

12 Insights into Leadership for Women

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12 Insights into Leadership for Women

I. Background

The Leadership Questionnaire was designed to explore women's definitions of leadership, their perceptions of how leadership developed and how its development in the workplace was encouraged. It was also designed to be a reflective tool enabling the respondent to identify their vision and what they needed to do to make their vision a reality.

The Questionnaire was launched on 1 August 2000 when the Australian virtual Centre for Leadership for Women (CLW) was launched on the Internet. The Questionnaire was accessible by members and non-members through CLW's Home Page and the Menu on the other CLW pages.

The Questionnaire required the individual to respond to any or all of the questions and then submit their responses via a Submit Key at the end. Although the Questionnaire asked the respondent for contact details, it was not compulsory as it was indicated that the Questionnaire was anonymous.

The Questionnaire was de-activated on 1 May 2002 when the Submit button's function was cancelled. The Questionnaire, therefore, was on CLW for the duration of 21 months.

II. Methodology

Responses to the Questionnaire were collated and the date and time of submission were recorded. Each response was analysed to see if it contained common key words. It was decided that for the analysis, a key word would be called 'Reference', for example in response to the question, "Does your workplace encourage women to develop their leadership skills?" the word 'Networking' is a Reference in the following response, "her natural networking ability."

Once this Reference was identified, the remaining responses for that particular question were checked to see if they contained this Reference. The occurrence of a Reference in the batch of responses for a particular question was tallied. If the response did not contain the specific Reference, but its context contained the same theme, then that Response was included in the count for that Reference.

References were then grouped together if they related to the same area, or if they were linked in some way. For example, the References, "Work" and "Profession", were grouped under the umbrella of "Work related areas." The score for all the References in a Group were then totalled. Finally the Groups were ranked to ascertain which Group of References was the most prevalent.

For 5 questions, References were not grouped as it was deemed that they were noteworthy in their own right. For the remaining 7 questions, due to the variety of expressions submitted by respondents, it was felt that the Group of References and their ranking were of more significance than merely the frequency of individual References. This Report includes for each question, a table that lists the References and the Frequency of the References in the batch of responses. A table that shows which References were grouped and their subsequent ranking is also included when this step was taken.

This Paper was titled, **12 Insights into Leadership for Women** as it focused on 12 questions of the Leadership Questionnaire, each culminating in perspectives that capture the thinking of women with respect to leadership as they begin the new millennium.

III. Overview of Results

193 individuals responded to the Questionnaire with the largest category of respondents being in the age group of 40-50. The second largest age group was 30-40 followed by 20-30 and thereafter 50-60. [Table 13](#) lists the Occupational Background of 117 participants who forwarded this information. Specific details were removed to maintain anonymity.

The numbers responding to each question varied. [Table 14](#) lists the numbers responding to each question. Each question had an 80% response rate. Recognising that the total number of respondents to the entire questionnaire being 193, statistically represents a small size, it was felt that the analysis of these responses were important as the common themes that emerged presented an informed understanding of leadership from new perspectives that are of relevance to places which employ women, both public and private, women's organisations and women themselves. It shows how leadership is interpreted as it is experienced in various domains of one's life. It translates the academic understanding of leadership into that which is lived and aspired. It delves into what women are doing about leadership and what can be done for them by organisations and individuals, if their empowerment is taken seriously. Moreover, as the Questionnaire itself did not constitute

tick box questions, but open-ended questions, the responses bear more information about the issues being focused on.

As the Questionnaire was conducted over the Internet and gave the respondent the choice to remain anonymous, absolute certainty cannot be claimed as to the gender of all the respondents or the geographical location of all the respondents. However, it can be said with certainty that due to the nature of the responses, the respondents are women. As CLW and the Leadership Questionnaire were being promoted to women's networks and organisations within Australia, it can also be said with certainty that the respondents are primarily from Australia.

IV. Results of each Question

Question 1: How do you define leadership?

164 individuals responded to Question 1. Analysis of the data for the occurrence of References showed that three References are the most prevalent. They are *Vision*, *People* and *Goal*. Therefore, it can be said that the majority of respondents defined leadership in terms of leaders having a *Vision*. Ranking second were the number of respondents who saw leadership in terms of leaders leading *People*, and the next largest group of respondents saw leadership in terms of having a *Goal*. [Table 1A](#) lists the Frequency of the References in the batch of 164 responses.

