

18 RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: GENDER, DIVERSITY AND THE ROUTE TO THE TOP

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Introduction

Responsible leadership is a cornerstone of addressing the grand challenges of our time, whether it is in a political office, corporate function, or grassroots movement. At its core, a responsible leader's task is "*to weave a web of inclusion* where the leader engages himself among equals" using a combination of emotional, relational and ethical intelligence (Mark and Pless, 2006:104, emphasis in text). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) (2015) present leaders with compelling calls to action in pursuit of a more liveable, equitable and sustainable global society. To fulfil SDGs relating to, for example, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality and decent work and economic growth, responsible leaders must "exercise...personal influence [for] accomplishing shared objectives in a way that is personally satisfying to those involved" (Nirenberg, 2004: 845-46). These ambitions pose a tremendous opportunity, yet also a formidable challenge. The opportunity lies in being able to meet the most pressing needs of the global populace through concerted collaborative action. The challenge, however, relates to implementing change in an inclusive manner, and being willing to listen to the diverse voices of those whose interests the SDGs aim to fulfil.

To rise to this challenge, responsible leaders not only need to tackle world-scale issues, but also enable the development of more responsible leaders – for the present, and for the future. This is critical for the creation of an inclusive society in an increasingly global and interconnected world. Efforts to make organizations more purposeful and meaningful for a greater plurality of individuals, directly address goals relating to equality and socio-economic progress. Developing a more diverse cohort of leaders, however, is bound to enhance the quality of leadership – and thereby progress a larger group of SDGs.

This chapter addresses the need to create a more representative and diverse group of leaders. It addresses the barriers that inhibit the progress of potential leaders who have to date been under-represented in the upper echelons due to their gender or ethnicity – two key dimensions of diversity. Specifically, this chapter starts by outlining the context of gender and ethnic diversity in leadership. It draws on evidence from aspiring and established leaders across a variety of sectors and organizational contexts, to expose institutional and individual barriers to their leadership development. The chapter concludes by utilizing the evidence on barriers to generate a selection of principles for responsible leadership development in organizations.

Gender and other forms of diversity in leadership

Since the 1980s, socioeconomic changes have prompted an increasing number of organizations to recruit, promote and retain high-potential females to join the top management ranks (Vinkenburg, Jansen and Koopman, 2000). Yet, in 2018, women still made up only 22.5 per cent of the Board of Directors in Fortune 500 companies, with women of color in an even starker minority, at 4.6 per cent (DiversityInc, 2020). The picture looks bleaker when it comes to other forms of diversity. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK) there are only 6 ethnic minority Chairs or CEOs across the UK's FTSE 100 (Parker and The Parker Review Committee, 2017). Looking at the public sector, only 6 per cent of Chairs in England's National Health Service are from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background (NHS Confederation, 2019). Similarly, heads of academic institutions with a disability also only stood at 3.1 per cent and a similar absence of leaders with disabilities has also been reported for other organizations (Roulstone and Williams, 2014). The current landscape of leadership is thus only sparsely diverse. Developing a more diverse cohort of leaders is a pressing priority.

Several studies highlight why diversity in leadership is important beyond simply creating a more inclusive work environment. Eagly (2013), for example, found that greater representation of women in senior leadership positions positively affected companies' financial performance, in a study linking their specific leadership style to the high performance of management teams in organizational contexts of innovation. Higher numbers of female leaders have also been found to enhance companies' corporate social performance, which is benefited through the enactment of 'soft' traits such as empathy, care and a generally sensitive disposition (Boulouta, 2013). Additionally, diversity in public leadership can enable those with power and authority to promote the interests of those they represent (Breslin, Pandey and Riccucci, 2017). As such, facilitating diversity at all levels of the leadership pipeline is as important as maintaining it in the upper echelons of organizations.

The multitude of ways in which diversity in leadership is conceptualized and consequently implemented has been highlighted by Ely and Thomas (2001) in the form of three paradigms. According to the authors, despite the – often – good intentions, the first two paradigms can have potential pitfalls. The *discrimination-and-fairness* paradigm recognizes that discrimination is wrong, but may end up idealizing assimilation, leading to diversity conformism. The *access-and-legitimacy* paradigm embraces diversity by celebrating differences as a way to access a more diverse customer base but may lead to marginalization or exploitation of certain groups. For Ely and Thomas, a third paradigm overcomes these pitfalls. Specifically, the *integration-and-learning* paradigm aims for integration by promoting a plurality of work perspectives and tapping into the differences in the organizational membership to generate creative ideas and enhance organizational effectiveness. This range of paradigms reflects the complexities associated with understanding and designing diversity policies, let alone implementing them.

