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TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING IN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

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As the number of women in all job categories has increased, there has been corresponding interest in cultivating women's leadership talent. Feminist scholars have suggested that to develop as leaders, women must recognize, question, and replace old mindsets and practices based on limiting, internalized, and gendered messages. This CGO Working Paper uses and extends ideas from the transformational learning literature to explore how this type of change is achieved among women in formal leadership training.

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A. TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING AND INTERNALIZED GENDER

Transformational learning is a process that engages the learner intellectually and emotionally. Mezirow (2000) describes it as a "movement through time of *reformulating* reified structures of meaning by *reconstructing [a] dominant narrative*" (p. 19, emphases added). This type of learning is contrasted with informational learning, which only engages the learner intellectually, leaving intact habitual patterns of perceiving, thinking, and acting.

For women, an important dimension of the "dominant narrative" consists of internalized, gendered assumptions and thoughts that shape behavior. Feminist scholars view gender as a cultural, rather than a biological, construct that a society uses to order its activities and divide labor among the sexes. From birth, members are taught what it means to be male or female by being inculcated into the mindsets, values, and roles considered appropriate for their sex (Dewey, 2007; Spender, 1982). Developing an identity as a competent individual in a particular culture requires internalizing these social expectations.

Although organizations are not the exclusive domain of men, they are organized in accordance with masculine principles. Women's needs are either ignored or "accommodated" through initiatives that are based on unexamined gendered assumptions. To be taken seriously, many women often feel that they have little choice but to adopt masculine behaviors and mindsets. However, when they exhibit masculine values and traits, women are seen as unfeminine; when they express feminine traits, their contributions are devalued or ignored. Because gender is internalized and taken for granted, many women see their difficulties as personal failings and not as a double-bind arising from the fact that their activities in organizations are interpreted in the context of cultural assumptions regarding their capabilities and their "proper" place in society (Catalyst, 2007). While some women fail to recognize the role of external constraints on their leadership difficulties, those who are aware of the gendered nature of organizational structure and practice sometimes feel unable to effectively counter deeply entrenched tradition, common assumption, and practice (Fletcher, 1999a).

As long as organizational culture and practice are exclusively based on masculine assumptions and worldview, the definition of what constitutes effectiveness will remain unduly narrow, preventing organizations from fully reaping the rewards of women's skills and women from realizing their full potential (Fletcher, 1999b). To counter this loss in capability, the masculine assumptions of the organization must first be surfaced and examined so that feminine traits can be legitimately incorporated into the work culture and practices (Kolb, Fletcher, Meyerson, Merrill-Sands, & Ely, 1998). Achieving complementarity between masculine and feminine aspects is a challenge that both organizations and individuals need to address. The current CGO Working Paper is concerned with the process that individual women undergo to develop more fully as leaders. Specifically, it is concerned with how leadership development training can loosen the grip of the internalized gender narrative and generate new mindsets and alternative practices among women leaders.
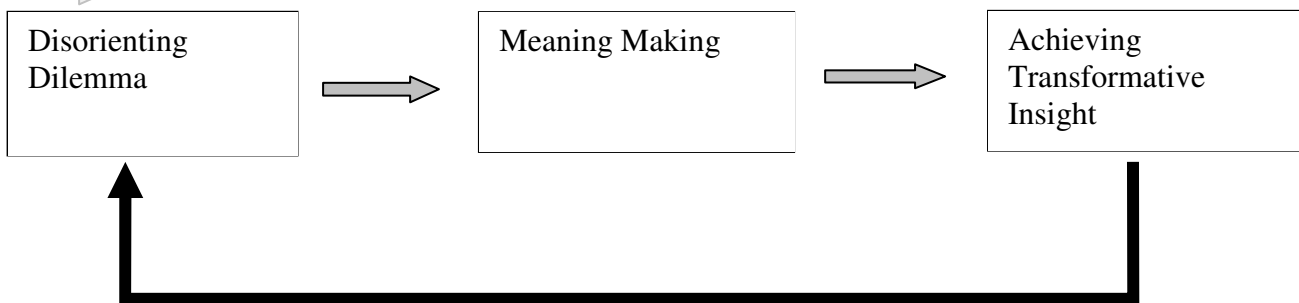
B. STAGES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING

Transformational learning theorists are concerned with a learning process resulting in a fundamental shift in assumptions, thoughts, and perceptions. In the context of women leaders, this shift involves recognizing and challenging limiting gender assumptions. Transformational learning unfolds in successive stages: encountering a disorienting dilemma, meaning making, and achieving transformational insight (Mezirow, 1991). A *disorienting dilemma* is a situation in which an individual's habitual patterns of thinking are disrupted by a disconfirming event, an event that causes one to look anew at one's *modus operands*. Here, a person pauses her automatic response, discerning without full understanding that a connection exists between her habitual thought processes, motivations, and actions on the one hand and repetitive, problematic outcomes on the other. This awareness creates disorientation because, while a new direction is not easily apparent, going back to old ways is not tolerable either.

Disorientation creates tension and puts the second stage of transformational learning, *meaning making*, into play. Meaning making involves a search for new input from a wide variety of sources including theory, conversations with others, and observation. During this stage, the learner draws on multiple sources to gain greater understanding and direction for future action.

At some point in the meaning making process, a *transformative insight* arises. This is the moment when a coherent idea emerges from interpreting the inputs that are collected during meaning making. The transformative insight resolves the tension and allows the learner to move from disorientation to clarity and purposefulness. At this point in the transformational learning process, the learner understands the nature of her habitual patterns, incorporates new concepts into her thought process, and adds new tools to her behavioral repertoire. A transformational insight is irreversible in that what has been learned cannot be unlearned (Clark, 1993). Yet insights are not static; they are partial and evolving with continual revision of current understandings through reflection on the effectiveness of new behaviors. Therefore, Figure 1 depicts these three stages of transformational learning as cyclical and evolving.

