Book Review: Women in Leadership: Contextual Dynamics and Boundaries

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Leadership is one of the most studied subjects worldwide. The study of leadership is based on the paradigms that have been formulated, theories, methodologies, and the benchmarks for the practice of leadership.

Women in Leadership: Contextual Dynamics and Boundaries edited by Karin Klenke explore different contexts under which women are leaders. The author chose to use different contexts of women in leadership because of their diversity. Various definitions of a context are given, but the author also reflects on what she considers the meaning of a context from page 9. Klenke defines a context as a sensitizing process, providing insights into how particular environmental factors may serve as temporal and/or spatial boundary conditions around a phenomenon of interest. In addition to general contextual factors, gender and culture provide additional contextual prisms through which to analyze leadership. To make this piece of work more fascinating, the author used vignettes at the opening of each chapter to portray women's leadership in the specific context the chapter represents.

Chapter 1 sets the scene by trying to examine leadership and some theories, models, and paradigms formulated to locate its practice. The book mirrors some obstacles that women encounter in their quest for leadership and why they are underrepresented in leadership roles in many profit and nonprofit organizations. The author makes a point that when women occupy leadership positions, they are often evaluated less favorably than their male counterparts with similar background and experience and earn considerably less than their male colleagues.

Even though women in leadership have been questioned in different spectrums of life, Chapter 2 looks at the history of women in leadership from antiquity to the 20th century as a context. By doing this, the author deepens our understanding about the study and nature of women in leadership. This gives a short picture of women who have been leaders as queens of nations and tribal chiefs worldwide. The discussion goes further to argue that the different traditions from which women emerged as leaders after the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the 20th century had a distinctively European Flavor.

Chapter 3 further examines women in leadership in a political context. The author in page 47 alludes that although more women are now running for high ranking powerful positions, relatively few empirical studies have examined this and yet their behavior is always under added scrutiny. Although women have made significant progress in the corporate sector in penetrating the ranks of middle management in companies, Chapter 4 highlights that they continue to lag far behind men and suffer the larger pay disparity in many industries such as finance which is dominated by men. Further to this, a catalyst survey showed found that companies with most number of women in top leadership

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[1] Human Science Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa

position had a return equity that was 35 % higher than those with the least number of senior women.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 concentrate on woman in leadership in the context of information technology (IT), mass media and in sports respectively. Conceptualization of IT and its characteristics is highlighted in Chapter 5. The author makes a very interesting statement (page 93) that there is no shortage of female talent on the internet as a crop of women's websites have been launched in recent years that attract growing female audiences. A gender difference between boys and girls in online communication from childhood is also tinted as it creates an impression that girls are computer phobic than boys. Women in media also make a fascinating debate on the way women leaders are portrayed across a variety of communication, be it on television and print. Sport as a context for women in leadership also presents a very enthralling debate which has not only gained in numbers but attracted an increasing number of spectators. In the Unites States, women have been outspending men as corporates hire women sports professionals who understand what women want and help them produce and market to the large and lucrative female consumers. Female coaches and athletic directors as addressed from page 143 will mesmerize a reader to want to go further than what the author has displayed.

The military as a context for women in leadership is discussed in chapter 9. This chapter requires some effort in reading as its tries to exhibit some prehistoric gender stereotyping in the military arena. Historically, military has been a male dominated context but is undergoing profound changes. The chapter also features some contemporary women military leaders and women in combat where many debates have focused on the physical and mental differences between male and female soldiers.

Women leaders in the context or religion and spirituality still receives a massive challenge as according to many classic interpretations of scriptures and church history, female leadership is not acceptable. The author in this regards still made the analysis of women who carved the path as religious and spiritual leaders in contemporary society (page 181).

Women's leadership in Science, Higher Education and Arts also received an indispensable attention which highlights significant scientific discoveries made by women since the ancient times. The author draws attention to remarkable achievements of female scientist who contributed significantly to medicine, physiology, physics, chemistry and astronomy. However, there is still some underrepresentation as only a few rise to leadership position regardless of their training completion in scientific discipline. The same utterance of underrepresentation of women in science goes for higher education. Even though women outnumber men in college enrollment at undergraduate level, they populate a narrow range of disciplines such as nursing, psychology, law and languages. The author in page 201 highlights that some causes of underrepresentation are rooted in childhood socialization practices and lack of role models that persist in our societies. Art on the other hand does not offer a very different context for women in leadership either. The author concludes by saying that despite some spectacular successes of individual women leaders in science and arts, radical change is slow to come.

In Chapter 11, the author covers the context of global women leaders in politics, business, information technology, sports and Global Nobel Peace. Cross-cultural leadership is critical for global leaders who need a diverse repertoire of skills to manage

the culture of their organizations and countries including a new kind of intelligence which the author refers to as cultural intelligence (CI) on page 216. In the final chapter, the author reflects on the progress and lack thereof, and the increasing number of paradoxes women are confronted with and have to learn to manage (page 232).

Whilst the book acknowledges the strengths under which women's leadership is underrepresented, it would have been enormous to have different contexts under which they are well represented to learn from. The book presents an appetizing scholarly search relevant to a multiplicity of readers who are much more interested in different contexts of the world's patriarchal issues.