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Women and Leadership Series

Paper No. 4

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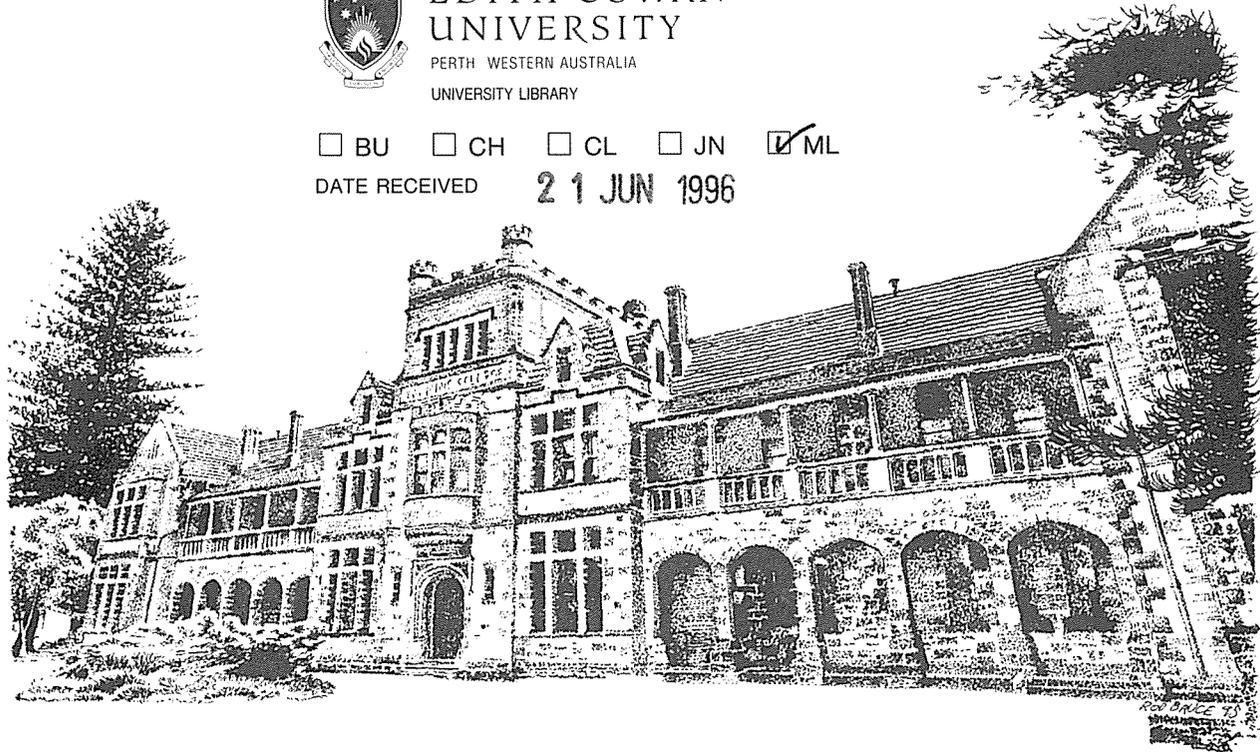### Leonie V. Still
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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a term that is not normally associated with women. This is despite the fact that throughout history women have often played a prominent role. Those that have gained prominence have done so in four main ways (Apfelbaum and Hadley, 1986):

- through *charismatic leadership*: the unique example being Joan of Arc.

- through *inherited leadership* positions: examples include the women who become heads of family businesses or queens by succeeding to monarchs.

- through the *achievement of professional eminence*: women who become leading figures in their disciplines because of their professional and/or scientific achievements - examples include Madame Curie, Margaret Mead.

- women who become *selected leaders* ie. are elected, appointed or nominated to important public offices such as prime minister, senator. Australian examples include two women premiers (Carmen Lawrence and Joan Kirner) and three women leaders of the minor political party, the Australian Democrats.

However, the women who reach such prominent and visible leadership positions are seen as exceptions rather than as potential role models. This portrayal is encouraged by the media because any public presentation of their qualities stresses the exceptionality of their capabilities, their personalities or their leadership situation. These women are therefore set apart from other workforce women, creating enormous expectations of them

and making the execution of their role model and mentoring responsibilities rather difficult. A perception also grows in the public's mind that because these women are so exceptional, women in general have now acquired their rightful place in the leadership hierarchy. Therefore, there is nothing more to be done in encouraging more women to aspire to and seek leadership positions.

