

Why do Women excel in IT Leadership position?

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Background

Past perceptions of leadership skills, competence, and assertiveness may still today hinder the ability of woman to succeed in IT management. Many companies still associate masculine characteristics with success and achievement and entities desire a leader who will execute, take criticism, and do what is best for the company at all cost.

When I googled woman in IT leadership it presented 336 000 search result on leadership with one article specific on woman in IT leadership. The search on percentage of women in CIO positions presented 487 000 results in comparison to the 38.2 million search results related to woman in CEO positions.

The IT industry as a whole continues to struggle with gender diversity. While women make up 57 % of the overall workforce, in the technology sector that number falls to just 25 %. The disparity is even more evident at the IT executive level, where women represent only 20 % of CIOs at Fortune 500 companies.

This begs the question to why are we not more prominent in this field of expertise? Let explore.....

My suggestion is that some of us don't think we are or make good leaders and some of us still subject ourselves to stereotyping and that combined with the perceptions that still in exist in organisations contributes to the percentage mentioned above.



Stereotyping and Leadership Style

Many books for example “Think like a Man, Act like a Lady” have in many ways contributed to believe that man and woman are worlds apart. How do we overcome or address these stereotypes.

My IT success story and background

I absolutely love technology. For me it is the perfect balance between male and female. It is mysterious, ever changing, evolving and full of surprises (good and bad). However once you step into the depths of it is logical and process driven.

I finished school in 1990 with programming as one of my final year subjects and started varsity in 1991 as a B.com Information System student. I was the one of two females in our school that matriculated with programming as a 7th subject and one of 5 that studied Information Systems at RAU.

I started my career employed by Siemens Nixdorf in the software department under the incredible leadership of a Kenyan man. We must have made quite a pair...the little blond girl and the big tall African man.

I had my first stereotype interaction at the third company I worked for where I was told in an executive meeting that upon presenting a new business idea that I’m not only a pretty face but that I had a useful brain as well. At the time looking at the person that made the statement I decided to take it as a compliment.....

Stereotyping and Leadership Style

Know Leadership Styles

A secret to effective leadership is to find your own voice and know both your strengths and weaknesses well.

To understand this I will like to look at what makes a great leader. Not a manager but a leader. There is a difference....

A leader promotes vision, creativity and change.

A Manager promotes stability, order and problem solving within a structure. There is a place for both of these types...

Roseline Torres from the Boston Business Consulting Group interviewed over 4000 companies to understand what makes a great leader. In her opinion most leadership programme train leaders for a world that was not a world that is. Most companies communicated that even with all the available leadership programme they still have a skill gap in leadership.



Stereotyping and Leadership Style

Know Leadership Styles (cont)

Great leadership is defined by the following 3 questions:

1. Where are you looking to anticipate the next change to your business model or your life?
2. What is the diversity measure of your personal and stakeholder relationships?
3. Are you courageous enough to abandon a practise that made you successful in the past?



Stereotyping and Leadership Style

Know Leadership Styles

There are several leadership styles but no right and no wrong leadership style. For me the following 5 leadership style make sense because they speak a language related to technology. Once you find your leadership style explore and educate yourself to become a great leader in your field.

The Five Leadership Styles

Innovator	Developer	Activator	Maximizer	Stabilizer
<i>Design</i>	<i>Design and Build</i>	<i>Build</i>	<i>Build and Maintain</i>	<i>Maintain</i>
Bringing new ideas and original solutions to the marketplace. Thinking outside the box to solve problems.	Taking action on original solutions and learning along the way. Motto: Ready, Fire, Aim.	Moving forward to achieve challenging goals. Overcoming obstacles and getting things done.	Embracing the good of the past while making new changes. Working together with all different kinds of people	Keeping things running smoothly and efficiently. Creating systems that meet the highest standards of accountability.
<i>Creativity</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Tenacity</i>	<i>Diplomacy</i>	<i>Consistency</i>



Stereotyping and Leadership Style

Stereotypes:

Due to the demands of leadership positions, it became a socially accepted tendency for men to assume leadership because of the perceived task-orientated style that was accepted to benefit companies.