The persistent lack, or poor implementation, of diversity policies illustrated in the examples above reflects that under-represented groups are confronted with multiple barriers on their pathways to leadership (Eagly and Carli, 2007). We examine these barriers by applying an intersectional lens. 'Intersectionality' refers to the "idea that social identities such as race, class, and gender interact to form qualitatively different meanings and experiences" for individuals than when considered in isolation (Warner, 2008:454). Applying an intersectional lens, therefore, enables us to develop a more granular understanding of the multiple levels at which inequalities manifest in individuals' leadership journeys. For the purpose of this chapter, we elucidate these barriers by focusing on two attributes – gender and ethnicity – and how they interact with other forms of diversity to impact individuals' advancement to leadership positions.

Barriers to leadership development among women and ethnic minorities

According to Ibarra, Snook and Guillen Ramo (2010a:663-64) leadership describes "a type of work or activity rather than a formal position or ... authority" and leadership development describes the change in "a person's capacity to exercise interpersonal influence to move and shape complex social systems". As such, it is a form of identity development whereby individuals incorporate novel elements into their existing self-concept and cement them as an integral component of their selfhood as leaders. Responsible leadership development, therefore, must nurture the individual identity of aspiring leaders such that it resonates with their preferred self-concept – and helps overcome the barriers that challenge its development. Indeed, the evidence indicates that women leaders, for instance, often get 'trapped' in some form of identity conflict due to behavioral expectations, which obstruct their leadership development (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2007). The same is also true of ethnic minorities, who struggle with being authentic because of conflicts between cultural expectations, on the one hand, and the identity traits that they are expected to nurture to be a successful leader, on the other (Chin, Desormeaux and Sawyer, 2016). Generally, such barriers operate at two levels – the institutional and the individual which will now be discussed.

Institutional barriers

Numerous scholars have examined the institutional barriers that slow down the leadership progression of women and ethnic minorities. They found that these primarily encompass structural barriers, gender role stereotypes and cultural impediments.

Structural barriers

One type of structural barrier reported includes the over-mentoring but under-sponsoring of women, which makes them not only less likely than men to be appointed to top roles but also more reluctant to apply in the first place (Ibarra, Carter and Silva, 2010b). Such a lack of sponsorship is also a barrier for ethnic minorities (Arday, 2018) in both the public and private sectors (Key et al., 2012). There is path dependency for female and ethnic minority leadership talent reflected in lack of access to opportunities for career promotion. A related barrier is the lack of leadership training and mentorship or support for career growth, promotions and development (Bhopal and Brown, 2016). This means that such employees may end up being less equipped with skills that would enable them to compete for more senior leadership roles in their organization.

A second structural barrier impeding women and ethnic minorities' leadership development relates to their access to resources such as role models, networks and sponsors (Arday, 2018; Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011) which could give them access to more opportunities to test and prove their leadership potential. A further structural barrier reported particularly among ethnic minorities on corporate boards is the limited organizational willingness to enact diversity initiatives or the belief that there is insufficient diverse talent available (Parker and The Parker Review Committee, 2017). Moreover, "the interplay of race and gender" which reflects the "lived realities of intersectionality" (Oikelome, 2017:29) function as a 'double jeopardy' (Key et al., 2012) that greatly impacts the leadership journeys of women of color, in particular. This paints the picture of an institutional context where diverse talent is not appreciated to the extent it deserves.

Gender role stereotypes

A further category of barriers for women's leadership development is gender role stereotypes. Examples include describing a typical 'good manager' in masculine terms, assuming women to be less effective, or expecting them to forego their career to have a family (Vinkenburg, Jansen and Koopman, 2000). As Ryan and Haslam (2007) point out, since stereotypes are often culture- or industry-specific, it is important to consider contextual variations. A female's ethnic background and upbringing or her working in male-dominated industries may render such stereotypes more difficult to navigate. Evidence suggests that even subtle forms of gender bias in societal or organizational culture interfere with the identity work of women leaders. Additionally, second-generation bias, which is predominantly unconscious and does not entail a deliberate intention to exclude or cause harm, is particularly powerful in impeding women's leadership progression by creating work structures and practices that prevent women from reaching their full potential (Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011). As a result, both overt and covert discrimination practices triggered by gender and minority role stereotypes impede female and ethnic minority leadership talent from realizing their potential.

