A Comparison of a Micropolitical Framework with a Feminist Perspective

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Introduction

My life experience has taught me that if we live long enough, we will experience conflict. According to Bolman & Deal (2003), conflict is both natural and inevitable and not always an indication that there is a problem in an organization. Hoy and Miskel (2008) refer to conflict as being a source of positive change and necessary for authentic involvement, empowerment and democracy (Hoy and Miskel, 2008). They argue that it can also be used to balance power which is a significant point not mentioned in the other literature studied (p.246).

Febbraro and Chrisjohn (1994) describe conflict as “a noun and a verb used to depict instances in which people do not get along, or disagree, or act on this disagreement” and that it “does not require objective, scientific analysis” (cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.246). Peterson (1983) states that a scholarly description of conflict considers: “dimensions of outcome (constructive or destructive; differential gain or misperception); degree of competitiveness; actual conflict behavior versus intention to behave (not openly expressed); structure of the interaction (e.g. fight, debate, game); and objective versus subjective criteria” (cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p. 170). The definition used for this paper is by William A. Donahue (1992) who defines conflict “as a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals” (Donohue, 1992, p.4).
Keashly (1994) states that evidence suggest that individuals see the same conflict differently, the old adage of one situation, two different stories (cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p. 170). Pinkley and Sheppard (2000) agree with Peterson’s definition that the strategies for dealing with conflict are dependent upon how they are interpreted along a number of dimensions. Another important research finding in managing conflict is that “conflict interpretations have been found to vary with gender” (Kelley Cunningham, Grisham, Lefebvre, Sink & Yablon, 1978; Pinkley and Northcraft, 1990, cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.170).

The purpose of this paper is to describe a micro-political approach to conflict management in a feminist context. This paper will explore strategies for managing conflict by Bolman & Deal (2003) and whether or not gender has an impact on these strategies. The particular political aspects that will be covered from Bolman & Deal’s framework (Bolman & Deal, 2003) include the essential strategies for managing conflict, dealing with political dimensions, education or negotiation processes needed to deal with resistance, and “principled bargaining”, a human resource view to creating win-win situations (p.205-219). A critique of this framework will be undertaken in comparison to how gender, power, leadership style, and context impact aspects of managing conflict. Concepts on conflict management from feminist authors Glaser and Smalley (1995), Rosener (2005), Grogan (2000), Hoy and Miskel (2008), Peters (2002), and Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.) (2000) will be investigated to better understand the topic. Observations, conclusions and recommendations on this topic by the author of this paper are included.
Managing Conflict: Feminist

Bolman & Deal’s Micro political Framework for Managing Conflict

According to Bolman & Deal (2003), politics, like power, can be used positively or negatively and is a part of organizational life when there are enduring differences, scarce resources and interdependence (Bolman and Deal, 2003, p.206). Enduring differences signifies the reality that events and situations will inevitably be viewed differently by people in conflict and that these same people will have difficulty coming to an agreement on what is true. Decisions about scarce resources are constantly being made with the reality that not everyone can have what they want. Interdependence means that people need each other’s help and support as well as their resources in order to serve their self-interests. Confronting the realities of diversity and self-interest in the context of moving the organization forward in a positive direction is a challenge many leaders face (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.206). The needed skills required to deal with effective management of conflict consist of three parts: a) agenda setting, b) networking and forming coalitions, and, c) bargaining and negotiating (p.208).

Setting the Agenda

Bolman & Deal (2003) suggest that leaders should have an agenda for change consisting of a vision and a plan for reaching that vision. This agenda should provide direction “while addressing the concerns of the stakeholders” (p.205). In order to set this agenda, leaders need to be familiar with the stakeholders, understanding their “shared values, goals and local agendas” (p.208). They need to not only be arm-twisters but they need to know which arms to twist and how (Pfeffer, 1992, p.172, cited in Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.205). At the same time, they should be planting seeds along the way so that acceptance of ideas comes not only from leaders but from other sources within the
organization. A successful leader needs to win his or her agenda first. The first one hundred days of being a leader are the most critical.