The view at the top is slowly changing and companies see more growth where leadership have a more balanced approach between male and female. It is proven that companies with a more balanced gender base are more successful than their competitors. I give some statistics later in the presentation.

I do believe that serotyping is still one of the biggest barriers for growth in organizations.

I had my first sexual and gender stereotype interaction at the same company I mentioned earlier. My account manger one night in the lift pressed me up against the wall trying to kiss me. Luckily at the time I was practising Tae-Kwando and my reaction came naturally to hid him so hard that he stood back and I ran out into the parking lot to the nearby security. The saddest part of the whole incident, when I took the case to HR, was that the female HR manager looked me up and down and kind of agreed with him that I provoked the incident. I could not believe that a woman will not stand up for another woman. I became very aware of how I carry myself, who I align myself to and dress myself for work.



Stereotyping and Leadership Style

Stereotypes:

Recent studies shows that although woman and men see equal opportunity for upward mobility the perception under women is that barriers still exist in promotion and flexibility within the work space.

Social science research is based on a search for differences. Since we do not look for similarities, we don't find them and thus propagate an overemphasis on the differences between girls and boys, men and women. Differences are at the basis of research design and theory. Differences can be easily proved while similarities cannot.

I do believe that there are many similar traits between men and woman that are left unnoticed because we so concentrated on our differences. However there are many external impacts that we need to be aware of so we can work and change these.

A psychologist and university lecturer, Marina Pavlova, tested the idea of the extent to which men and women are influenced by stereotyping in a given task.

What clearly emerged from the study is that women are more vulnerable to stereotyping than men. The only time men's performance declined was when they received an explicit negative male message.



Stereotyping and Leadership Style

Practical tools to adapt and change perception

I am thrilled to notice that even Hollywood is changing their perception of Women in technology. A few years ago we were still presented as the fat cat lady that support the sexy male hero. I recently seen two movies where the technical hero saving the world were both very attractive females. The one even had a James Bond moment where the woman walk out of the ocean in a bikini

- The way we dress and present ourselves– dress for the job you want or the career progression you have in mind.
- Diversity in communication – understand people personality and communication styles and use the knowledge to support the communication in business.
- Promote the recruitment of other resources who are very different from you or where you can influence the recruitment process to employ resources that are very different from you. Then listen to them deeply, use their strengths to support you and trust them completely to operate at their best .
- Build a culture of inclusion and innovation. Challenge processes such as recruitment, performance management, succession planning and talent development to ensure there is a non-biased and consistent process to identify, develop and advance women leadership in a organisation.



Woman their own worst enemy?

The question always remains, do woman promote and support other woman in business. Read “Lean In” by Author Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Google. She been widely critise for her book by both men and woman and specifically feminist. I however think that she is right on the money to say that as a woman we should take risk with our career, be bold, stand up and make yourself known. I not going to touch on the aspects she promotes in detail because it created such sensitive conversation. I still value her view....

Understanding behavior in business

- Relationships among people are not passive. It is dynamic and can be used to achieve a common goal.
- Recognise people preferences and how they achieve their targets.
- Take notice of their strengths and weaknesses
- Understand the dynamics of long standing employees
- The culture of a business



Woman their own worst enemy?

Understanding cultural difference in leadership engagements

Research indicates that South Africa is seventh in the world when it comes to women's representation at board level. However is it still only 17.1 % of all seat at the strategic table.

South Africa is one of the most diverse nation in the world. To enable a cohesive society we have one of the most progressive constitutions in the world that gives protection to the rights of every individual to be valued, respected and not to experience any form of discrimination.

More and more research indicates that woman are good for business. More encouraging leadership characteristics assist woman to excel in business. However a more sensitive approach does not encourage woman.