Figure 1. **The Process of Leadership Transformation.**

⇐ **Stages and Mechanisms of Transformational Learning** ⇒

C. RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODS

The transformational learning lens proved to be useful in analyzing and interpreting data from the Women' Leadership Series (WLS). The WLS is a leadership development training program of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). The CGIAR is a strategic alliance that seeks to use scientific knowledge to pursue the goal of achieving sustainable food security in developing countries. The alliance is composed of private foundations that support fifteen scientific research centers and international and regional organizations. The CGIAR launched the WLS in 1995 to help women overcome some of the everyday leadership and management challenges they faced, as well as to provide them with an opportunity for building a strong network within the CGIAR.
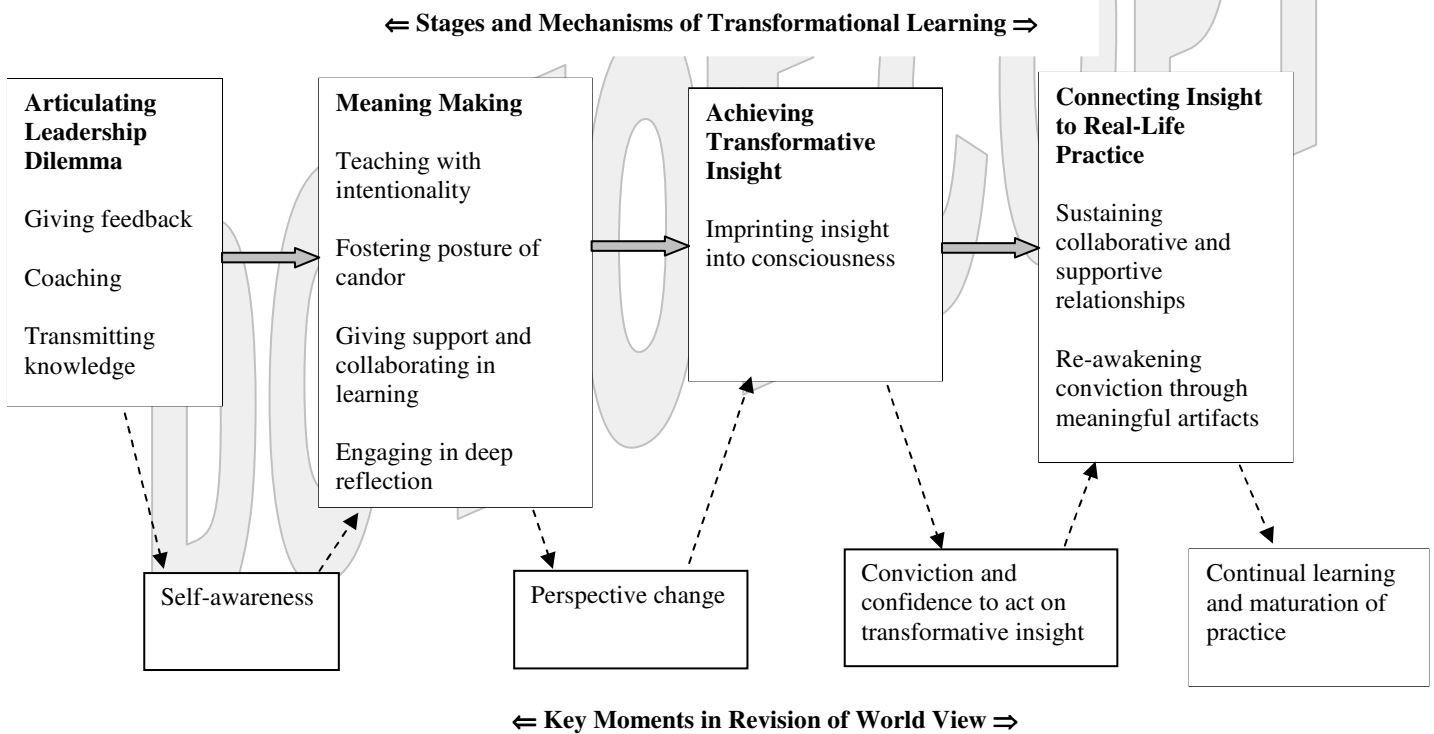
The instructors who designed and delivered the two WLS courses—Women's Leadership and Negotiation Skills for Women—concurred that women often do not realize what they are capable of accomplishing because they have grown up in a patriarchal society that can have an eroding effect on their confidence. Thus, while WLS courses are similar in content to leadership development training courses in the market, all the WLS courses were designed with an understanding of the fact that women's understanding of themselves and the world around them is based in such a societal context.

At the time of this study, more than 300 CGIAR women had participated in the WLS courses. Twenty-four alumnae (or eight percent of the total WLS alumnae) were interviewed for this study. Because alumnae are located all around the world, the vast majority of interviews were conducted by telephone. The phone interviews averaged two hours each, although they ranged from one hour to three and a half hours. Interviews elicited *leadership stories* that explored the leadership experiences of alumnae before and after the WLS. This study also examined the *critical learning* that occurred during the WLS, how it occurred, and whether insights from the course impacted future behavior. This paper uses the transformational learning lens as an orienting framework to develop an interpretive analysis of participants' accounts of critical learning moments during the WLS.

Three themes emerged from the data analysis: stages of transformational learning, all-women gender composition, and transformative teaching and learning practices. With regard to the first theme, while the WLS alumnae described going through the stages identified in extant literature, they also underwent a fourth stage of *connecting insight to real-life practice*. Additionally, there were what I call *transition moments*, states of consciousness that mark a turning point in a learner's revision of pre-existing assumptions. Four transition points were identified: *self-awareness*, *perspective change*, *conviction and confidence to act on transformational insight,* and *continual reflection on practice*. The second and third themes address the conditions necessary for transformational learning among women in the context of formal leadership training. By incorporating these three themes, Figure 2 revises and enriches the model of transformational learning that oriented data analysis and interpretation.