Networking and Building Coalitions

Four strategies for dealing with political elements in an organization according to Kotter (1985) include: a) recognizing significant relationships, b) locating where resistance might be positioned, c) initiating relationships with these people, and d) being prepared to use more forceful measures if these strategies do not work (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.210).

Power is required in order for these strategies to be successful; leaders must rely on the cooperation of others to meet organizational goals (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.211). Bolman & Deal (2003) suggest networking with individuals on their turf in order to successfully sell their ideas, build alliances which can be activated at a later time and trading resources for rewards as required (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.211). Leaders must be careful not to miss opportunities to test their assumptions about who actually has power. From my experience, power does not always reside at the top. It can reside with individuals you least expect in an organization such as with custodians and secretaries.

Bargaining and Negotiating

When “two or more parties have some interests in common and other interests in conflict” (Bolman & Deal 2003, p.213), effective bargaining and negotiating skills are necessary in order to manage the conflict positively. Fisher and Ury (1981) argue that problems occur from “positional bargaining” where people “take positions and then make concessions to reach agreement” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.214). They suggest a four step win-win approach where firstly, people are seen separately from the problem;
secondly, there is a focus on interests instead of locking oneself into a fixed position that renders an individual unable to see different possibilities of how interests might be served; thirdly, exploring alternatives that bring advantages to both sides; and fourthly, creating fair and objective criteria with which each side can live with (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.214).

The bargaining process is a complex one where even though both parties want an agreement; each person has a different preference for which one. Decisions are interdependent as each individual or group tries to get the upper hand by predicting the other individual’s or group’s next move. If one party can control the others level of uncertainty, the more powerful they become. Threats are often used to increase the likelihood of one side winning but the threats must be credible, with the right amount at stake, otherwise, a player’s position is weakened.

To win over the most difficult people in an organization, leaders must clearly outline their vision and convey an understanding of the opposing person’s viewpoint in a neutral way. In addition, leaders need to be aware if and how they, as leaders, might be contributing to the problem when dealing with difficult people.

Review of Bolman & Deal’s Micro political Framework: A Feminist Perspective

Several women writers were consulted to compare their perspectives on managing conflict in leadership with those of Bolman and Deal’s micro political framework.

Setting the Agenda

Bolman & Deal (2003) imply that if an agenda is set and plans for reaching that vision are in place, the chances for conflict to occur are reduced. I would argue that this
sets up a perfect situation for conflict to occur. Feminist leaders are more inclined to include stakeholders in the decision-making process and the planning session that is required to reach the vision as the research shows that they have a preference for an interactive leadership style (Rosener, 2005, p.186). Grogan (2000) discusses the feminist perspective on the importance of caring in leadership where people are seen as individuals not social groups and “leaders who adopt an ethic of care are more likely to see themselves in relationship with others” (Grogan, 2000, p.133). Caring allows leaders to encourage employees to express their concerns and differences of opinion and offer suggestions which lead the way to a shared decision-making process. This would increase the likelihood that there would be more ownership and shared responsibility of the plan.

Bolman & Deal’s framework does not mention interpersonal communication as being an important strategy to handling conflict and yet the literature indicates that “interpersonal communication is a primary consideration in understanding conflict between individuals in an organization” (Evans, 1996). I agree with Rosener (2005) that “women managers are succeeding not by adopting the traditional command-and-control leadership style but by drawing on what is unique to their experience as women” (Rosener, 2005, p.185). Rosener (1995) says

when men with a traditional 'command and control' leadership style encounter women with an ‘interactive’ leadership style, they may have difficulty in recognizing them as leaders at all. Conversely, when they encounter women leaders who have adopted the command and control
style, they may have difficulty relating to them as women (1995 as cited in Peters, 2002, p.15).

