

Eagly, A.H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Reviewed by Heather S. Baruch

Moving Up the Ladder: The Evolution of Female Leaders

Introduction

Through the Labyrinth discusses women's role in leadership and how women have broken through barriers in order to work at the same level as their male counterparts. Eagly and Carli present their literature by asking eleven questions over eleven chapters, pondering how women's places in organizations have changed over time. With their findings, it becomes easier to see how far women have come, yet how much further they still have to go in order to be held in the same esteem as male leaders. The major themes that run through the book are women's access to leadership and the barriers that impede their way up the ladder and the barriers women face because leadership has so longed been associated with men and male attributes.

Theoretical frame/situate in body of literature

Women in leadership have been explored heavily in literature. Helgesen (1995) discusses the Web of Inclusion in relation to women's leadership. She notes that when women described their place in their organization, they often put themselves in the center, "reaching out," not "reaching down" (Helgesen, 1995, p. 46). In the web, the "architect" (the leader) is able to build by "providing access and engaging in constant dialogue" and knows that only by sharing strengths and sometimes yielding power makes the web stronger (Helgesen, 1995b, p. 14). When women lead in this way, they are also improving the experiences for the people with whom they work. When people are part of a web, they have more investment in the work they are doing, as they are able to "share directly in the responsibilities and rewards of major undertakings" (Helgesen, 1995b, p. 14). This takes place more often in the web because people have "more incentive for full-hearted participation," (Helgesen, 1995b, p. 14).

Hoyt's chapter in *Leadership* on women and leadership devotes an entire section to the labyrinth and discusses the three concepts of the leadership labyrinth: human capital, gender differences, and prejudice (Hoyt, 2010). Hoyt (2010) also explains the levels of leadership effectiveness: individual (promoting effective negotiations and use of effective leadership styles), interpersonal (decreasing gender stereotypes), organizational (organizational changes), and societal (gender equity in domestic responsibilities). This section also covers many of the same concepts as Eagly and Carli, like pointing out women who have successfully navigated the labyrinth, the idea that women use transformational leadership more than men, and stereotypes that pervade gender differences in leadership (Hoyt, 2010).

Elements of the book

Chapter one asks "Is there still a glass ceiling?" and serves as an introduction to present the background and history of women and leadership. It describes three elements of women's leadership: the concrete wall, the glass ceiling, and the labyrinth. The concrete wall is described as "barriers to women's leadership" including rules and norms (p. 2). The glass ceiling excluded women from positions at the highest levels and served as a barrier, albeit an invisible one. The labyrinth is described as the negotiable yet challenging routes and "circuitous paths" towards top

leadership positions Eagly and Carli are explicit when they describe the labyrinth as misleading and give seven clear reasons why. Chapter one also covers why women aren't equally represented as leaders and provides evidence to better understand gender and leadership. Finally, the chapter explains that leadership matters and in order for organizations to be successful, women need to be afforded equal access to leadership roles. The book's mission is to assess if restrictions to leadership positions for women exist and if so, how they can be eliminated.

"Where are the women leaders?" discusses how far women have come, where they have advanced as leaders, and where they still lag behind in terms of leadership roles. Eagly and Carli also bring up the important point that a woman being promoted to a high leadership position is still news and society still counts "firsts" in women's leadership. Chapter two covers statistics over the past century concerning labor force population and bachelor's degrees awarded, in addition to discussing shifts in social patterns and how education predicts future workplace advancement. The chapter also discusses women and men as political leaders, as well as, how female leadership looks in other countries, making the important point that women have risen to top positions in other countries and at the writing of this book, women served seven presidents and five prime ministers in countries other than the United States. While women have advanced in American politics (e.g., Geraldine Ferraro), women are only being elected to high leadership positions on the state level. However, women are being appointed to federal level positions such as secretaries of state and housing and urban development. It is noted that women have increased the most in leadership roles in management and administrative occupations, but have less authority than men in these positions. Furthermore, leadership roles in education, foundations, and the arts have increased for women and Eagly and Carli posit that because women have progressing into the "most elite leadership roles, absolute barriers are a thing of the past" (p. 27).

In chapter three, "Are men natural leaders?" Eagly and Carli discard the notion that men, unlike women, possess a "naturally dominant and competitive psychology that facilitates leadership" (p. 29). Evolutionary psychologists insist that because males are more dominant and competitive than women, they are more likely to inhabit leadership roles. Furthermore, the basic idea of evolutionary psychology is that "men and women have different personalities because they evolved different behavioral strategies for reproduction" for years (p. 30). Eagly and Carli point out that the evolutionary psychology analysis of leadership lacks substantial data, and thus raises questions about the plausibility of these claims concerning men's predominance as leaders. The chapter also discusses psychological sex differences that supposedly enhance leadership, such as dominance, assertiveness and competitiveness. It also looks at personality traits associated with leadership and goes into detail about the "big five": neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Eagly and Carli note that extraversion is the most consistent predictor of leadership, as it strongly predicts both the emergence of leadership and the effectiveness of one's leadership. When comparing men and women in regard to the big five and intelligence, the two genders are similar. General intelligence is equal in men and women and extraversion subsists at the same level in men and women. However, traits like emotional intelligence, empathy, and compassion are more prevalent in women. Women also seem to regard ethics at a higher level than men, with women being less accepting than men of "unscrupulous" tactics (p. 46).