Cultural differences is not only linked to race and gender but to religion, the age of the individual and environment of the organisation itself.

Culture can only be understood through open dialogue. It is necessary to provide education, training and development to create a common understanding and a level of equal performance goals.

Companies should drive and be responsible for workplace transformation. Staff satisfaction and motivation should be assess on an on-going basis to drive strategic interventions to proactively manage issues that are threatening the welfare of staff, the management of cultural programme and their future stability.

Good leaders have workplace transformation as one of their key agenda point for their staff.



Woman their own worst enemy?

How to bridge the gap promoting woman

The first step toward overcoming any challenge is awareness. Woman need to identify their unique talents, understand what they bring to their work environment to best enable success, and, then make sure that their voice are heard. Speak up, speak up, and contribute...

Statistics indicate that more woman then men leave organisation because of their desire for more flexibility in their jobs. Woman are more likely to leave or change jobs in support of their family. Either moving because of a partner or because of commitment to children.

In the best workplaces/companies, significant attention and resources are focused on recruiting, retaining and developing woman leaders. It is not only the right thing to do, it's smart business. This however is this far and in between....

The technology landscape is rapidly changing and the way in which we operate and interact should change accordingly. Technology enhances flextime, work from home and virtual workplaces which are predicted to become the norm and women should use these to create a more suitable work environment for all.

Senior women need to be strong advocates for more women in senior leadership position across all industries and in all functions. We need to celebrate the woman that been trailblazers so that from a young age, women have more role models with whom they can identify.

We need to expose young girls and woman to STEM (Science, technology, engineering and math careers) subjects from an early age and encourage their curiosity and natural interest with programmes and activities which keep the spark alive.



Value of woman leadership in IT

Value contribution

- Women have always been great leaders we just don't talk about them much. I met a number of woman in business that are incredible at what they do but never promote themselves. They wait to be seen....
- Women naturally lean more toward inclusive, interactive and participative leadership types. Research proven that more women than men display these type of leadership styles.
- Research findings indicate an overwhelming support for participative leadership styles. People of all genders, races, colour and nationalities have an universal desire to participate in the decision that effect their life.
- The relationship between organisational effectiveness and participative leadership is closely knitted and is evident in successful companies that are thriving despite the world economical situation.
- In order to show positive results in organisational effectiveness it has to be planned, structured and carefully monitored. Lasting effectiveness gains are realised only through effective utilisation of people and the systems within which they operate. Woman are bringing a different perspective to this based on a different set of life experience



Value of woman leadership in IT

Value contribution

- A recent Catalyst.org reported that Fortune 500 companies with three or more women on the Board outperform other companies with 53% more returns on equities, 42% more return on sales and 66% more return invested capital.
- Yet according to the National Center for Woman and Information Technology, woman executives account for only 6% of chief executives at the top 100 tech companies.
- How I added value through my experience...



Value of woman leadership in IT

External factors fail or enable woman (Globalization and Lifestyle conflicts)

Globalization presents many new barriers for women. Senior level managers and top executives now have even more responsibility and higher expectations than before.

Due to the time pressures and relocations of many businesses, top executives have had to move to new towns, cities, and countries. This presents a large barrier for many women with families and a working spouse or significant other (Wellington, Kropp, & Gerkovich, 2003).

Perhaps more surprisingly, the largest problem, however, has not been family issues; it has been adoption of new cultures and social norms. While the natural ability of women to adapt is higher than that of men, a large number of women have been unable to accept the culture shock and fail in their new environments.

Similarly, women may also experience resistance in other cultures to female leadership. Many countries will simply not deal with a women executive because of their beliefs and perceptions that women are incapable of doing business effectively.



Value of woman leadership in IT

Social economic impact

The lack of education and training still fails woman in our modern society.

Woman especially in South Africa and Africa still take care of families instead of advancing their career. Especially in the lower social classes where parents are no longer available and siblings needs care.