When considering these four traditional paths, you may believe that there is a fifth path: the *selection by merit to leadership*. The Australian Public Service and various State Public Services have been endeavouring for some time to open the way for women to gain leadership positions through merit-based selection. In fact, women are now being appointed as Departmental Heads, albeit rather slowly. Nevertheless, when one compares the numbers of women now employed in the various public services (46% of permanent staff in the APS and 52% in Western Australia), and the numbers of women in leadership positions, the achievers are still seen and treated as exceptional women. Women have a long way to go before they will achieve equity and equality in the leadership arena. In this paper I will examine why this is so, basing the discussion around consideration of leadership style and the unique qualities of women.

What is Leadership?

Before we can begin, however, it is necessary to consider what is meant by leadership. Leadership has many definitions. There is no clearcut agreement on the meaning of leadership to include all circumstances, particularly because the emergence of leaders is often situational, sometimes temporary and sometimes permanent. Leadership has been defined as a process that takes place in groups in which one member influences and controls the behaviour of others towards some common goal (Denmark, 1993). Some

researchers believe that the leader must be able to plan, organise and control the activities of the group. Others believe that the leader must possess certain innate personality traits or particular skills to make them leaders. The way leaders emerge or assume the mantle is also many and varied. At one stage, philosophers proposed the 'Great Man' theory in which the personal characteristics of great leaders determined the course of history. Leadership was assumed to be the property of the individual, such as having superior genes or a certain personality. These days, most researchers would recognise that leadership is situational and that there is no one true way of selecting a leader or one true list of characteristics that define leaders from non-leaders. Hence, leaders can be male or female, young or old, fat or thin, short or tall, educated or uneducated, etc. Probably why women are not generally seen as having leadership 'potential' is that they have not normally been in such roles. As a result they are stereotyped as not having the essential qualities and are only rarely considered when it comes to leadership positions.

Traits and Qualities of Leadership

One of the issues that appears to hinder women's progress into leadership positions is the question of whether or not they possess 'appropriate' skills and qualities. As most of us know, management is essentially a male culture because when management originated only males were in the workforce. Consequently, the same type of thinking transfers over to leadership, with the 'great man' or 'hero' still dominating criteria for leadership positions. As Amanda Sinclair (1994) discovered in her interviews with eleven chiefs of industry, anyone embarking on a quest for membership of the executive culture has traditionally been on a Ulysses-like journey: full of grand-scale trials of endurance and tests of strength - the modern day equivalent of the heroic quest! An executive's potential is demonstrated through trials and

suffering. Anyone who can't meet these challenges is not considered suitable. Sinclair also found that women who were judged as 'successful' were considered to be 'strong' and 'tough', 'smart' (meaning bright, brilliant, intelligent and consequently highly respected), 'straight' (having strong principles, strong views) and with 'esprit de corps' (being committed, practical, dedicated and able to get others to work hard). These qualities made them 'acceptable' to the male culture rather than women who tried to 'be one of the boys' or were 'too different'.

Women's lack of acceptance in the corridors of power can be traced directly to the development of the first leadership theories and concepts of power. For instance, the 'great man' theory, which later evolved into the *trait theory of leadership,* effectively kept aspiring women from gaining prominence because they lacked the necessary traits to become leaders. While leadership theories have progressed since the inception of trait theory, the attitudes towards women assuming authority roles are still locked in this time-warp. It seems to be indelibly printed in society's mind that women do not 'possess' the necessary traits to be a 'great woman' (read 'great man') despite the achievements of women like Carmen Lawrence, Joan Kirner, Margaret Thatcher and Indira Ghandi! (Still, 1993).