Chapter four asks "do family responsibilities hold women back?" and explores how women's roles in the home impact their leadership positions. While men do contribute to

housework and childrearing, women's familial responsibilities contribute to their "lesser access to power and authority in society" and these circumstances lessen their "prospects for advancement through the labyrinth" (p. 49). Eagly and Carli also discuss women's patterns in employment. While some women leave their jobs entirely, most women choose other options, such as taking leaves of absence, using sick days, and looking for more flexible job and part time jobs. Men and women also differ in their preferences in regard to job attributes. Women and girls prefer jobs that offer experiences to work with others and help people in addition to an easy commute and a "feeling of accomplishment and intrinsic stimulation", while men and boys favor jobs with opportunities for leadership, supervision, or solitude that provide plentiful leisure time (p. 61). However, men and women do not differ in their psychological commitment to their jobs or organizations and in both sexes, their role as a worker is less important than their family roles.

In chapter five, "Is discrimination still a problem?" Eagly and Carli evaluate if discrimination against women exists in regard to leadership. Men and women differ heavily in their pay, with women earning 81 cents for every dollar men earned in 2005 (for full time U.S. workers). The authors also discuss that women receive promotions less frequently than men and women's promotions at the higher level are less likely than men's within organizations. To illustrate current promotional patterns, Eagly and Carli provide a hypothetical situation that shows five hierarchical levels with seventeen men to everyone one woman at the CEO level. Surprisingly, women do not have an advantage in female-dominated fields. In four fields, nursing, librarianship, elementary school teaching, and social work, men reached authority positions more often than women. Eagly and Carli come to the conclusion that men "ascend to supervisory and administrative positions more quickly" than women and because of men's advantage for promotions, their "gains over women in authority and wages grow larger with longer job tenure" (p. 80).

Chapter six asks "what is the psychology of prejudice toward female leaders?" and explores the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding women's leadership. Eagly and Carli note that men have an advantage over women regardless of their qualifications because people attribute male qualities to leadership. Stereotypes and mental associations about men and women contribute to expectations about their behaviors and qualities, and are "pervasive and influential" (p. 85). Specific gender stereotypes center around communal qualities (being affectionate, helpful, friendly, kind, sympathetic, sensitive, gentle, and soft-spoken) are more associated with women, and agentic qualities (such as being aggressive, ambitious, dominant, self-confident, forceful, self-reliant, and individualist) are more associated with leaders. Furthermore, the way people think about leaders is adjusted for the tasks leaders perform and the context in which they lead. Eagly and Carli also note that prejudice against female leaders results from the disparity between the way people think about women and leaders, in addition to assessing women less positively as leaders. While stereotypes and prejudices limit women's access to top leader roles, their approval as leaders over time might give hope that women may be navigating the labyrinth more successfully.

Chapter seven, "Do people resist women's leadership?" discusses how the stereotypes covered in chapter six create a struggle for women to attain leader roles because of the competing demands on them. Eagly and Carli describe the double bind that exists for women. Specifically, women are assumed to be warm and selfless (typical female gender roles) while at the same time expected to be assertive and competent (characteristics of leaders). Communal characteristics do not "produce respect for women as authorities and leaders" (p. 102). The chapter explores barriers that face women who do not act communal, such as resisting assertive,

directive, or dominant women; resisting self-promoting women; resisting women in masculine domains and leadership roles; and men's resistance to agentic women. Eagly and Carli also discuss feelings people have about women who lack agency, like doubts about female leadership competence and shifting standards of competence. Unlike women, men do not have to be likeable or clearly show themselves to be superior in ability in order to be influential. Furthermore, women who are assertive or competitive face resistance from others; conversely, women are sometimes disparaged for being too nice. This delicate balance of personality traits does not exist for men and therefore, make women's access to top leadership roles more difficult.

In chapter eight, "Do women lead differently than men?", Eagly and Carli evaluate if and how men and women differ in leadership styles. They report that women tend to be more democratic, participative, and collaborative. An exception to this occurs when women are in senior management positions when they tend to lead in styles similar to their male counterparts. Furthermore, women are slightly more likely than men to lead in with a transformational style in addition to using rewards and mentoring to motivate subordinates. Men, alternately, avoid solving problems and remain absent at critical times. However, as the chapter notes, women leaders can act autocratic and male leaders, democratic. Eagly and Carli also note that women have more effective leadership styles than men, as men's styles can actually impede effectiveness.