The pool of woman that are qualified for promotion to executive positions is still fairly small.

For many women, in addition to the roles they hold in their companies, they remain the primary caretakers for their families (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2009).

As the time constraints and demands of a job become more important upon, promotion forces many women to choose between family and career.

According to Jack and Suzy Welch (2007), very few women CEOs and women executives have children due to the affect it would have on their career.

Conversely, many women have voluntarily left their jobs due to family decisions (Baxter, 2000; Wallace, 2008).

While a decreasing number of women are taking pregnancy or childcare leaves, 32% of women still leave their jobs once they have children. Also, once a woman has children she is much more reluctant to travel and work long hours due to their responsibilities at home further hindering her promotion likelihood.



Value of woman leadership in IT

Bridging business and IT through woman leadership

IT is becoming more and more of an enabler in business and are in the spotlight at board level because of risks like cyber security. IT is no longer seen as a back office entity and is in need of participative and consultative discussions to better support business in market growth.

Technology can assist in bridging the disadvantage of lack of experience and knowledge of how organisations work. Amongst the new generation of entry levels attributes such a willingness to collaborate, the tendency to do extensive research before making a decision and to network through technology is prominent.

Woman in most cases are better equip to understand the new generation and utilise their abilities through collaboration and consultation.

Woman are proven to take on a more participative and consultative leadership approach which encourage teamwork in subordinated and superiors and promotes decision making throughout the organisation. This instil mutual confidence and trust in all matters.

Research shown a consistent relationship between these types of leadership styles and organisational effectiveness. As previously mention that it is proven that women in leadership improve the bottom line.

With woman's natural ability to collaborate and with the use technology is making it easier for them to climb to the top while raising a family.



Value of woman leadership in IT

Who are these technology leaders

I research both international and local leaders and failed dismally at obtaining substantial evidence of Woman in IT leadership position. Here are a few....

- Amanda Dambuza – former divisional CIO Barclays Africa, founder and CEO of her own project management consulting company. The corner stone of her success is the commitment to service excellence and unwavering obligation to achieve business outcomes.
- Google COO – Sheryl Sandberg. She promotes that woman should be more open to take career risks, to stop pleasing and see their career as a jungle gym filled with opportunity
- Lynn Good of Duke Energy - the \$25 billion company experience a 50% increase in profits. Her accountability through actions, her unwavering focus and her ability to engage with people to provide the opportunity to showcase their work.
- Mary Barra – Barra inclusive leadership style to garner employee advocates and improve business operation earned her the position of CEO General Motors
- Mary Laschinger – CEO of Veritiv, a business to business solutions Company. Her feminine trait by being careful to credit her team and her work ethic earned her the top position. She collaborated her career to the top of a very competitive business.



Leadership Tools

The book “The rise of the Female Executive” looks at how woman’s leadership is accelerating Cultural change.

Practical communication processes and tools

The technology landscape is rapidly changing and business is forced to change accordingly or be terminated.

- The ability to communicate effectively in the workplace is an essential life skill to demonstrate. Everyone has their own style that they naturally adapt and develop to suit the different environments in which they operate in. Our need to educate, inform, persuade, or entertain drives our communication style.
- The ability to relate to others in a way that creates trust and understanding is critical to convey your message.
- The ability to see the point other’s point of view and get them to understand yours – Six thinking hats by Edward Debono
- Emphasizing similarities – associate and common understanding.
- Pacing – Match body postures, breathing voice tone and level, language patterns, beliefs and values.



Leadership Tools

Practical communication processes and tools

Let look at communication styles in more depth as a secondary tool...