There is no general agreement as to which traits are generally found in leaders or which traits are more important than others. What is commonly agreed by practitioners and decision makers alike is that women do *not* possess whatever it is that is important. This partly explains why women, who do manage to slip through the system, are ignored for their talents and often denigrated for their lack of 'feminine' qualities. Classic cases are Joan Kirner (Haines, 1992), who was derided for her weight and style of dressing; Bronwyn Bishop (Leser, 1994; Still, 1994a), who at various times has been called 'Atilla the Hen', 'a Centurion tank', a 'Rottweiler' and 'Wilson Tuckey

in drag'; and more recently Carmen Lawrence, the former Federal Health Minister who, before the Royal Commission, was described in an article as being 'aloof', 'without buddies', 'self-sufficient', 'self-contained', 'incredibly suspicious of people in the system' and 'lack of accessibility' (Cadzow, 1995). Women are therefore judged not to have the essential qualities, traits (including personality), which make 'good' leaders (what constitutes the 'good' never really being defined, except that the qualities are usually of masculine inclination).

Gender and Leadership Style

Given that women on the above scenario do not appear to have the 'right stuff' to be leaders, do they also disqualify themselves in terms of leadership-style?

Judy Rosener (1990), in a seminal article in the *Harvard Business Review*, asserted that there was a difference between men's and women's leadership styles. Women were essentially 'transformational' leaders, while men were generally 'transactional' leaders. A 'transformational' leader was one who was able to get subordinates to transform their own self-interest into the interest of the group through concern for a broader goal. A 'transactional' leader, in contrast, was one who viewed job performance as a series of transactions with subordinates - exchanging rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance. Although many subordinates prefer the woman's style, others are less content because they believe that women are not as able as men to obtain resources for departments, divisions and employees. This is because the woman, although a competent professional and managerial leader, is usually locked out of the decision-making 'elites' and doesn't have sufficient clout amongst networks to garner support for her department's needs. Bryson (1987) in looking at public

sector reforms in Australia pointed out that a woman's 'co-operative' management style was less favoured in the promotion stakes when contrasted to a man's 'corporate management' style. While the woman's style was inclusive and more preferable to work with, it was not the preferred style when it came to a consideration of outcomes and measurement of performance.

More recent research by Eably and Johnson (1990) found no difference between men and women in respect to leadership style in organisations. Both genders could adopt an interpersonal style or a task-oriented style. However, a difference did emerge between the genders in respect to whether or not they exhibited a democratic or an authoritarian leadership style. Women were more democratic than men, employing a more participative work style. Male leaders were identified as being more autocratic and directive. However, the researchers found that female leaders were evaluated more negatively than were male leaders, although the difference in overall evaluation was small. The bias against female leaders was greater when leaders chose typically masculine styles such as being autocratic and nonparticipative, while women were also more devalued when they occupied typically male positions and when their evaluators were primarily men.

Appelbaum and Shapiro (1993) portray the difference between a feminine and masculine leadership model (see Table 1). The contrasts have been gleaned mainly from previous research and amalgamated into model form. As can be seen the feminine model is less assertive, more egalitarian, less command and control and more intuitive. Although Appelbaum and Shapiro point out that both genders possess attributes associated with each model, in the eyes of most practitioners of management and leadership, the feminine model would be the less desirable one.

	MASCULINE	FEMININE
Table 1 **Comparison of Leadership Models**		
Operative Style	Competitive	Co-operative
Organisational structure	Vertical and hierarchical	Horizontal and egalitarian
Objective	Winning	Quality product
Problem solving approach	Rational and objective	Intuitive and subjective
Key characteristics	High control, Strategic, Unemotional, Analytical	Low control, Empathetic, Collaborative, High Performance
Perceived power base	Organisational position and formal authority concentrated at the top	Personal characteristics shared within a group.

Source: Applebaum and Shapiro (1993, p31)

Do Women Have Leadership Capacity?

Since the above discussion has not produced a satisfactory outcome for women and their leadership aspirations, we now need to ask if women do have leadership capacity.

In 1990 the multinational executive search firm, Russell Reynolds Associates Inc., commissioned a study to determine 'that women executives had special strengths as 'manager-style' executives (task-oriented, empathetic employees who stabilise companies in the face of change) but were less likely than men to be 'leader-style' executives (visionary, solitary, charismatic individuals who create change) (Russell Reynolds, 1990).

Contrary to expectations, the study of 164 men and women in upper management of *Fortune* 500 companies found that a majority of women in both line and staff positions were leader-style executives. In contrast, male executives were as expected: leader-style in line positions, and manager style in staff positions.