Figure 2. **The Teaching/Learning Processes in Leadership Transformation.**

⇐ Stages and Mechanisms of Transformational Learning ⇒

Articulating Leadership Dilemma	**Meaning Making**	**Achieving Transformative Insight**	**Connecting Insight to Real-Life Practice**
Giving feedback Coaching Transmitting knowledge	Teaching with intentionality Fostering posture of candor Giving support and collaborating in learning Engaging in deep reflection	Imprinting insight into consciousness	Sustaining collaborative and supportive relationships Re-awakening conviction through meaningful artifacts

Self-awareness	Perspective change	Conviction and confidence to act on transformative insight	Continual learning and maturation of practice

⇐ Key Moments in Revision of World View ⇒

The central claim of this CGO Working Paper is that constructing a learning environment that affirms women's experience is necessary for transformational learning among women trainees (For a discussion of pedagogical issues in relation to women learners, see Belenky, Clinchy,

Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). This environment was created through an all-women training event and by means of teaching and learning practices that allowed for the exploration of the full range of influences on women's leadership experiences and the utilization of available resources to address those leadership challenges. Table 1 identifies and defines the teaching and learning practices that were employed in the WLS as well as those that characterized the behavioral norms of an all-female learning environment. The remainder of this Working Paper will elaborate these three themes using qualitative data from the WLS.

Table 1. **Practices of Transformational Learning Among Women Learners.**

Practice	Definition
Receiving and Giving Feedback	Giving and/or receiving information from others regarding their perceptions about the nature and impact of one's behavior on oneself, others, and on desired outcomes
Receiving and Giving Coaching	Supporting and/or being supported in one's personal development in ongoing relationships in which there is a sharing of information, knowledge, experience, and advice
Transmitting Knowledge	Sharing information in a variety of forms—models, concepts, tools, assessments—with the intention of engaging learners with ideas about a topic within a disciplinary community
Teaching with Intentionality	Providing broad teaching goals with respect to a subject matter and types of learners that instructors use to guide the design and delivery of a course
Articulating a Leadership Dilemma	A learner's description of a covert assumption and thought process that routinely shapes her behavior and maintains a recurrent leadership challenge
Giving Support	Providing emotional support through empathy, acceptance, and affirmation of others' feelings and experiences to encourage persistence in working through difficult issues
Participating in Collaborative Learning	Creative intellectual exchange resulting in new conceptions of a problem
Deep Reflection	Internal process of critical thinking that involves examining habitual patterns of thinking and acting
Imprinting and Re-awakening Insight into Consciousness	Highlighting the key learning gained from a training activity and subsequently reinforcing this learning through storytelling, self-talk, and meaningful artifacts
Sustaining Relationships	Utilizing relationships established in the training setting in ongoing exchange of information, ideas, and advice regarding one's handling of leadership dilemmas encountered once one returns to work
Re-awakening Conviction Through Meaningful Artifacts	Overcoming habitual patterns of thinking and acting once one returns to the work setting by using artifacts that remind one of critical insights achieved in training and one's conviction to change

A. ALL-WOMEN TRAINING EVENT

Most of the WLS participants noted that the WLS setting was different from any in which they previously participated. Bontu articulated such a view, stating, "I remember the unbelievable feeling of spending a week in a room with only women, the first time in my life. And it was quite overwhelming for me… The level of energy, the level of camaraderie—I remember being so relaxed in my learning." In her comment, Bontu implied several dimensions of training in an all-women setting that others explained contributed to their feeling that the WLS was a unique learning environment.

First, among women, the norms of interaction were different from those that were prevalent in settings that included men. Participants explained that when men were present, the environment was more competitive. Individuals were expected to behave with skepticism, push others to get the work done under stressful conditions, demonstrate what one knows, and act tough. In contrast, participants said that in the WLS, individuals showed care for the others' well-being, behaved supportively, and were approachable. Several interviewees said that while they previously tended to shut down when men were present, the behaviors they experienced in the WLS helped them to relax, open up and share their experiences honestly, and become energized.