There are 4 basic styles of communication with a fifth being a combination of two or more of the four, that I will like to bring to you attention. Each of the four styles describes how you act in the majority of your communications. For example, do you usually:

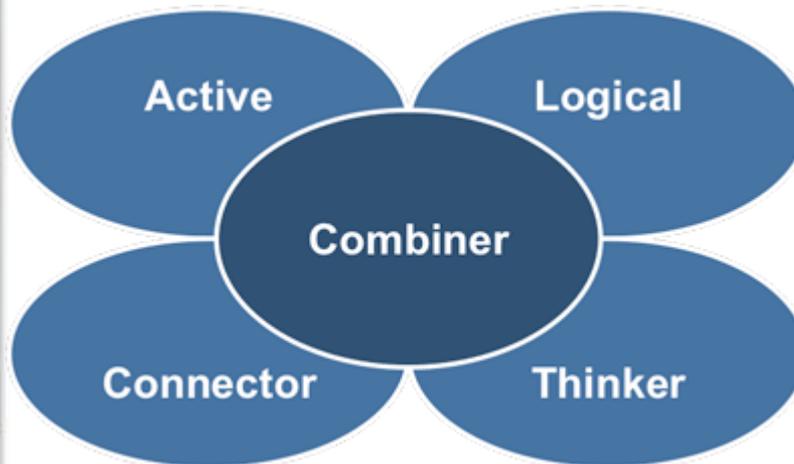
Take an active role in the communications?

Connect and empathize with others?

Take time to think and respond?

Follow a logical path?

Or do you find that you usually use a combination of the four?



Active – Animated and direct, , confident, use language for impact, quick to decide and fill the gaps and space in conversation

Logical – Logical approach, have strong opinions, use language of extremes, like frameworks, need aim and evidence, practical and realistic

Connector – Approachable, empathetic, intuitive and rely on feelings, subjective, considered and pause before talking

Thinker – Objective, seek data and facts, controlled, think before speaking and less concerned with emotions



Leadership tools

Leadership tool and processes

Look up Rani Habiby Anderson the Founder of the Way Woman Work and author “Undeterred” – It is a book about 6 Success Habits for Woman in Emerging Economies

Use the leadership tools and these processes in your daily life:

- Follow your passion and find something you love doing.
- No matter how small or big a task is, just do it a little better than what is expected.
- Find the joy in what you are doing
- Treat employees no different to how you want to be treated
- Keep your eye on the prize, where you want to go and what you want to achieve.
- Never defines yourself as a product or by your competition. Be flexible and agile.
- Find a way to yes to things outside your comfort zone.



Leadership tools

Mentorship and tools to assist mentorship

A well known barrier is the relationships many women have with their mentors, bosses, and female co-workers. Most employees tend to bond through similar interests. Since there tend to be few executive women; many women are unable to find a female mentor.

Laff (2006) finds that women are repressed in the workplace because of their limited access to capable mentors. Many people prefer to have mentors of the same gender because they tend to understand the challenges most commonly faced. Men do not face the same barriers, have the same family issues, and many times simply do not want to mentor a woman.

The needs of women from their mentors also tend to differ from the needs of men. Many women claim to need more encouragement, an example to follow, and simply more tasks to complete.

Male mentors tend to be resistant to mentor a woman because they perceive women as more emotional, not as skilled at problem-solving, and because of the risk of workplace sexual harassment issues



The end

I want to end our session talking about our social responsibility to mentor our nation.....

Make the Impossible Possible by author Bill Strickland. The business model he designed promotes crafting hope through opportunity in local communities.

Bill in his center took in people with very little or no education and changed them into mathematical geniuses working with complex string of information in laboratories, he created jazz geniuses and culinary and creative masters.

I believe, "If this country has a future, it's because of the ability to form visions and partnerships. I believe that we can change our country in my lifetime. We've got to change the way this country sees itself." We have a magnitude of differently skilled resources and resilience in our people.

I will leave you with this....

Michael Obama recently mentioned that today there are still 62 million uneducated girls in the world. Can we use our women leadership in technology to assist these girls to remotely learn and excel in life to create entrepreneurs and leaders in technology.....

Lets work together to create a better future for our world....