While women were found to possess a leadership orientation - in fact, often more so than their male counterparts - there were perceptual differences between men and women executives regarding the emotional ambience of their companies and access to opportunities. For example:

- two-thirds of the leader-style women perceived hostility towards women as compared to 2 per cent of leader-style men.

- 75% of leader-style men believed that their companies actively encouraged career development among their women executives; two-thirds of leader-style women disagreed.

- more than half the leader-style women also believed that men were given more opportunities to exercise power and authority; two-thirds of leader-style men perceived equal opportunity.

- a majority (over 50%) of both leader-style and manager-style men believed women had at *least* equal access to casual social interaction with potential mentors. Only one-third of manager-style women and less than a quarter of leader-style women agreed.

The study failed to substantiate the traditional myths about women and their leadership capacity. However, it did reveal that organisations need to correct misconceptions and perceptions about gender, position and

leadership orientation, and later the climate and culture before women can be given the opportunities they seek and deserve.

How Do Women View Their Leadership Capacity?

Research suggests that they tend to adopt a personal perspective, viewing themselves as being either unable to overcome the challenges created by gender stereotyping or assuming that they lack some innate ability/capacity (such as access to power) to perform the role (Still, 1993). However, McKenzie (1992) reveals that women may not be focused sufficiently in relation to their career direction which could impact on their consideration for leadership positions. She compared two samples of public and private sector women in relation to career goals. Asked where they planned to be in five years' time, the public sector women responded, in order of priority:

- senior management position;
- general management position;
- don't know;
- where I am now;
- head of an organisation;
- in my own business;
- retired.

In contrast, the private sector women were more focused. Their order of priorities was as follows:

- national or senior management role;
- running a corporation;
- running my own business;
- getting more education.

While the responses reflect differences in organisational culture, the private sector women had sharper career objectives than the public sector women who viewed their future more in generalities. Both groups aspired to leadership positions. Given the lack of women running large organisations in Australia it is doubtful that the private sector women will achieve their second priority. The public sector women may achieve their two highest priorities through the aegis of government equity policy rather than through well-identified career aspirations. Hence, organisational context influences leadership capacity (the situational variable), as well as the innate drive of women themselves (Still, 1993).

Pathways to Leadership

Since having an 'inappropriate' leadership style often mitigates against the progress of women, what can women do to ensure that they are given an equitable chance at leadership? The following suggestions present themselves:

- women have to recognise that at senior levels, and in leadership positions, 'style' rather than 'substance' becomes a deciding factor (Still, 1994b). However, the definition of 'style' varies from that commonly understood. For instance, it is not a matter of being democratic or autocratic, but appreciating what are the determining factors in senior positions. Hence, negotiating skills, 'old boy network', 'teamwork' and whether a person 'fits in' to the team become important criteria for success and progress. Aspiring women leaders do not generally meet these criteria because of differing cultural interpretations. For instance, 'teamwork' in the male domain means letting the leader lead and being a good follower. The female interpretation usually means 'making a contribution' and 'speaking

up' - the exact opposite of what is required under the male version. Women thus have to understand the cultural nuances involved in assuming leadership positions. Most women believe that if they work hard, they will be rewarded. Most men understand that it is the social system that will assist them to be promoted and recognised rather than the amount of time spent in being task-oriented. Hence, the emphasis on lobbying, meetings, drinks after work, social events, sporting activities and other such examples which are avidly followed by male counterparts. While women do not favour these activities, believing that men play a 'game' while women are serious about their work, promotion usually goes to those who do understand these differences or 'rules' and can be relied on to perform as expected. Women may have to adjust their approach, then, to ensure that they can compete under the rules.

- despite the advent of over two decades of equal opportunity and affirmative action, there is still a cultural resistance to women at the top. In fact, women present a 'cultural dilemma' to their male colleagues at the senior levels. Because women have been locked out of decision-making arenas, there are no ground rules on how men and women should interact at these levels (Still, 1994a; Sinclair, 1994). Women should adopt the strategy of developing a mentor(s) to assist their transition to leadership. While the mentor may not assist all the way, or several mentors may be needed to guide the path, a woman should attempt to obtain as much useful advise about her career directions and strategies as possible (McKenzie, 1995). The mentor should help the woman make the transition from a technical specialist to one who understands what is involved in leadership in a masculine environment.

- women should also endeavour to change the resistant organisational culture by entering into the life of the organisation - for instance, getting onto committees, volunteering for task forces, generally seeking opportunities to present their point of view. If women hold back from participating, or showing an interest, the culture will always remain the same because of women's inertia. Only persistent effort will change a culture and women have to play their part in bringing this change about (Cox, 1996) For instance, the varying perceptions and experiences of the workforce between men and women will never be revealed unless some 'cultural awareness' programs are introduced. Surveys and examinations of the culture need to be encouraged. Many senior men in organisations are unaware of the need for change because it does not confront them in their day-to-day functioning. Because they are protected within their cultural cocoon, they believe they are enlightened in both their attitudes and perceptions when it comes to women's progress. Organisations, and top management, need to be 'unfrozen' from their cultural milieu. While it may seem unfair to put the onus of change on women, it is essential because even in to-day's enlightened times the cultural problems experienced by women are not recognised by men - that is, there is no commonality or experience or understanding.

- women also need to learn to distinguish between managerial ability (competence) and leadership ability (power). When organisations chose potential candidates for top managerial positions, leadership capabilities win out over managerial or technical ability every time. Women thus need to learn how to use power, to cease thinking of themselves as 'victims' (Still, 1996), and to be seen 'acting smart,

strategising and 'leading' rather than 'thinking smart' and performing tasks well.

- Finally, women have to be mindful of the ever-changing workplace and the ever-changing criteria for success. For example, the results of the Industry Task Force in Australia into Leadership and Management Skills (1995) heralded a new set of criteria for the chief executive of the future. Chief amongst these new criteria is the requirement for international experience and the ability to speak foreign languages and to understand different cultures. Women may feel that they are nearing leadership positions, but the criteria are already changing. They should thus ensure that they are positioned to take advantage of this change and not expect organisations to be paternal 'godfathers' for them without a reciprocal effort on their part.

Edith Cowan University's Women in Leadership Program

This is all by way of introduction. I will now elaborate on what my own University, Edith Cowan, is doing about the leadership dilemma for women. I will briefly outline the program and elaborate on outcomes.

The Women in Leadership program began in 1992, with support from the Commonwealth Government's Staff Development Fund. Conceived as a training and development program in leadership skills and abilities for 30 female staff members, the program grew and developed momentum and insightfulness going well beyond its planners expectations.

There is much about ECU which appears to be congenial to women and their interests. The University is named after the first woman elected to an

Australian parliament, and both the staff and student bodies are dominated by women. The academic program also gives priority to traditionally female routes to the workforce: the humanities, education and nursing. ECU also has an affirmative action program on behalf of women in promotion and tenure. An innovative sexual harassment policy won a commendation in the Affirmative Action Agency Awards. However, like most Australian tertiary institutions the proportion of women in leadership positions is small with most women occupying junior academic or sessional appointments (Milligan and Genoni, 1993).

From its inception, the Women in Leadership Program has endeavoured to deal with a number of pertinent issues. How can more women get promoted? What are the challenges of leadership for women in the context of change at ECU and in the wider higher education sector? What is leadership? What skills, knowledge and values do leaders need? Why don't women participate more in leadership?, and, What personal and organisational strategies are necessary to include more women in academic leadership? The program has adopted the following statement as its purpose: *to enable women to claim their place at ECU and play a role in its future by shaping its structures and culture in ways which will recognise and reward women's contributions.*

The program has a unique conceptual framework for thinking about leadership which has been put into practice both internally and in the community (see Model 1). Essentially it develops in participants an understanding of the organisation and its workings, and the skills necessary to participate effectively in it, and to shape and influence it. Participants develop an understanding of the political, economic and industrial environment of the University as well as developing individual technical, personal leadership and management skills.

Edith Cowan University - Model of Leadership

Model 1

Societal Context

UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

CREATOR
OF
ENVIRONMENTS

STRATEGIST

SELF

PUBLIC VOICE
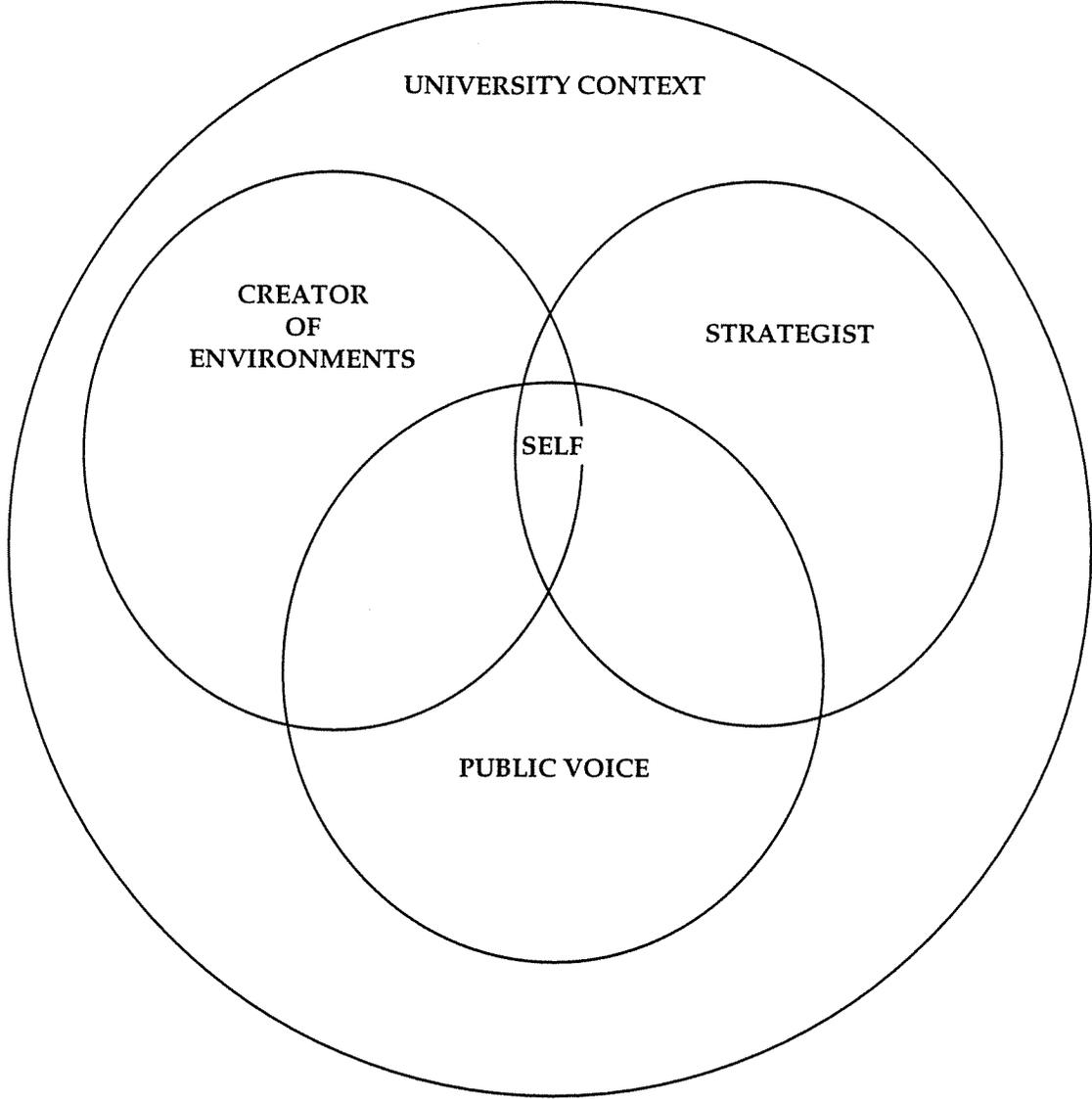
Dimensions of Leadership

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

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The framework encompasses four overlapping categories which broadly
cover the leadership capacities considered essential for women at ECU (see
Table 2).

Table 2	
Framework of Leadership Capacities ©	
Capacities relating to being a **STRATEGIST**	*Capacities relating to having a* **PUBLIC VOICE**
• Understanding the existing power structures • Having a clear vision of a desired future • Knowing the organisation's procedures, policies and committees • Analysing the organisational culture • Recognising potential allies and enemies • Understanding organisational resource use: funding, equipment, human resource policies • Understanding costing: personal, human, financial • Valuing risk taking, collegiality, patience • Making choices and decisions • Conflict resolution and negotiation • Managing discomfort and vulnerability • Knowing your limitations • Strategic planning • Debating skills • Communication skills • Cultivating mentors	• Documenting achievements and views • Understanding the use of language • Making recommendations • Understanding media and mediums • Understanding the audience • Understanding when to speak and when to be silent • Using enquiry, putting views, negotiating • Representation: political, academic and organisational • Knowing appropriate forms of communication • Public speaking, debating and marketing skills • Valuing courage, sincerity, persistence • Forming alliances
Capacities relating to **WORK AND IDENTITY COMPETENCE**	*Capacities relating to being a* **CREATOR OF ENVIRONMENTS**
• Developing competence in scholarship, teaching and community services, research • Knowledge of industrial awards, organisational structures, funding structures, government policies • Understanding the impact of technology, political and academic changes • Understanding policies impacting on the institution, such as restructuring, performance management, enterprise bargaining • Delegating • Facilitating	• Knowing the history of the organisation • shaping departmental structures and culture • Setting up a learning environment • Managing change, making a difference • Collaboration and cooperation • Valuing the capacity to take responsibility, the capacity to take risks • Maintaining personal, moral and ethical standards • Time management • Team Building • Valuing mutual respect

The capacities cover:

- capacities associated with *work identity and competence;*
- capacities associated with becoming *a creator of environments;*
- capacities associated with *being a strategist;*
- capacities associated with having *a public voice.*

The program contains three core activities: collegial groups (these operate across existing personal and professional networks and address common issues guided by a trained facilitator), the public lecture series and the national conference. While distinct activities, each of the core elements share aims, objectives and strategies.

The program is now in its fourth year of operation. What are some of the outcomes? A brief summary follows:

- over 100 women, both academic and general, have participated in the collegial groups. The drop-out rate has been low.

- Over 600 people have attended the three major conferences that have been held to date.

- the public lecture series (seven lectures in all each year) averages over 200 people each lecture.
- participants in the collegial groups have gained an understanding of leadership and realised the differences between positional power and informal power. There is more exercise of leadership from participants in day-to-day operations.

- in the first round of promotions in 1994, women were successful in gaining 17 out of 25 positions. Of the 17 women, 11 had been through the program. More women are also gaining a fairer share of tenured positions.

- women are using the Women in Leadership model and framework as a significant vehicle for their publishing efforts.

- a review of merit and promotion procedures within the institution has been undertaken.

- changes have been occurring in the culture - more women sit on committees, a major study of work and family responsibilities was undertaken in 1994 as was an investigation into the development needs of general staff, while increasing emphasis has been given to assisting women to improve their research performance to have a meaningful career.

- networks have been established; women now feel more 'comfortable' in having a public voice; and there has been some success in the emergence of a gender inclusive organisational culture.

- Women in Leadership is considered to be a significant priority area for ECU.

A further review is currently being undertaken which will build on the previous two reviews (Ashenden and Genoni, 1993; Pyner, 1994). However, current thought is that the Women in Leadership program has already changed the environment in which women work at ECU and that the program has contributed to changes in structural arrangements which have

made a difference to the shape, structure and culture of the university. This does not mean that there is still not work to be done. But a significant start has been made and the program and its effect have their own momentum. Further significant changes are expected in the years ahead.

Conclusion

In summary, then, it appears that if women are to be more successful in obtaining leadership positions, they need to recognise that the reasons why they are not normally distributed in leadership is because of cultural factors, most of which have a gender base. Organisational culture is the remaining barrier to most women's progress, and little change has been effected in it in the last twenty years despite tinkering around the edges. The Women in Leadership program at Edith Cowan University has set out to meet that challenge. Its success already serves as a model to other institutions who are interested in improving the position of women generally. It would appear that a more concerted effort at attempting to change organisational culture would do more to assist women's leadership aspirations than worrying about whether women had the 'appropriate' leadership style. The ECU Women in Leadership model is one such pathway to change. Its conceptual base and framework have been tested in practice and proven to be effective. Organisations can make great advances if they adopt such a model, or a similar one, in improving the career prospects of women.

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