Second, with the encouragement of instructors, participants spontaneously shared their experiences, thereby surfacing the full range of experiences that have shaped women (gender, family upbringing, personality, etc.). The outcome of this sharing was that many women, often for the first time, recognized that their issues and challenges were widely shared by other women. This recognition was extremely significant because in mixed gender situations, the coupling of masculine behavioral patterns with leadership in participants' understanding of leadership effectiveness often remains unchallenged. The result is that participants lack the conceptual means and the language for recognizing the relevance and importance of women's concerns and experiences to leadership concerns. For instance, one woman said that she had once faced a very difficult issue of sexual harassment at work. When she finally reported it, she was made to feel that she was making too much of nothing and was being "hysterical". In other cases, participants reported that their experiences were not denied but were simply unaffirmed, such as when they shared experiences that male participants could not relate to and therefore did not acknowledge.

Third, the full expression of women's experiences allowed for the surfacing, exploration, and resolution of critical aspects of this experience. Some described gaining greater gender awareness. One woman said, "We all came up with stories and all realized that we all were suffering here, one more than the others, but there was none of us who hadn't suffered because of gender issues." Others indicated that they learned about how other women dealt with a variety of challenges in their lives, and this broadened their understanding of their possibilities. Many women said that they greatly benefited from the ongoing informal exchanges and coaching by other participants. Finally, some said that they not only felt affirmed in their experiences, but also saw possibilities for themselves that they had not seen before. One woman described this by stating,

> The last day was filled with emotion. People expressed their minds about what they feel about women, what they think women are, what women can achieve, notwithstanding our

organizations and the society, and how we can cross the hurdles. From that moment, I saw that, for women, there are possibilities that we could aspire higher and we can also make our dreams come true… We need to go all the way out to achieve our dreams and our aims.

In sum, the WLS alumnae felt that learning in an all-woman environment was critical to the learning they had achieved. One woman succinctly articulated this sentiment, stating, "I think it was helpful. It was a very open exchange and sharing of feelings and stories. Before the course, I myself was the one questioning, 'Why a women's course? Men also need this type of training.' But after the course, I said, 'Yes, it was right.' Because if we would have had men, we women probably wouldn't have been so open."

B. ARTICULATING A LEADERSHIP DILEMMA

Articulating a leadership dilemma involves gaining clarity on a salient leadership challenge by recognizing the unconscious fears and assumptions shaping one's thinking and action. It also involves making the link between these habitual processes and one's leadership challenges. This process leads to greater self-awareness in that an individual sees an aspect of her behavior that was previously either not recognized or simply seen as normal. While the articulation of a leadership dilemma is disorienting, it is also empowering because seeing where the problem lies motivates a learner to undertake change.

As shown in Figure 2, the articulation of a leadership dilemma is facilitated by a number of practices such as feedback from peers, one-on-one coaching with instructors, and engaging with learning materials including cases, readings, and self-assessments. The following story demonstrates how feedback from peers and from a 360° instrument was pivotal to the articulation of Rosaria's leadership dilemma.

During the leadership course, participants were put into groups that worked together on a variety of activities throughout the one-week period. After having collaborated on several tasks, members of the group were asked to give one another written and oral feedback on their group participation. While individuals in Rosaria's group felt that her feedback to them had been the most thorough and insightful, none had felt they could offer her any feedback in return: she had been too silent, and therefore her group members did not know what to say. This in itself was invaluable feedback for her, allowing her to realize that her silence had prevented others from having a sense of her strengths and weaknesses.