When the References were grouped together, the Group of References relating to *How do leaders lead?* ranked the highest. The Group of References relating to, *What do leaders do?* ranked second and *What qualities do leaders possess?* ranked third. [Table 1B](#) shows which References were grouped and their subsequent ranking.

Collectively, the majority of respondents defined leadership in terms of *how leaders lead*, alluding to the way in which leaders help others, take charge, make decisions, listen, inspire, influence, motivate and empower others while offering support, trust, understanding, direction and guidance. Leaders were seen to collaborate with others, facilitate change, formulate visions independently or with others and achieve their implementation. They were good communicators who willingly mentored others.

Ranking second were the Group of References that related to, *What do leaders do?* In this Group, respondents defined leadership in terms of leaders having clear vision, setting and reaching goals singularly or jointly. They respond to a situation with a vision that is usually for the betterment and common good of society or the organisation. They strive to attain the best in others and themselves. They are forward looking managers, finding purpose with a desire to identify others' needs and initiate positive change, growth and new ideas.

Ranking third were the Group of References that related to, *What qualities do leaders possess?* In this Group, respondents defined leadership in terms of the attributes of leaders. Leaders have skills and strengths, values, ethics, self-belief and integrity. They respect others, recognise the gifts of others and are passionate, determined, fair and focused. Inspired by role models, they are creative, wanting to make a difference and solve problems.

Question 2: Who are the leaders you admire?

153 individuals responded to Question 2. Analysis of the data showed that the majority of respondents admired *Nelson Mandela*. Ranking second was *Natasha Stott Despoja*. Ranking third was the respondent's *Mother*.

For this question, the References were not grouped together due to their specificity. [Table 2](#) lists the frequency of the References in the batch of 153 responses.

Question 3: Why do you admire them?

161 individuals responded to Question 3. Analysis of the data showed that the majority of respondents admired those whom they saw as leaders, firstly because they were *Courageous*, secondly because of their *Strengths*, and thirdly because they had a *Vision*. As the References are qualities admired by the respondents, it was felt that it would not be beneficial to group them in categories of qualities. [Table 3](#) lists the frequency of the References in the batch of 161 responses.

Leaders were seen to be courageous in terms of saying and doing what they believed in, despite the consequences and the opinion of the crowd. They challenge the status quo. With respect to admiring leaders because of their strengths, respondents addressed issues of the individuals having strength of character. This strength manifested itself in the individual's self-belief and values, vision and determination to carry out this vision, and in their decision-making skills.

Leaders were described as visionaries with a passion and determination to follow a vision that they could articulate clearly. It showed strength and was far-ranging.

Question 4: Do you believe that a woman can be as good a leader as a man?

138 individuals responded to Question 4. Analysis of the data showed that 69% of the respondents believed that a woman can be as good a leader as a man with 25% believing that a woman was a better leader than a man. The remaining 6% either thought that the premise of the question was 'silly' or that gender should not be an issue.

Below is a collation of some of the reasons given for a woman being a better leader than a man.

- shows more preference towards consulting
- listens
- is a doer
- is strong
- is more compassionate and helpful
- has more skills generally
- is much better at communicating and trusting
- does not only use her head but also her heart
- has an innate empathy for humankind
- values relating and relationships
- has more insight
- is committed
- looks at issues from many different angles
- due to the conditioning of being female, she has an inner strength to persevere despite the barriers
- uses maternal instincts of taking the lead in sorting out the daily activities of a household

Whilst most of the responses commented on specific attributes of women, a few respondents argued the pointlessness of the question itself.

"Absolutely, but a strange question, it implies a man as a leader is a standard to which a woman should aspire..."

"Too general - some women are better than some men and vice versa. Don't believe women necessarily make better leaders just because they are women. Resent statements that insist women are more nurturing, caring, team oriented etc"

Some respondents pointed out that leadership should not be restricted to gender but instead, be reflective of merit.

"yes, leadership skills are not gender specific"

Question 5: What aspects of a woman's life do you feel develop her leadership potential?

190 individuals responded to Question 5. Analysis of the data showed that the majority of respondents felt that *Work* developed a woman's leadership potential. *Women* ranked second, with *Experience* being third. [Table 5A](#) lists the frequency of the References in the batch of 190 responses.

When the References were grouped together, the *Group Self* ranked the highest. The *Group*, *Home related References* ranked second and *Work related References*, third. [Table 5B](#) shows which References were grouped and their subsequent ranking.

A group of References that appeared to be about the *Self* emerged as a category, when the References needed grouping. In this category, the individual's age and emotional maturity; qualities of understanding; tolerance; empathy and support; their perseverance; strengths; self-awareness; ability to communicate and make decisions; were grouped together. Also included, were their experiences and knowledge, the challenges they had faced and the roles they had undertaken. In attaining the highest rank, this Group that was entitled the *Self* indicated that the majority of respondents perceived leadership to develop first and foremost in the *Self*. The qualities of the individual, their own development through challenges faced and experiences encountered, attributed to developing their potential for leadership.

The References that related to one's *home life* such as family, home, childcare, parent, partner, motherhood, father and relationships gained the second highest ranking as a group. This Group, in attaining such a significant ranking indicates the proximity of areas related to the *Self* that contribute towards the development of one's leadership.

It is then interesting to note that *Work related References* gain a third position. One's leadership potential is perceived to develop at work through one's management experience, career development, being mentored and networking with others in leadership positions.

Question 6: Does your workplace encourage women to develop their leadership skills?

117 individuals responded to Question 6. Analysis of the data showed that 28% of respondents said that their workplaces did encourage women to develop their leadership skills through policies, programs and access to courses and training, and in some cases, from opportunities in the form of experiencing higher positions.

Equally 28% said that their workplaces did not encourage women in this regard. There was no evidence of it.

"not at all - very segregated workplace with different roles for each gender"

21% said that their workplaces only partially offered encouragement with policies existing but not being followed across the board, or practices only being tokenistic in nature.

The remaining responses account for those who were unsure or who did not give a comment.

Question 7: What forms of support would you like to see in your workplace to help women develop leadership skills?

164 individuals responded to Question 7. Analysis of the data showed that the majority of respondents wanted *Mentors and Mentoring Programs* to help them develop their leadership skills in the workplace. Ranking second was Assistance from *People*, including experienced managers, guest speakers and peers. Support from *Networks/associations/schools/clubs* ranked third. [Table 7A](#) lists the frequency of the References in the batch of 164 responses.

When the References were grouped together the *Group, People related Support* ranked the highest. *Specific Needs related* References ranked second. [Table 7B](#) shows which References were grouped and their subsequent ranking.

The *Group, People related support* included support from mentors and mentoring/coaching programs; assistance from people in general; support from networks and associations such as schools and clubs; as well as support from family; friends; other women and role-models. Thus, it can be said that support from people within the workplace; in professional networks outside the workplace; in the home and social environment; are perceived to be quite significant for the development of leadership skills.

Specific Needs related References referred to specific forms of support the respondent required in the workplace in order to develop leadership skills. This category included need for recognition; time; training; education and information; personal development; confidence and assertiveness; finance and experience doing higher level jobs.

Question 8: Do you feel women in a work and personal setting help each other to become leaders?

145 individuals responded to Question 8 with 26% saying *Yes*, 49% saying *sometimes women help each other*, and 15% feeling that women did not help each other. As the two latter figures are not absolute affirmations, if they are added, then it can be seen that 64% say that women did not help each other all the time. [Table 8](#) lists the frequency of the References in the batch of 145 responses.

Competition, jealousy, backstabbing, territoriality, afraid of being toppled, the attitude that "I did it the hard way, you should have to as well," are some reasons offered by the respondents for why women do not help each other.

Reasons given for why women do help each other indicate that those women who are "confident in their own skills will encourage others; they will not be threatened by others."

Other respondents claimed that generalisations cannot be made and it depends on specific circumstances. Examples of such comments are:

"(it) depends on each individual, some actively support, some actively undermine, people are people and will always react in conjunction with their personal prejudices."

"Absolutely not - other women are usually our worst own enemies - especially women without children towards women with children."

Question 9: In what area of your life do you see yourself as a leader?

162 individuals responded to Question 9. Analysis of the data showed that the majority of respondents saw themselves as leaders at *Work*. The Reference *Work* ranked the highest, with *Community* being second, and *Family*, third. [Table 9A](#) lists the frequency of the References in the batch of 162 responses.