Women are drawn towards “interactive leadership” (Rosener, 2005, p.186) where they try to make all of their interactions positive ones within the organization including goal setting and planning processes.

According to Rosener (2005), women also exhibit a transformational leadership style where their employees transform their own self-interests into one that positively reflects organizational goals (Rosener, 2005, p. 188). Men, on the other hand, exhibit a transactional leadership style which means that they view “job performance as a series of transactions with subordinates—exchanging rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance” (Rosener, 2005, p.188). The transactional leadership style used by men is confirmed in Bolman & Deal’s (2003) political framework where terms such as “credible threats” and “positional bargaining” are used (p.214).

Women tend to credit their success to personal characteristics or traits such as “charisma, hard work and interpersonal skills”, whereas men are “more likely to use power that comes from their organizational position and formal authority” (Rosener, 2005, p.188). Even though the framework stresses the importance of becoming familiar with the “local agendas” within an organization, there is no mention as to how or if these agendas will be considered during decision-making sessions or which agendas hold higher value in the organization.
Networking and Building Coalitions

Every woman leader I have ever met has been politically astute to the power sources within their organization. It is my opinion that these leaders saw the value in networking and in building coalitions. One such example is of a female principal I worked with over the past few years. She uses Kotter’s (1985) strategies for dealing with the political elements in her school, however, compared to the male principals I have worked for, she was more interactive in her approach and only resorts to authoritative strategies when there are situations where progressive employee discipline is required for an ongoing irresolvable problem. The difference of power structures does not lie within the hierarchy of the school but how the principal is seen by her peers in similar positions. In speaking with this female principal, the work of Rosener (1995) stated earlier rings true in this situation. Because the majority of the female principal’s colleagues are men, they often do not see her as a leader and discount her interactive approach to leadership and managing conflict (cited in Peters, 2002, p.15). On the contrary, when matters are discussed where she takes on a command and control opinion on handling matters of conflict; they have difficulty seeing her as a woman or brand her as a feminist or the functional equivalent of “extremist”, “militant”, “strident”, “oversensitive”, “abrasive”, “disruptive”, or “difficult to work with” (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p.1).

Bargaining and Negotiating

The feminist literature suggests that a win-win situation is about empowering others and giving them opportunities to have input so that employees feel good about themselves. They argue sharing power and information creates loyalty “by signaling to
co-workers and subordinates that they are trusted and their ideas respected” (p.191).

The term “bargaining” suggests that there is negotiation, a give and take mentality, and eventually an agreement. Based on my experience in leadership roles, I would argue that this term refers to more of a win-lose situation.

For example, a female colleague of mine who occupied a middle management position in a mobile telephone company was informed that her position would be eliminated due to restructuring of the organization, management was directed by senior administration to give employees affected by the restructuring an opportunity to negotiate another position since there were also several new positions created in different areas. There were implications in the negotiations that extended travel might be included in some of the higher level positions and that this might be difficult for anyone who has a young family. Some of the women in the organization saw this as a credible threat and a manner of positional bargaining on the part of senior management. This woman had made it known now and in the past that she was interested in moving up in the organization despite the challenges she might face with a young family. She had a high level of education and was overqualified for all of the positions discussed.

In the final analysis, two offers were put on the table that was not part of the negotiations. Both were in the loser category for this individual and neither one of them were in the higher level, higher paying category. This woman was in a powerless position to negotiate even though she had years of education and experience behind her as well as a reputation of being a hard worker and a valuable employee because her experience and history with the organization were discounted and not something management saw as a valuable bargaining tool. This bargaining tactics stance of taking
a position and using credible threats, in my opinion, shows aggressive power
behaviours. It also reflects the notion that individuals possess power over others which
is a masculine approach to power. (Febbraro & Chrisjohn as cited in Taylor & Beinstein
Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.254).