Chapter nine asks, "do organizations compromise women's leadership?" and explores whether organizations' practices might limit women's access to leadership. An organization's culture will inherently play a part in how a woman is able to access leadership roles. Eagly and Carli draw on organizational barriers that impede women's advancement including demands for long hours, travel, and relocation, which have obvious connections with women's familial obligations as discussed in chapter four. Women also face challenges including building social capital, fitting in with organizational culture, and obtaining desirable assignments, all of which can be difficult because of the innate male-dominated culture that is present in many organizations. The chapter outlines suggestions by the authors for organizations to cultivate gender equality, like providing flexible work hours for women who have domestic responsibilities. Other innovations include reforming performance evaluations and recruitment strategies, legitimizing women's involvement as leaders, and reducing tokenism. Eagly and Carli posit that due to changes in managerial roles, now is the time to "propose and try out innovations" that will make organizations "more hospitable to female managers and executive" (p. 160).

Chapter ten, "How do some women find their way through the labyrinth?" ponders how some women have successfully navigated the labyrinth to reach high-level leadership positions. Eagly and Carli propose suggestions to women for "coping at the workplace" (p. 161). They are clear when they note that these are general, as they acknowledge how complex women's lives are. First, the authors suggest that women show that they are both agentic and communal by taking credit for their accomplishments, negotiating effectively, and working to feel authentic in leader roles. They recognize that this "blended" style can be difficult to attain in a male dominated field and note the limitations that exist for breakthrough women in areas where few women have been in charge (p. 167). Second, Eagly and Carli suggest that women build social capital. This involves receiving support from colleagues and joining and participating in networks with both men and women within one's organization. The authors also discuss the topic of balancing employment and family and the concept of "having it all" (p. 175). This chapter also covers quality and women who earn more than their employed husbands.

The book's last chapter, "How good are women leaders and what does their future hold?" explores the outcomes of having women serve as leaders. Eagly and Carli admit that while the glass ceiling does not apply to women today, barriers still exist that impede them from gaining top leadership positions. The chapter summarizes many topics already covered in the book including dismissing the myth that gender explains the inequality women face in their access to leadership roles. The authors also revisit psychological dispositions that can predict leaders, prejudice and discrimination that infect women's leadership and organizational processes common for men and women. Eagly and Carli talk about the advantages that organizations have by giving women access to leadership roles, societal pressures favoring gender equality, the dynamics of the psychology of prejudice, and the male perspectives. It also answers the question of: are men or women better leaders? The authors know there is no simple answer and provide research and statistics supporting that fact. Finally, the authors close the book by contending that while the future will probably not bring "continuous, even progress toward gender equality," women will "steadily gain greater access to leadership" (p. 198). They encourage contemporary women to continue to work hard to be "pathmakers of social change" so they can create paths for the women who will follow them (p. 199).

Uses of book in practice

Through the Labyrinth presents the important concept of women's access to leadership and should be used in student leadership programs. I suggest the book be assigned on a chapter-by-chapter basis over a semester because each one builds off of the first. This way, students can digest and discuss the ideas presented in each chapter while beginning to formulate their own ideas about women and leadership. Furthermore, because the book utilizes graphs and statistics, students can easily draw conclusions from Eagly and Carli's data.

Finally, students should use the book as a self-reflection piece and look inward to examine how they confront gender equality in leadership. I encourage educators to encourage students to journal while reading each chapter and draw on their own lives and experiences. For example, female students can discuss if they have confronted any stereotypes and barriers on their quest to leadership roles and how they dealt with them. They can also explore how they may have overcome these barriers to attain high-level positions. Male and female students should reflect on their own privilege within the leadership ladder and how they may have benefitted from male-centric thinking. They can also think about any actions they may have taken or language they may have used that impeded a female peer from gaining a leadership position, or any prejudice they may have against females in leadership roles.

Critique

Through the Labyrinth is at its best when presenting anecdotes from real organizations and telling stories of women who have successfully navigated the labyrinth to become successful in leadership roles. The book also does a good job in presenting data from Eagly and her colleagues' years of research in the form of charts, graphs, and statistics. The overall organization of the book is seamless; by posing each chapter as a question, the reader is able to reflect on his/her own experiences to understand women and leadership. Furthermore, by dissecting each topic into sub-categories allows concepts to be fully explored and not rushed or overlooked.

The book could have had more depth by including additional first-person narratives. It would have been helpful to hear more from women who have attained high-level positions, as

well as, those who still struggle. Including more of the male perspective would have been useful as well, as it is important to hear from those men who work with women in order to understand the full story of women's access to leadership.

The book lacks focus and contradicts itself in some places. For example, it states that women do not face "monolithic roadblocks that obstruct access to high-level positions," (p. 183) but presents many points on how barriers still *do* exist for women. It would have been useful for the authors to define clearly what they mean by barrier, roadblocks, and access when describing women's path to leadership roles.

While the book has its weaknesses, overall it is a helpful tool in understand and further promoting women's' position in leadership. It is an important book in that it is an evidence-based book that sheds light on a topic that many might not know much about, but should. As evidenced by *Through the Labyrinth* and accompanying literature, women and leadership is an important concept that must be fully understood in order for organizations to function at their fullest potential and highest efficiency.

References

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Reviewer

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Baruch, H. (2011). Moving up the ladder: The evolution of female leaders. [Review of the book *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*, A. H. Eagly & L. I. Carli]. National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs. Retrieved from <http://www.nclp.umd.edu>