When the References were grouped together the Group, *Work related References* ranked the highest. *Family related References* ranked second and *Community related References*, third.

[Table 9B](#) shows which References were grouped and their subsequent ranking.

The majority of respondents saw themselves as a leader in their work, profession, business and career. Family, home, personal life, parenthood and relations with one's husband/partner were next seen to be areas where women saw themselves as leaders.

There were a small proportion of respondents who specifically strove to be a leader to advance women's rights and empower women either at work or in their personal life. An equal proportion of women saw themselves as leaders amongst their friends or colleagues.

A recurring theme to note amongst the responses was that one need not compartmentalize which areas one was a leader in, but rather that one was able to demonstrate leadership qualities depending on the situation at hand.

"I don't really divide my life into areas as all of it contributes to who I am as a whole person - and I try to use leadership to a greater or lesser extent depending on the situation. This can be as simple as role-modelling, or as challenging as helping"

Also some respondents answered this question with the awareness that being a leader depended on whether others perceived them to be so and that this could vary.

"To some you will always be seen as a leader, for others there will be a differing perspective on who are leaders and who are not."

There were some who referred to their future ambitions of leadership.

"I aspire to become a member of a Presidential Cabinet or an Embassy Attaché."

Question 10: In what area of your life would you like to become a leader?

183 individuals responded to Question 10. Analysis of the data showed that the majority of respondents wanted to become a leader at *Work*. Ranking second was the Reference *Community*, with *Profession*, third. [Table 10A](#) lists the frequency of the References in the batch of 183 responses.

When the References were grouped together, the Group *Work related* ranked the highest. The Group, *Specific Areas References* ranked second and *Community related References*, third.

[Table 10B](#) shows which References were grouped and their subsequent ranking.

The majority of respondents wanted to become a leader at their work/employment, in their business, career and profession. In second place, specific areas that were identified included politics, being a mentor, with respect to their education and in developing specific skills. Empowering other women and being a leader in their church and community were identified as the third most desired areas for becoming a leader in.

Question 11: What is your vision as a leader?

155 individuals responded to Question 11. Analysis of the data showed that the majority of respondents' vision was about helping women. An equal second place applied to three themes: reaching one's own or helping others reach their potential; developing the workplace and; including others and working with a team. Ranking third were the visions that related to creating change in the workplace. [Table 11A](#) lists the frequency of the References in the batch of 155 responses.

When the References were grouped together, the Group Self/other person's development ranked the highest with Working with others being second. Ranking third was the Group, Women related. [Table 11B](#) shows which References were grouped and their subsequent ranking.

The majority of respondents indicated that their vision focused on developing their self and helping others develop. Reaching one's full potential through self-development, developing one's integrity, self-respect, education and skills competence while helping others, valuing others, imparting knowledge and showing understanding were themes that were prevalent in the majority of vision statements.

Including other people, working with a team, empowering, influencing, inspiring, motivating others, leading by example and achieving personal or organisational goals were themes that were common to a large extent. Grouped together under the umbrella of Working with others, visions with these themes were focused on a work setting rather than a personal setting.

There was a strong recognition of a bias against women particularly in the workplace leading to many women wanting to help the cause for women and work towards achieving equity and equality for women in a work environment.

Question 12: What forms of support do you need to make this possible?

159 individuals responded to Question 12. Analysis of the data showed that the majority of respondents needed recognition and encouragement to develop and achieve their vision. Ranking second was the need for equality in their workplace.

The need for *Role models* ranked third. [Table 12A](#) lists the frequency of the References in the batch of 159 responses. When the References were grouped together, the Group *Education/training* ranked the highest with *Opportunities to encourage leadership* being second. *Guidance from others* ranked third. [Table 12B](#) shows which References were grouped and their subsequent ranking.

Most of the respondents needed some form of training and education, as well as the time, money and childcare assistance to undertake any form of education.

Opportunities to encourage them to become leaders and the need for equality in the workplace so that they can also take up these opportunities were recognised as being important for them to achieve their vision.

Guidance from others in the form of mentoring and professional guidance, through role-models and networking or from their own drive for self-development were perceived as being necessary for them to achieve their leadership objectives.

