders in their own right.

The bottom line is that there is no bottom line. Women, while becoming increasingly more accepted in the world of management, are still undeniably held back. One can't assign blame for this fact without understanding the established norms in corporate America. If a traditionally male leadership style has been recognized as the standard throughout history, then that standard will inevitably be what people are conditioned to believe is acceptable in the workplace, and will make their hiring and promotion decisions accordingly. Is it possible for women to rise above these existing preconceptions?

In an optimistic deduction, the author concludes that it is possible with hard work, thick skin, personal sacrifice and perseverance. Is it fair that women have to work harder than men to obtain a CEO position? Maybe not, but for now, at least, it remains a reality. Often women need to make a choice between diplomacy and advancing their careers ("Cracking the Code", 2001). Women have proved over time to be resilient and determined in the face of challenges regarding their gender. The author believes that women will once again steadily climb the ranks until they account for equal numbers in the executive boards.

The author asserts that the greatest impact on the low number of female CEO's in corporate America are the external and internal perceptions of women. While the perception of powerful women is not usually the reality, it can ultimately become the strongest factor in the advancement of women because of its ability to influence the decisions and opinions of others. Each woman must decide for herself if she is willing to challenge those perceptions, by doing the best possible job and staying true to herself.

Based on all of the research and survey responses, as well as personal experience as a woman in the working world, the author believes that the fight against the existence of gender differences is a fruitless one. Women do not need to adapt their leadership styles to be more like men. Instead, they should celebrate and embrace their unique abilities. As companies struggle to keep pace with the rising number of women in the workforce, their executive boards as realizing the benefits of diversity in leadership. Women have all of the skills that it takes to be a successful executive, and there is nothing gender-based about that (Roberts, 2000).

In summation, the author believes that women have already shown that they are equally effective leaders. Their equal representation in the senior ranks will inevitably become a reality as women continue to lead companies as successfully as men. As older generations move out of the top executive spots and make room for professionals who know the value of having both men and women as leaders within a company, women will likely achieve their rightful place in the boardroom.

Because the issue of gender differences is so relevant in the modern labor market, it should continue to be brought to the forefront of the executive selection process within organizations. Once the gender-stereotypes and barriers begin to diminish, corporations and the rest of society can start evaluating leaders based on their abilities, qualifications and influence instead of their feminine or masculine associations.

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Appendix A

Survey

**Women and Men as Corporate Executives:  
A leadership style assessment**

The purpose of this survey is to get a better perspective on how men and women are perceived in executive roles, and which communication styles are seen as the most effective in a leadership position. My objective is to get your candid answers to these questions in order to get the most accurate assessment.

- All of your answers will be kept confidential.
- Final results and analysis will be available upon data completion.

*Please rate the following statements on the basis of your own experience in the corporate world.*

**Key**

**SA = Strongly Agree**

**A = Agree**

**N = Neutral**

**D = Disagree**

**SD = Strongly Disagree**

- |   |    |   |   |   |    |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. Men generally make better bosses than women because they tend to be more assertive.                                | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 2. For the most part, men ask fewer questions than women, therefore men seem more competent.                          | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 3. Women are usually less comfortable than men in a leadership role.  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 4. Women are generally more effective bosses than men because women connect with their employees on a personal level. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 5. I would feel uncomfortable having a woman as my boss.  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 6. For the most part, women have the same opportunities as men to move ahead in the corporate world.                  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 7. Overall, it is more important for my boss to command respect than to be nice.                                      | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 8. There is such a thing as the "glass ceiling" that hinders the advancement of women in the corporate world.         | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 9. In general, my company encourages the advancement of women through policies such as equal pay for men and women.   | SA | A | N | D | SD |

Please add any additional comments here: