

# Women in Strategic Leadership and Management: Identifying Concerns and Implementing Strategic Gender-Specific Leadership Development

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## INTRODUCTION

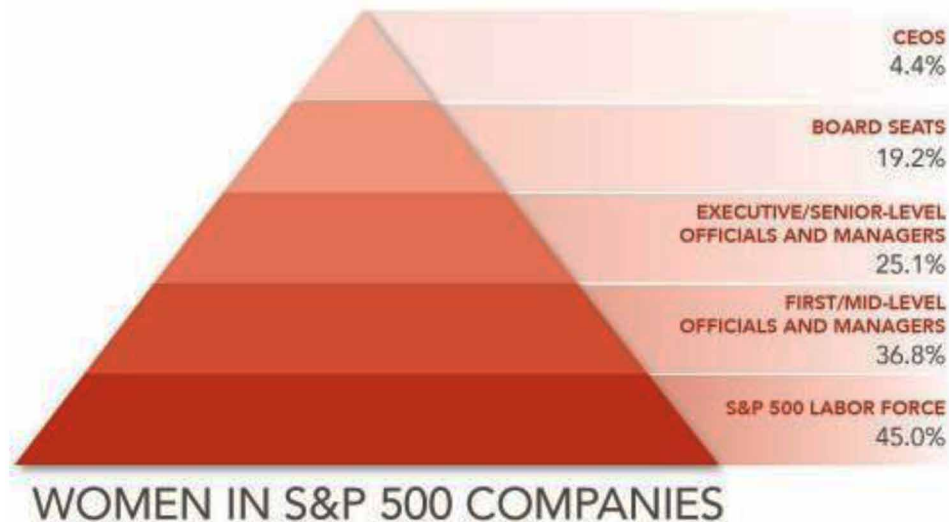
After more than a century of legislative advancement, progress for women in the workplace is still slow moving. Women comprise nearly 51% of the United States population, yet the percentage of women who occupy top leadership and managerial positions is disparate. On average, women still make 78 cents to every dollar earned by men (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2013) and this trend holds true for women in full-time management and leadership positions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). A study conducted by Morrison (1999) showed that nearly 200 women in progressive leadership and managerial positions said that they experienced prejudice, lonely and hostile environments, and a lack of support that inhibited their advancement through leadership ranks. As women nearly equal and in some cases exceed the number of men in the workforce, one must question the inequity that exists in managerial and leadership positions.

In 1990, *Fortune* magazine did a survey and found that only 19 women occupy top executive positions out of a total of nearly 4,000 positions. Nearly 25 years later that number has increased to a mere 22 women occupying CEO positions at S&P 500 companies, which accounts for only 4.4% of all CEOs (Catalyst, 2015). In the United States, women occupy less than 20% of the total congressional seats and is currently, ranked 98<sup>th</sup> in the world for the number of women involved in the country's national legislature (Hill, 2014). This disparity is concerning given that women in politics tend to be stronger advocates for civil rights, education, health, and labor. Additionally, when nations elect women rather than men as key national leaders, economies experience significant growth in GDP (Hill, 2014). In academia, women are represented equally if not more than men in certain studies during graduate and postdoctoral training. However, fewer women fulfill academic careers (34% of full time faculty, 26% of tenured faculty, and 19% of full professors at doctoral-granting universities) and even less fulfill leadership positions (13.5% of presidents and 23.5% of provosts at 200 institutions) (Bilen-Green, Froelich, & Jacobson, 2008; Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; and Schneider, Carden, Francisco, & Jones, 2011). Clearly, formidable obstacles resulting in a "glass ceiling" exist for women that prevent access and opportunities to executive leadership and managerial positions.

The marginalization of women in the workforce results in a situation where few women are able to rise into top executive positions is shown in Figure 1. Although this figure is representative of women leaders in corporate entities, it is comparable to nearly all organizations especially those with a hierarchical structure such as military, politics, and academia. In order to understand this phenomenon and strive for equal representation in these leadership positions, issues barring women from top leadership and managerial positions need to be addressed.

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Figure 1. The percentage of women in S&P 500 companies decreases with increasing managerial and leadership position  
(Adapted from Catalyst, 2015)



This chapter delves into the contemporary and historic literature to address the specific needs of women who are trying to obtain, maintain, and ascend leadership positions. This chapter will investigate the inherent gender differences between leadership styles and how that affects leadership success within the context of the organization. This chapter will also address societal pressures that decrease women's opportunities for leadership and managerial success. And finally, this chapter will review suggested gender-sensitive leadership development programs as a way of increasing women and closing the gender-gap in strategic leadership and management positions.

## Leadership Styles

Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have studied theories on how leaders perform and have concluded five differing leadership styles. These five leadership styles are summarized in Eagly and Johnson (1990) and Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen's (2003) comprehensive reviews on gender-specific differences in these five key leadership styles. The first two leadership styles are *task-oriented* and *interpersonally oriented* and are classical theories on leadership styles (Bales, 1950). Leaders who are *task-oriented* or labeled "initiates structure" exhibit qualities that focus on following rules and procedures, maintaining high standards of performance, and clearly separating the role of leader and subordinate. A narrower dimension of this leadership style is an *autocratic* or *directive* approach to leadership in which leaders predominately make decisions on their own and discourage subordinates from participating in the decision-making process. On the other hand, leaders who are *interpersonally oriented* or labeled "considerate" exhibit behaviors such as explaining procedures when they are not clear, working with and supporting subordinates whenever possible, and maintaining an overall collaborative and cooperative mentality. A narrower dimension of this leadership style is a *democratic* or *participatory* approach to leadership, which emphasizes working with subordinates in a cooperative way and making decisions together.

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