I would argue that power is a noteworthy factor in bargaining and negotiating in
the sense that if one party has more power than another, there is no motivation on their
part to consider the other party’s interests. It is in this context that gender will be
explored further into this paper to consider how it affects conflict management. Power
imbalance, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper by Hoy and Miskel (2008) can
be a significant reason for conflicts.

I agree with Bolman & Deal (2003) and Rosener (2005) that striving for a win-win
situation is an honorable goal. There seems to be different approaches in the literature
as to what a win-win situation is. One serious limitation to this approach is the large
amount of time and subsequent cost that is required to get input from employees.
Leaders need to take this into account when embarking on this type of strategy at
finding a solution to a conflict. There is also the situation where some individuals within
the organization do not want to participate and give input (Rosener, 2005, p.191).
Bolman & Deal (2003) consider “how much an opportunity there is to create a win-win
situation and whether or not you will have to work with these people again” (p.218).
Because being a successful leader is about creating positive relationships with others
within and outside the organization, it is my opinion that most feminist leaders care too
much about the individual to take such a cut-throat approach. This is a generalization,
of course, as my partner reminds me of his superior who is willing to and does take Bolman & Deal’s (2003) approach.

Identifying when it is worthwhile to use the win-win approach to positively affect the organization is a valuable skill to have as a leader, regardless of the gender of a leader. I have discovered that situations do occur when it is impossible to create a win-win situation. Warranted or not, there are always some individuals or groups who dig in their heels, which makes learning strategies to manage conflict successfully an essential tool for leaders in order to move the organization forward essential.

**Power and Conflict**

It is difficult to talk about conflict without discussing power because the two are interconnected. Power can be defined as the ability to control the behaviour of others and has the negative notion that there will be winners and losers. Bolman and Deal (2003) state that power is the most important asset in conflicts and that power promotes dependency (p.187). Individuals need things from one another and power relationships are multi-directional, not just horizontal across the top. Baron and Byrne (1991) describe conflict as a “zero-sum game” (p.252). Febbraro and Chrisjohn argue that our everyday use of the word conflict “may well reflect a masculine world view and the patriarchal culture in which it makes sense (as cited in Taylor & Beinstein, 2003, p.252). According to Taylor and Bernstein Miller (Eds.) (2000), “attention must be made to the nature of power in conflict, the relationships of power to conflict, and the place of power in conflict, in each case as power is modified by gender” (p.11).

Information is a source of power and sharing information can be seen as naïve or needing to be liked (Rosener, 2005, p.194). The more highly valued participants have a
greater value placed on their agendas and since historically, greater value has been placed on male agendas, the male gender typically has swayed the outcome of conflicts in their favour.

A feminist analysis by Burton and Dukes (1990) questions whether or not conflict can be resolved with power in the first place or whether power really only helps to manage it. Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.) (2000) suggest that there will always be conflict “among unequals—inevitable as long as humans strive for autonomy—[and it] cannot be resolved in a hierarchy” (p.14).

An alternate feminist notion of power conceptualized by Gilliigan (1982), promotes the development of each individual in terms of “nurture, growth and empowerment of others within the context of interpersonal relationships and the maintenance of harmony with nature” (Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.252). In this notion, called the Female System by Schael (1985), the “power of care” comes from the maintenance of relationships, increases when it is given away and is limitless (cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.253). In addition, Miller (1976) calls for women to challenge the negative notion of conflict which in turn will “challenge the status quo and women’s position in patriarchal society” (cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.253). Unfortunately, power today is mostly about aggression instead of growth because we are still living with a system of dominance relations that will only be changed if the political context in which words and concepts derive meaning changes instead of just words (Taylor & Beinstein Miller, 2000, p.253).
History of Women as Interactive Leaders

Historically, society has had significant expectations of men and women. In the past, the roles that women have had as wives, mothers, community volunteers, teachers, and nurses has meant that they were “supposed to be cooperative, supportive, understanding, gentle, and to provide service to others” (Rosener, 2005, p.197). Women were expected to gain self-esteem and satisfaction from these roles. Men, on the other hand, “had to appear to be competitive, strong, tough, decisive, and in control” (p.197). As more women entered the workforce, they assumed similar roles to their home lives which might explain why women are not seen as assuming the more powerful positions in the business world.