Stereotypes have been found to pose barriers for ethnic minorities in several ways, not least in the form of negative perceptions and biases that affect performance evaluations and career outcomes (Bhopal and Brown, 2016; Greer and Virick, 2008). For instance, stereotypes govern assumptions about personality traits that are seen to be incompatible with being a 'good' leader (Marquardt, Brown and Casper, 2018). Thus, Chinese individuals are presumed to be quiet and non-confrontational while BAME individuals are perceived to be too direct in their communication. Generally, those that do not fit the leadership prototype tend to be disliked or unaccepted (Showunmi, Atewologun and Bebbington, 2016). As such, stereotypical assumptions pose obstacles for ethnic minorities who find it difficult to be accepted if some presumed aspect of their identity does not fit their professional work.

From an intersectional perspective, biases and stereotypes continue to cause the leadership capabilities of female ethnic minorities to be both questioned and limited (Smith et al., 2019). Black women experience racial biases and have their performance measured against overly harsh standards (Oikelome, 2017; Rosette et al., 2016). In their evaluations, they are often negatively differentiated from White women to create ‘a distinct social location’ in organizations (Parker, 1996). They also do not get sufficient developmental feedback because of the ‘angry black woman’ stereotype (Smith et al., 2019). Asian-American women are assumed to be demure and thus penalized for showing dominant behavior (Rosette et al., 2016). Such biases undermine women’s authority and prevent their accomplishments from being acknowledged or recognized – and minority women’s authority even more.

Cultural factors

Finally, leadership development is also impeded by cultural factors that manifest as covert and overt forms of discrimination where minorities struggle to fit the majority culture. For women, such barriers often arise when organizations are gendered, for example, in the corporate practices they promote (Oakley, 2000) or the career paths they offer (Ely et al., 2011). Examples of this include job adverts designed to attract male applicants or new leadership opportunities created which female employees, who may be already struggling to balance work and family obligations, are unable to accommodate and hence are self-excluded from applying. Similarly, the gender ratio of their industry impacts women’s leadership style, stress levels and mental health (Gardiner and Tiggemann, 1999). Specifically, barriers to women’s ascent to senior management positions include “stereotyping, tokenism, power, preferred leadership styles, and the psychodynamics of male/female relations” (Oakley 2000:322).

Arday (2018) observes that, for ethnic minorities, cultural barriers take the form of challenges to their authority, excessive scrutiny or surveillance, poor appraisals, missed-out promotions and hindered progression overall. Similarly, being from ‘outsider groups’ creates the assumption that ethnic minorities ‘lack the ‘right stuff’ for leadership (Eagly and Chin, 2010). Simultaneously, homosociability (where, for example, panels recruit individuals similar to themselves) (Coleman, 2012) and homophily (where, for instance, leaders are rated positively based on the similarity with oneself) (Ospina and Foldy, 2009) further intensify these barriers when cultural biases impact leader appointment decisions and where institutions are reluctant to factor ‘race’ into decision-making (Arday, 2018).

From an intersectional perspective, the ‘double jeopardy’ of gender and race continues to manifest in cultural barriers. This can be illustrated when ethnic minority women confront concerns over how they can fit in a White male organization (Oikelome, 2017), and report having their authority undermined and ability to be themselves marred (Showunmi, Atewologun and Bebbington, 2016). They consequently face ‘everyday microaggressions’ in the workplace, including racism, sexism and discrimination. They also feel ‘marginalized and tokenized’ (Ospina and Foldy, 2007), and are expected to ‘leave their culture at the door’ if they want to progress within the organization (Showunmi, Atewologun and Bebbington, 2016). In addition, cultural differences prevent minorities from understanding ‘political capital and gamesmanship’ which leaves their accomplishments unacknowledged and them personally “unrecognized or doubted as professionals” (Smith et al., 2019:1721). This means that the environment within which gender and ethnic minority leadership talent operates often tends to neither celebrate their accomplishments, nor nurture a space where their successes can be visible.

Individual barriers

Viewing leadership development as a process of identity transition (Ibarra, Snook and Guillen Ramo, 2010a) helps conceptualize individual-level barriers as challenges to the personal self-concept. Such challenges can manifest in two ways – as detrimental emotional states, and as self-presentation dilemmas.