Feedback from her colleagues at work, however, was less neutral. One comment she received from the 360° instrument was that she was "unimaginative", yet she knew that this was not the case. This contrast with the WLS participants' feedback enabled Rosaria to recognize her leadership dilemma. At best, her silence could be interpreted neutrally in that it made it difficult for others to assess her strengths and weaknesses, but at worst it could be interpreted negatively. Her silence was not serving her well, and prior to this point she was unaware of this fact. Further reflection revealed her motivation and habitual ways of thinking. Her hesitance to communicate her ideas stemmed from fear of possible rejection, but her team members' positive reaction to her enabled her to realize that her fears were largely unfounded. One WLS group member told her that her silence enabled her to be a keen observer and an insightful team member. Members of

her group advised her to share her thoughts more often. Their comments resonated with her deeply. She knew she was a very creative and imaginative person, and she learned that her co-workers did not know this because she never shared her ideas.

Rosaria's story demonstrates the role of gender in women's leadership development, and, more importantly, the need for leadership development instructors to attune to issues of gender. The feedback that Rosaria received allowed her to better understand her motivations and explore how these were related to gender. Rosaria's fear of rejection reflects two characteristicly feminine behaviors: maintaining connections with others and devaluing one's own ideas. Feedback and coaching enabled Rosaria to question her assumptions about the kinds of behaviors she believed fostered connection as well as to recognize and to question her negative feelings about the value of her ideas. While she did not know what to do with this information immediately, the realization that her silence had undesirable consequences motivated her to figure out a way to change her leadership behavior. (For discussion of these issues, see Belenky et al., 1986; Merrill-Sands & Kolb, 2001; Miller, 1976; and Miller & Stiver, 1997.) Greater self-awareness marks the first transition moment in the revision of assumptions by heightening tension and the desire to resolve the dilemma. This tension propels the learner to the second stage of transformational learning, meaning making.

C. MEANING MAKING

Meaning making is facilitated by the practices identified in Figure 2. The activities involved in meaning making precipitate the next transition moment of perspective change. The transition effectively reduces the tension inherent in the leadership dilemma by changing the way the participant thinks about pre-existing challenges and by presenting new alternatives. Beatrice's story illustrates several of these practices in an effort to resolve a pre-existing leadership dilemma. Her pre-WLS leadership story had to do with overcoming isolation as the leader of a new, system-wide initiative within her organization. Despite her best efforts to interest and engage key decision-makers in the activities of her initiative, only a handful responded enthusiastically and indicated an interest in working with her. A second group of constituents responded negatively and a sizeable third group was simply silent, with a "wait and see" attitude. During the leadership course, she was presented with a model of the three types of constituents involved in any change process: allies, opponents, and fence-sitters. In the quote below, Beatrice describes how this theory enabled her to frame and thereby articulate her dilemma:

> I remember during the course when this model of allies, opponents, and fence-sitters was presented—I just had this light bulb go off in my head. And [I said], "That's what I'm facing!" I immediately pictured all of those [constituents] in those three categories—I could immediately place them, in my head.

Theory was also used in one-on-one coaching and collaborative and supportive interactions with workshop participants to resolve her leadership dilemma. As Beatrice explains below, in these interactions, she learned a lot about what would and would not work in the unique culture of her organization. Most significantly, she learned that her relational style of trying to engage each key stakeholder personally was more effective with allies and less effective with opponents and fence-sitters who were influenced through impersonal data and information:

> Once I had [the model in mind], I thought, okay, here are my allies. Here's who I can turn to for support and where I can deliver, right away, and start having results. For the others, I concretely thought about their information needs, and then I started thinking about how I could move fence-sitters and opponents into allies, but that was going to be a longer-term effort. I was first going to start with my allies.
>
> I wasn't taking the easy way out—it really was the right thing to do. And yet, to make sure I gave concerted effort, giving information to the others and trying to understand what kinds of information would make them happy. And that's when I became very data driven, recognizing the culture of the organization and doing lots of survey work and hitting them with data, more data… I never stood up and talked theory, although gender and organizational theory is so interesting to me… I present our own facts and figures and trends and challenges. So, I think the leadership course helped me understand that I needed to run a fact-driven program.