There are many generalizations in the literature about the style in which men and women lead an organization. Interactive leadership has been proven to be effective for both men and women in leading an organization and this style of leadership has been an asset to conflict resolution (Rosener, 2005, p.200). Women use this style of leadership effectively in an organization even though some prefer the traditional corporate model (Rosener, 2005, p.200). The danger with women being linked with this style of leadership is that there may be resistance it if they see this style of leadership as “feminine”, since women are often seen as the “quintessential accommodators, mediators, adapters, and soothers” (Miller, 1976 as cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.253).
Women in Today’s Workplace: The Glass Ceiling

It is interesting to note that many women who were interviewed by Rosener (2005) stated that they were moved into leadership not because of qualifications and work experience but when the company was in crisis and change was rampant (p.200). *Time* magazine, in a special issue on women states that “men are expected to emphasize an “all or nothing” approach whereas women as expected to be open, emphasizing a problem-solving approach (Rudolph, 1990 as cited in Ruble, Schneer (2002), both cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.155). According to Dr. Dawn Wallin, this is a common occurrence in “communities made poor” (also known as inner city schools) where almost all leaders are women (personal communication, 2007). Women struggle to get into the same leadership positions as men, thus, the phrases: “glass ceiling”, the phenomenon of vertical occupational segregation; and “glass walls”, a horizontal occupational segregation experienced by women, have been coined to describe the lack of movement both upward and out of stereotypical occupations held by women (Breaking through, 2004).

Gender and Conflict Management

Ruble and Schneer (2002) suggest that gender differences may be attributed to social processes where girls are socialized to “value relationships and maintain harmony while boys are socialized to value status and seek victory. This is thought to translate into women taking a cooperative stance in conflict situations, whereas men are more competitive” (Ruble & Schneer, 2002, cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.155). Research by Rahim (1983a) suggests although there were no differences between men and women and competition, women used collaboration and
compromising tactics more often to manage conflict (cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.157).

The cultural hierarchy of the business world “is strongly linked to patriarchy”, where feminine values are not seen as equal to masculine values (Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.13). Stephens (2002) states that radical feminists point out that the centrality of hierarchy denies “the development of women, poor people, and racial and ethnic minorities” (cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p. 223). Interesting to note that the literature reveals that in addition to women, race and class within hierarchies, males only keep their higher rank if they exhibit male characteristics. Stephens (2002) asks, “How do gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals fit into a gender scheme? We could say that they are advantaged or disadvantaged to the degree they have masculine or feminine traits” (cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p. 222), a topic which needs further exploration.

Of equal interest to the subject of leadership styles is that research shows that women treat subordinates of their own sex with discrimination (Chodorow, 1978 as cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.137). One possible reason for this might be that women have a stronger identification with a female leader. Another explanation by Ott (1985) describes the situation in terms of the Cinderella story where Cinderella is the nurse and the prince is a male nurse. In this context, “a female manager would judge behavior of the prince more positively and correct him in a friendlier way than she would Cinderella, who has to know her place” (Ott, 1985, as cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.137). Since a lesser number of women currently occupy leadership positions, another explanation might be that there are a perceived limited number of positions available for women in leadership which sets up a competitive environment (personal communication, 2008)

Sex vs. Gender in the Context of Conflict

According to Rhode (1990) and Unger (1989), sex and gender is not the same thing:

“Sex refers to the biologically based distinctions between [a] woman and [a] man (chromosomal and hormonal) [while] gender refers to the cultural, social, and power implications of this biological differentiation (i.e. the beliefs about, expectations, interpretations, and experiences of women and men in our society” (as cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.168).