Detrimental emotional states

A key individual barrier reported by women is a sense of strife in relation to personal versus managerial roles. As Ruderman and colleagues (2002) note, this can be a source of guilt and exhaustion and impact leadership practice. Another barrier relates to women's (in)visibility, which is prompted by a lack of female role models and maintained through deep-seated organizational processes, practices and power relations (Stead, 2013). Ethnic minorities also report a range of emotional states – such as inferiority, incompetence, insecurity and vulnerability – that impede their leadership journey insofar as they undermine their confidence, influence and ability to network or communicate ideas (Bhopal and Brown, 2016). In 'dominant White spaces' these phenomena are experienced as 'internalized problems' (Arday, 2018) and often attributed to 'lack of pro-activism' (Bhopal and Brown, 2016:22) and negative expectations held by others (Chin, Desormeaux and Sawyer, 2016).

Self-presentation dilemmas

Ibarra and Petriglieri, (2007:14) have commented that, especially during career transitions, women also engage in 'protective' self-presentation characterized by modesty, reluctance to actively and freely interact with others, and a "propensity towards neutral, uncertain and qualified expressions of judgment" such that the impression conveyed is 'unassailable'. This is in direct contrast to men, who engage in 'acquisitive' self-presentation to signal credibility and display confidence. Interestingly, the same workplace behaviors that bring positive outcomes to males are largely unsuccessful for females (Budworth and Mann, 2010). Concerns with self-presentation equally pose a barrier for ethnic minorities who experience difficulties determining which behaviors suit different contexts (Bhopal and Brown, 2016) and internal conflicts between preferred and expected leadership behaviors (Chin, Desormeaux and Sawyer, 2016). They also feel pressured to fulfil diversity-related duties to uphold others' expectations and report being subjected to higher standards at work to be seen as worthy (Ospina and Foldy, 2009).

Examining the intersectional effects of gender and ethnicity reveals that Black women feel the pressure to be "twice as good" as others (Smith et al., 2019:1719). BAME women feel compelled to maintain a highly professional persona and do not ask for adjustments relating to family life fearing to appear uncommitted (Bhopal, 2014). Evidence indicates that they feel constantly challenged as leaders (Showunmi, Atewologun and Bebbington Showunmi, 2016) – as though "others are waiting for [them] to make a mistake" (Fitzgerald, 2006:208).

Breaking the barriers: Principles for responsible leadership development

Our review of the barriers to leadership development among women, ethnic minorities and those at the intersection of these two groups helps to identify a set of key principles that can foster the development of responsible leaders of the future. These center on defining success, overcoming biases, increasing representation, recognizing the positive effects of multiple roles, and providing organizational support. To achieve these principles, the current generation of leaders must play multiple roles aimed at bringing together various stakeholders across the personal, organizational and community ecosystems. In doing so, they must demonstrate personal traits that enable them to act as a steward, citizen, servant and visionary for change. Additionally, they must also display the relational characteristics that help them act as architects, change agents, storytellers, and coaches (Maak and Pless, 2006). We now consider each of the key principles in turn.

Define success

Responsible leadership development must recognize and respect the cultural differences and values that shape individuals' ideas of success and frame their leadership identity. For example, women's definitions of success and achievement depend on personal criteria such as "a sense of contribution,

personal fulfillment and integrity, as well as external tangible measures such as compensation and title” (Hopkins and O’Neil, 2007:134). Among ethnic minorities, maintaining a sense of personal authenticity is seen as a sign of success (Chin, Desormeaux and Sawyer, 2016), as is hard work and perseverance (Bhopal and Brown, 2016). Female BAMEs rank competence and capability as key to being successful (Oikelome, 2017). It is important to both acknowledge and validate such criteria when appointing and appraising leaders. Current leaders can also facilitate the development of organizational cultures and discourses that both promote and celebrate the diversity of values considered important by individuals.

Yet another measure of success is self-acceptance. Irrespective of their background, highly successful females report a moment of self-acceptance early on in their careers at the outset of their leadership journey. Self-acceptance as potential leaders allows them to take active ownership of their careers, steer their leadership journey with more confidence and look for sources of support within themselves and their environment (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). Responsible leaders can foster self-acceptance among emerging leaders by providing formal opportunities for coaching and mentoring, as well as through the creation of safe organizational spaces that enable conversation on self-awareness and self-worth in relation to leader identity development. Showcasing the personal identity journeys of emerging leaders can enable responsible leaders to play a pivotal role in redefining what leadership success means in organizations.

