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WOMEN, BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

Gender and Organisations

Contents

Introduction

It is over half a century since the first sex discrimination laws were enacted. No doubt the women who fought during the 1960s and 1970s, for equality of pay and opportunity, would have imagined a fairer world than the one we find ourselves in today.

There are certainly some areas where improvements have been made. More women make it to middle management levels, and many formal barriers preventing women from reaching the top levels in organizations have been removed. Yet as Chapter 10 (Burkinshaw and White) demonstrates, for those women who do make it to the highest levels within their occupations, fitting in with male-dominated cultures can be challenging. According to Chapter 12 (Antoniou and Aggelou) social and gender stereotypes still dictate the way female managers ought to behave and the ones who defy them often face multiple consequences. And as Gatrell and Peyton (Chapter 18) observe some mechanisms barring women from career advancement have remained firmly in place until the present decade.

This book comprises a collection of chapters exploring the situation of women in business and leadership positions in organizations today. It is presented in three parts. The chapters in the first section centre specifically on *women and leadership*. These chapters examine a range of situations, from family business (Discua Cruz, Hamilton and Jack) through to educational and other settings (Antoniou and Apergi). Research in these chapters suggests that women in leadership roles, within all arenas, come up against challenges specific to their gender. For example, women who take over the leadership of their family businesses often have to learn on the job – as family members they may have been less visible than male heirs, and thus less likely to have been 'prepared' for the responsibilities of heading up the family enterprise.

The second section of the book explores how gender impacts on women's experience of undertaking leadership and management roles in organizations, and of balancing relationships between work and family. Bevan's chapter (15) shows how women in heterosexual relationships may feel obliged to conceal from male partners the extent of their ambition, in order to reduce conflict at home. And Perrewé, Daniels, Hackney and Maher (Chapter 16) explore the challenges of managing pregnancy and paid work.

The final section focuses on *constraints*: the structural and cultural impediments affecting women's career advancement, and the manner in which these are dealt with in relation both to practice and policy. We see, for example, in the chapter by Bisom-Rapp and Sargeant (25), how women may be disadvantaged at every life stage, such constraints operating cumulatively to reduce career opportunities.

As a whole, this collection suggests that we have a way to go before gender ceases to impact on women's careers in business and management. The chapters in this book highlight specifically disadvantages relating to gender. We remain aware that gender represents only part of the story, with issues of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and health impacting on career advancement. What the chapters show is the extent of

change – in relation to culture, policy and attitude – that is needed if women in management and business are to achieve parity with their male counterparts.

The views within each chapter are not necessarily those of the Editors – but the general approach of the book – that change needs to happen – is one we all share.

We cannot and should not wait for another fifty years.

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7. Goddess Athena as leader and mentor in Homeric epics

Christos-Thomas Kechagias and Alexander-Stamatios Antoniou

<epigraph>Athena: Telemachus, where your native wit fails, heaven will inspire you. It is not for nothing that the gods have watched your progress ever since your birth.

(Hom. *Od*. 1.296)</epigraph>

<epigraph>Athena: "Greek god. Coach. Teacher. Guide. Pathfinder. Leader. Pilot. Advisor. Supporter. Counselor. Director. Sponsor. Conductor. Caretaker. Friend."

(Hansman, 2002, p. 9)</epigraph>

<a>GODDESS ATHENA: A FEMALE MENTOR ARCHETYPE

This chapter aims to study one of the most famous mythological origins of women leadership development by exploring the role of the goddess Athena in the Homeric poems, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. We use Homeric poems as a foundation of a new insight into the origins of women mentoring and leadership in one of the most ancient texts of human history. From the perspective of literature and mythology, leadership development practice seems to have almost three thousand years' history starting from the mythological action of the goddess Athena in the Homeric world. By underlining the significance of identifying mentoring and leadership skills that are innate to human societies and specific to their training development process, we suggest that Socrates's value of "know thyself" is more similar to the early leadership role of Athena in the ancient classical world. It seems that Athena acts as a mentor of heroes to guide them or to inspire them to behave as leaders.

The term "mentor" portrays the image of a supportive person providing encouragement or emotional and mental help to a mentee, by assisting him/her for a difficult period of time or by sustaining him/her during personal or professional development. The mentor as a personal coach, teacher, advisor, and sponsor is able to build confidence and self-esteem, and cultivate interpersonal dynamics through emotional bonds or mutual discovery of common interests on an informal basis (Kram & Isabella, 1985). In formal mentoring schemes aimed at career development, there is a need for organized professional structures such as companies or organizations that can improve skills and guide the mentee's career development. In an attempt to move away from mainly male examples of mentoring, one may ask is there a key example of a female mentor archetype guiding a famous protagonist? In our modern myths and popular fiction movies there are of course examples such as Glinda (*Wizard of Oz*), Galadriel (*Lord of the Rings*), General Leia Organa (*The Force Awakens*) and so on.

In Western education, a well-known idea of mentoring is the concept of the goddess Athena when she takes on the form of Mentor. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, the main hero of the poem, on leaving the battlefield of Troy asks Athena "to be Mentor," in other words to act as a friend to him, to be the wise Mentor, and to guide his son Telemachus as a life coach. Thus, the term "mentor" was applied to people who benefit our lives, and the themes encompassing mentors as helpful teachers were brought into consciousness (see Hansman, 2002). The concept and the image of the mentor have continued through time with many definitions, shapes, and professional models. Athena, the goddess of wisdom and elegance (Guo, 2005),

representation of the human mind's functions like control, coordination of parts, rational capability of decision making, etc. If modern scholars propose self-awareness as the foundation of emotional intelligence and good leadership (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017) we suggest that the Socratic value and operating principle of the Delphic oracle "know thyself," as an effective and thoughtful way of life, is more similar to the early leadership role of Athena in the ancient classical world.

The self-belief that marks out the most effective women leaders seems to flow from the understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the scope and the realistic and actual knowledge of the "battlefield." For example, women's leadership is an ongoing learning experience, and just like life itself can lead to efficient handling of resources and information in terms of knowledge management. Athena acts as a helper of heroes by using her power on behalf of their own good to persuade them, inspire or encourage them to behave as leaders. But at the same time she victimizes their enemies, individuals or groups, by turning against them (i.e., the Trojans). She causes suffering for her mentees' opponents without any ethical or moral barriers. This characteristic does not match the contemporary profile of a mentor who must have a set of ethical principles when teaching his/her own mentees to be leaders. If someone uses aesthetic philosophy and/or arts-based methods 'as processes for intervention and change' (Hansen & Bathurst, 2011, p. 258) in women leadership development that person may counteract the overreliance on rational models of decision making.

In this chapter we examined one of the mythological roots of women leadership development through the exploration of the role of the goddess Athena in the famous Homeric poems, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. By navigating through cases of Athena's appearances and metamorphoses we found aspects of the origins of women mentoring and leadership in one of the most ancient texts of human history. Literature and mythology on leadership development practice seems to have almost three thousand years' history starting from the Homeric world and the goddess Athena.

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