I prefer to use the term “gender” to describe the differences that occur in understanding conflict. Gender differences are related to the social system not the
individual whereas sex differences in behaviour refer to the innate nature of men and women (Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.168).

Social issues cannot be studied without taking into account the impact of gender. Taylor and Bernstein Miller (Eds.) (2000) argue that gender “pervades all aspects and levels of conflict”, and therefore, we must recognize that there are expectations of behaviour in conflict and rights and responsibilities for conflict negotiations (p.4). Gender influences the way in which we process information about our world because it organizes social life, social structures, and social beliefs, and thus, it effects our communication in and about conflict (Money & Ehrhardt, 1972, cited in Taylor & Bernstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.4).

One area in which gender can be applied is language (Peters, 2002, p.9) where we can identify various forms of gender specific nuances or phrasing. For example, the military uses masculine-centred sexual imagery as part of their spoken culture using expressions such as “getting more bang for the buck”, “losing your stuff by disarming”, giving talks about “erector launches”, patting the missile, and deep penetration. Even the detonation of a nuclear bomb was coined as “the birth of a baby boy” (Taylor & Bernstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.7). I found it remarkable that even though I had heard these phrases used many times, it never even occurred to me that these phrases contained gender specific inferences until I researched this topic. This brings to my awareness just how ingrained some of these gender-specific behaviours in our culture are and how this makes it so difficult to bring about changes not only in our way of thinking but in the words we use on a daily basis. Despite the above, I think Peters (2002) makes a good observation when she points out that “differences in speech
patterns may be attributable also to status, age, ethnicity, geographic location, and education” and that there could be “multiple interpretations of femininity and masculinity and behaviours that vary across time and context (p.9). Nevertheless, there is some outstanding gender loaded language in various social contexts that should not be overlooked when considering communication styles in the workplace.

Understanding conflict means that we have to understand the context in which conflict occurs. Hoy and Miskel (2008) state that conflict is caused by either trying to satisfy one’s own concerns or trying to satisfy other’s concerns (p.246). Taylor and Bernstein Miller (Eds.) (2000) suggest that in patriarchal societies such as ours, gender and power are important characteristics of contexts in which status relations and values are negotiated (p. 2). We also need to understand how gender shapes conflict issues and conflict management processes.

Observations

Keashly argues that there are more similarities than differences among conflict management styles between men and women (cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.174). Women’s behavior may differ from men’s in how they respond to conflict. For example, women leaders are more inclined to show their anger outwardly whereas men deny its existence. (p.174). The literature reveals differing conflict management strategies between position levels but where the position levels are the same, conflict management styles do not differ (Chusmir and Mills (1989) as cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.179). Women leaders tend to use fewer conflict management styles than men and have lower confidence in these abilities. This can be attributed to the power imbalance that often exists in organizational conflict where
women tend to be in the lower positions. Women focus on connection more than on the status of an individual. If women have overall less experience collectively at the higher levels, Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.) (2000) conclude that there are gender linked differences in experiences of conflict (p.186).

Does gender define power relations? Kreisberg (1982) argues that if men were to give up or share the power they have over women, they would gain the ability to make more independent choices and have more freedom (p.224). It is my opinion that women leaders bring a different dimension to an organization and if these differences were accepted and even embraced, the success of these organizations would continue to flourish. Kellerman and Rhode (2007) believe the barriers to women in leadership impose organizational costs (Kellerman and Rhode, 2007, p.16). Market shares and return on investments indicate that a positive correlation between the representation of women in leadership positions and business performance although this does not necessarily imply causation. Regardless, I agree with Kellerman and Rhode (2007) that there are strong reasons to believe that diversity in leadership has tangible payoffs (Kellerman and Rhode, 2007, p.16).