Overcome biases and increase representation

Chen and Van Velsor (1996:299) observe that: “To develop diverse individuals, the leader has to first create an environment that allows different individuals to excel differently”. This requires leaders to overcome biases not only at a personal level, but also facilitate the development of a bias-free organizational culture and a diverse leadership pipeline. Several measures can be put in place in this regard, such as using a wide breadth of advertising mechanisms to ensure a diverse candidate pool, offering unconscious bias training for recruitment panels (Equality Challenge Unit and Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, 2009) and performance evaluations (Marquardt, Brown and Casper, 2018), as well as overcoming any ‘similarity bias’ during succession planning (Greer and Virick, 2008). These steps allow the removal of significant barriers for female and ethnic minority leadership talent, paving the way to the top – hence, potentially leading even to the senior executive office.

There are additional sets of measures that can increase diversity in senior leadership roles. These can take the form of affirmative action through statutory quotas or mandated candidate diversity at the shortlisting stage of the leadership appointment process (Arday, 2018), ‘positive discrimination’ via BAME quotas within senior ranks, or ‘softer’ measures including mentoring, shadowing or coaching with Board members (Parker and The Parker Review Committee, 2017). Other actions include offering remuneration for board roles to encourage diverse membership for individuals who cannot afford *pro bono* board work (Equality Challenge Unit and Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, 2009), modifying hiring practices by relaxing requirements for diverse candidates or focusing on relevant skills instead of experience in a similar role (Equality Challenge Unit, 2015). In this regard, continuous monitoring of diversity statistics against measurable goals is critical for sustainable outcomes. It is important to note, though, that the establishment of the above ‘hard’ measures for reducing bias must be accompanied by ‘softer’ mechanisms that promote an organizational culture of sensitivity, empathy and awareness. Indeed, a responsible leader needs to play a more significant role in this regard at both the personal level, through the practice of reflexive leadership, as well as in their role as trailblazers of diversity at organizational level.

Recognize the positive effects of multiple roles and provide organizational support

Responsible leadership development should recognize the value of incorporating an individual’s multiple personal roles in their leadership *persona*. For instance, unlike common assumptions about the negative effects of work-life balance tensions, the roles women play in their personal lives also produce several positive effects in their work lives including psychological wellbeing, enriched

interpersonal skills, and improved leadership effectiveness (Ruderman et al., 2002). Among BAME leaders, effectiveness appears to be linked to their utilization of both personal and social identity, specifically, drawing from lived experiences to practice leadership based on cultural values such as consensus and collaboration over competition, and family values and relationships over business (Chin, Desormeaux and Sawyer, 2016). A central aspect of promoting and valuing multiple roles is to stop fitting leaders into ‘cookie-cutter’ molds and instead conceptualizing them in the myriad ways that promote a diversity of leader images to emerge.

Organizations can promote the positive effects of multiple roles by providing organizational support that goes beyond the minimum statutory requirements to embed diversity in their overall organizational strategy (Parker and The Parker Committee, 2017). Building mentoring and networking skills among women and ethnic minorities is key in this regard (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018; Coleman, 2012). Those mentoring aspiring ethnic minority leaders should receive relevant leadership training to deliver mentorship within a safe climate (Bhopal and Brown, 2016; Greer and Virick, 2008), act as organizational sponsors for mentees, and help them develop the skills to take on and navigate their leadership roles (Chin, Desormeaux and Sawyer, 2016). Relatedly, responsible leaders must enable the creation of high-visibility assignments that provide the skills, confidence and learning opportunities for women and ethnic minorities to hold a leadership position (Chen and Van Velsor, 1996). This entails not only embracing leadership development interventions but also creating an organizational environment that genuinely values the distinctive leadership style of women and ethnic minorities – one in which they can feel comfortable and authentic to reach their full potential (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018; Chin, Desormeaux and Sawyer, 2016).

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide an evidence-based discussion of the challenges faced by underrepresented groups as well as the range of interventions possible to enable these groups to become responsible leaders of the future. These opportunities exist conjointly, at the individual, organizational and institutional levels. They help to foster individuals’ diverse potential, enable organizations to embrace individual differences, and facilitate institutional environments that celebrate and realize the benefits of having a diverse leadership. It is now incumbent on our current generation of leaders, within the constraints of their contexts, to create the conditions for greater diversity to inform the decision-making and change processes required to translate the UN SDGs into action.

This form of responsible leadership requires leaders to shift away from hierarchical practices and, instead, nurture ‘relationships, conversation and shared purpose’ (Stokes and Dopson, 2020) that enables diverse leadership talent to emerge, experiment and learn. Another formidable task is for leaders to nudge existing contexts to “cultivate the [organizational] ecosystem and build internal connection and collaboration” (Stokes and Dopson, 2020:14). As such, the creation of a psychologically safe culture that fosters accountability and learning remains a key aspiration of the responsible leadership that we consider critical for diversity to flourish.

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