Beatrice's story is an example of how gender considerations are introduced into supposedly gender-neutral theory to analyze her leadership challenge. Beatrice used the theory to help her understand the different types of responses she got from her constituents. Beyond that, she reflected on how she had engaged with them, and more importantly, how her approach with all of them, especially those she later came to see as opponents and fence-sitters, had been to build relationships. However, through coaching, collaborative and supportive interactions, and personal reflection, she realized that her feminine approach was not effective with all three types of constituents, so she was able to formulate a strategy that incorporated both feminine, relational approaches and masculine, impersonal approaches depending on the needs of each constituent.

D. ACHIEVING TRANSFORMATIVE INSIGHT

While interpreting the various inputs in relation to a leadership dilemma, a learner becomes aware of alternative ways of thinking and recognizes the drawbacks of old ways of thinking. She also considers a large amount of information that points to alternative ways of thinking about and addressing a leadership dilemma. At some point in this process a coherent idea emerges, bringing together key insights from meaning making that render a problem meaningful and suggest a direction for action. This coherent idea is the third stage of transformative learning: transformative insight. For some workshop participants, the challenged assumptions had to do with internal factors—how the person thought and felt about herself. For others, the assumptions had to do with external factors—how the person thought about the environment in which she operated. For a few individuals, internal and external factors interacted in interesting ways, causing the learner to unravel and challenge them. As shown in Figure 2, a transformative insight was a notable moment in all cases, and participants consciously imprinted the insight into their consciousness to be sure that they could have a way of taking the clarity they felt back into their work lives.

The transformative insight achieved by one group of WLS alumnae primarily involved challenging internal assumptions, such as recognizing how they thought about themselves—as persons who lacked valuable ideas and could not effect change on their environments. Rosaria falls into this group of individuals. This group recognized the faulty nature of these assumptions, as well as how these faulty assumptions constrained their effectiveness. Once they became aware of their habitual patterns of thinking, these individuals crossed a threshold. They were unable and

unwilling to see themselves in the same light—they had literally developed a new identity, albeit one that needed development and strengthening.

The transformative insight achieved by another group of WLS alumnae involved challenging both internal and external assumptions concerning relationships. For some in this second group, the problematic assumption involved minimizing the importance of relationships and overemphasizing the importance of task focus to organizational performance. For others, like Beatrice above, the problematic assumption had to do with recognizing that she needed to complement her primary, feminine mode of working in relationships with a masculine mode, depending on each stakeholder's needs.

A third and final group came to the training with a clear sense of and commitment to their personal values, which guided their actions. However, they felt at a loss in situations where values relating to feminine aspects were not considered to be important in their organizational culture, and this was manifested in interactions with co-workers. The transformative insight for these individuals came from the affirmation of their values in the training setting and the recognition that these values were indeed functional. This affirmation not only strengthened their commitment to their convictions, but also enabled them to envision how to creatively express their values. Because achieving a transformative insight has a quality of irreversibility—once the learner recognizes a faulty assumption, it loses its grip and the learner seeks alternatives—it leads to the third transition moment of conviction and confidence to act on the transformative insight.

E. CONNECTING INSIGHT TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Conviction and confidence lead to the fourth stage of transformational learning: connecting insight to leadership practice. The evidence gathered in this study strongly suggests that the impact of the learning process did not wane once the WLS training was over. Indeed, WLS alumnae described acting on the conviction to change, and they indicated that they sustained their changed behavior permanently. Initially, a learner's efforts to leverage training in practice are mechanical and unrefined, but over time, she gains self-confidence and matures in her practice. This continual learning and maturation of practice is the last transition moment in the revision of worldview.