The findings are inconsistent in many areas of this topic. However, the bottom line is that women in leadership need to see conflict as necessary and inevitable in order to initiate change and growth and they need to be confident in their approach regardless of how it is seen by men and women. I agree with Miller (1976) that women need to challenge the status quo in a patriarchal society (as cited in Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.253). Not just words need changing but the political context in which words and concepts derive meaning need to be considered.
Recommendations

So what can be done to change and improve women’s success in leadership positions in the educational system where skills such as conflict management strategies are essential? I will expand upon some of the recommendations made in the report, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management* developed by the International Labour Office in 2004.

Firstly, there needs to be a high level of commitment from senior administration to change the existing culture because without tapping into this power source change will be difficult to enact and sustain. Secondly, programs should be put in place to disprove myths about women in the workplace and education around what the current trends are for women in the workplace at all levels of the organization from the school board to the school secretary and custodian. This program should be aimed at managers and leaders in the organization and should include a component around respecting and recognizing the advantages of different leadership styles.

Thirdly, professional development for women in leadership training and access to high level mentorship is required to build confidence and leadership skills. Fourthly, there needs to be policies in place to hold the organization accountable for equal employment opportunities. Fifthly, women need to come together and support one another especially in a mentoring capacity. Lastly, women need to demand pay equality (Kellerman & Rhode (Eds.), 2007, p.25).
Conclusion

Organizations do not welcome open expression related to conflict. Many individuals, both men and women, prefer to avoid conflict. There are unwritten norms of behavior and masked conflicts in organizations. For the most part, my experience has been that both men and women avoid conflict or deny its existence because to deal with it is difficult.

In a conversation with two female administrators, they both indicated and agreed that women tend to avoid dealing with conflict. This makes dealing with conflict difficult and frustrating for any leader because one can think that a situation is resolved and then find out through other sources that it is still a problem. The whole organization suffers when conflict is not openly and constructively dealt with. In schools, it can filter down to the students and negatively affect them. The outcomes in managing conflict are unpredictable and present the possibility that you, as a leader, may become the target of the party’s hostility. If it is not managed effectively, there can be adversity for years to come for the organization and its people.

Educational leaders need to recognize where conflicts are initiating, understand that everyone’s perception of the same conflict is different, appreciate the role gender plays in conflict, and know what the values and beliefs are of the employees you manage. I agree with Chataway and Kolb (2002) who state that one’s place in the organizational hierarchy is important since position seems to influence the types of disputes experienced, the resources available, and the resources accessed” (Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.263).
The credibility of women is not enhanced by proven competence and organizational loyalty to the same extent as men. Based on my experience, this is true in educational administration. Open and honest public disagreement by women is very often discounted (Taylor & Beinstein Miller (Eds.), 2000, p.263). In my research for a graduate course in Qualitative Research, I recently asked four women in educational leadership about whether or not they thought advanced higher education was necessary to move ahead in an organization. Their answer was that women in leadership seemed to need to prove themselves where men did not and that having advanced training or education was one possible way of proving that they could handle the job. At the very least, women seemed to need to work harder to be accepted, at least in the beginning of their tenure as leaders. One administrator stated that once she had got a job in administration, it took another four years before she finally felt accepted as an equal both by men and women. The glass ceiling still does exist.

Bolman & Deal’s (2003) political framework outlines strategies around managing conflict. It is functional and objective, however, the feminist perspective on managing conflict leans to more of a radical structural approach. Conflict does exist for many reasons and in various contexts depending on how it is defined and it exists just as much in schools as it does in other organizations. Conflict management affects us all, which gives it value and because of how gender impacts it within this context, changes to the system need to be made.

Lastly, I believe that women are suited just as well as men to managing conflict. Women tend to be more selfless whether it is because they have inherent maternal instincts or whether they have been socialized to be this way. Women can and do wield
power like any man but it is my experience in both the business world and in the world of education that they would prefer to use this power to empower those around them, build capacity in a team of players, and create successful organizations.
References