V Summation of Results

Leadership was defined first and foremost in terms of leaders having a vision, secondly, in terms of leaders leading people and finally in terms of the goals leaders set and achieve. When the references were grouped, it was found that the question, How do leaders lead? alluding to the way in which leaders empower others, make decisions, facilitate change and formulate visions, emerged as the dominant category to which most of the references referred. Ranking second was the Group of References that related to, *What do leaders do?* in terms of leaders having clarity and the best interests of the people and organisation at the heart of what they do to achieve goals. Ranking third were the Group of References that related to, *What qualities do leaders possess?* referring to the attributes of leaders, such as

their skills, strengths, values, and self-belief in wanting to make a difference and solve problems.

Aspects of a woman's life that were thought to develop her leadership potential were their involvement at work, assistance offered by other women and their own experiences of leading others or taking charge of a situation. In contrast, work emerged as the third category when the references were grouped to incorporate all the common themes raised.

Development of the Self emerged as the dominant area that led to building one's leadership potential with one's home life being subsequently significant.

Work, community and family, in that order, were the three areas that were nominated as domains in which the respondents perceived themselves as being leaders. Work and community were again nominated as the areas of choice when they considered the areas they would like to lead in, with their profession being the third choice rather than the community. When the References were grouped, work, family and community were found to be apparent as domains in which the respondents perceived themselves as leaders. Grouping the References showed that at work, in specific areas and in the community, respondents wanted to take leadership.

The vision of the majority of respondents was to help women. In second place, were visions aimed at reaching one's own or helping others reach their potential; developing the workplace and collaborating with others in the workplace. Creating change in the workplace was identified, thereafter. In contrast, when the References were grouped, developing the Self and helping the other person develop became apparent as the most prevalent vision objective. Working with others followed by empowering women were subsequent groups.

Recognition and encouragement, equality and the presence of role models were seen to be necessary in the workplace for respondents to achieve their visions. Education and training; opportunities to encourage leadership, and guidance from others were identified as much needed when the References were grouped.

Nelson Mandela, Natasha Stott Despoja, and in some cases, the individual's mother were recognised as leaders and were highly esteemed. They were admired for their courage, strengths and vision.

Most of the respondents believed that a woman can be as good a leader as a man with some of them believing that a woman was a better leader than a man. Most women, however, felt that women in a work and personal setting did not help each other to become leaders.

On the whole, respondents felt that their workplace did not fully encourage leadership. Mentors and Mentoring Programs, assistance from people and networks were identified as important forms of support that were needed for leadership to develop in the workplace. In the same vein, people related support, featured as the primary need when the references were grouped, followed by support for specific needs such as the need for recognition; time; training; education and information; personal development; confidence and assertiveness; finance and experience doing higher level jobs.

Table 15 summarises the results of each of the 12 Questions.

VI Conclusion

Due to the variety of expressions submitted by respondents to the 12 open-ended questions that have been analysed in this Paper, it was felt that the Group of References and their ranking were of more significance than merely the frequency of individual References. The following conclusions that were based on the results obtained when the References were grouped and ranked form the **12 insights into leadership for women**.

1. The Leadership Questionnaire clearly demonstrated that in general, most women believe that the potential to be a leader is developed in oneself.
2. Leadership is brought into focus through one's life experiences and incrementally develops in time.
3. Most women see developing themselves and helping others to develop, as their vision.
4. Empowering others to achieve their vision and potential emerges as the main definition of leadership. Leadership is defined in the context of the 'Self' helping 'Another'
5. The ways in which the leader empowers others, the avenues used such as collaboration, inspiration and facilitation are seen to dominate the definition of leadership.
6. In empowering others, the leader also reaches one's potential as they achieve their vision and their attributes are brought into play and enhanced.
7. Women have a need for assistance from those who have achieved their visions.
8. Yet, it has been found that on the whole, women who have achieved leadership positions do not help others to do the same. Although, it must be recognised that there are women who do help other women become leaders, the percentage of women in this category is not very large.
9. It is in the workplace that most women see themselves as leaders.
10. Furthermore, it is in the workplace where most women want to be leaders.
11. If leadership is to be encouraged in workplaces, education and training, as well as, formal and informal support from people who have achieved leadership are seen to be vitally necessary in the workplace.
12. Family and Community are the other two significant domains in which women want to become a leader.