The transformation from a previously established leadership practice to a new one involves hard work and effort. This is not because the learner lacks a commitment to change. Rather, to change practice, one has to overcome the ease of reverting to old habits. One key practice for sustaining change was reawakening conviction through meaningful artifacts. Meaningful artifacts are objects given to participants by trainers that have both collective and personal meaning attached to them. These objects are used by learners to maintain the immediacy and urgency to act on a transformational insight well after the training. In the WLS courses, these objects were also used as a cue to psychologically transport the learner to empowering moments in the training setting where her insights emerged, reminding her of the nurturing and affirmative context but also that her experiences are real and shared by other impressive women. Joycelyn aptly described the way in which meaningful artifacts kept the urgency for change alive once she returned to her place of work:

One of the exercises during the workshop was working up and down the ladder of inference [(Argyris, 1990)]. They gave us some plastic ladders, and I brought it back with me and I have it here on my bulletin board, just to remind me that I should not take things for granted and should not withhold information that the other person might need to understand. This artifact is now a symbol. A symbol is an artifact with meaning added to it—*you* add meaning—something that you want to remember. If you don't put meaning to it, the thing is meaningless. Adding it and making yourself aware that this means what you want it to mean… is a conscious decision in which you tell yourself "when I look at this, I will remember this." It is like [recreating the] conference with myself—when I see the ladder, I will remember that.

As argued above, the teaching and learning practices of the WLS facilitated transformational learning among women leaders. While these practices were not inherently unique to women learners, they had a powerful effect on WLS participants because they were employed in a way that affirmed and legitimated women's experiences (Knowles, 1990; Rogers, 1970). Affirming and legitimating women's experiences was important because it gave participants permission to explore all the factors, including gender, that affected their current leadership behaviors. In this process, some WLS alumnae were able to recognize that they had internalized negative messages about the value of their ideas and had silenced themselves. Others recognized that while feminine, relational modes of interacting had strengths, these needed to be complemented by more impersonal, masculine modes. Others learned the opposite lesson—masculine approaches can inhibit relationship building, limiting leadership effectiveness. These individuals rediscovered, revalued, and incorporated feminine competencies.

The data on the WLS alumnae enrich the transformational learning framework used to orient this analysis. First, while the WLS alumnae described going through the stages of transformational learning, they also identified a fourth stage of connecting insight to real-life practice. Second, introducing the idea of transition moments in the revision of worldview to the analytic framework adds another dimension to our understanding of the processes of transformational learning. This dimension involves identifying the impact of each stage of learning on the revision of a learner's worldview. Two of these stages—self-awareness and perspective change—have received attention in the leadership development literature but have not previously been incorporated into a coherent framework of transformational learning. Third, by incorporating teaching/learning practices, the framework identifies the learning activities involved in each stage of transformational learning. By incorporating these three elements, the analytic framework brings these different ideas together into a coherent framework of transformational learning.

As noted by adult learning scholars, adults do not easily part with the ideas and assumptions that have previously given them a sense of agency and control (Knowles, 1990; Mezirow, 2000). Nevertheless, despite the challenges involved, WLS participants willingly undertook the task of revising the assumptions that previously guided their practice. This transformative potential of leadership development training may be simultaneously reassuring and challenging to organizations sponsoring leadership development training. Sponsoring organizations can benefit from individuals returning with fresh ideas and a greater sense of agency. However, trainees often return to an organization that has not changed, to an environment that may not be supportive of their continued growth as leaders. Thus, it is possible that while organizations invest a great deal in the training of future women leaders, the organizations may not change quickly enough for these women to reap the benefits of the training. Thus, efforts to develop women's leadership need to go hand-in-hand with systemic organizational change efforts.

The potential for transformational learning in formal training settings may also be of interest to trainers. While it may not be possible to have an all-women training setting in all cases, trainers still need to contend with how to create a learning environment that takes seriously the influence of gender. How is it possible to make the learning environment, especially if it is a mixed gender

environment, safe enough for women to explore their experiences? What are the practices that would ensure that gender concerns do not get lost in a mixed gender setting? More generally, the conclusions of this paper raise the question of which design elements and training approaches would ensure an attention to women's experiences and gender more broadly in the context of leadership development training.

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