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August 10, 2015

Advancing Theories of Women and Leadership: Challenges and Opportunities

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Advancing Theories of Women and Leadership: *Challenges and Opportunities*

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Abstract

This caucus provides attendees a forum to discuss the challenges and opportunities for advancing theories of women and leadership. The session goal is to provide Academy members the opportunity to engage in an innovative discussion where they can meet others from across divisions to discuss this multidimensional and multifaceted topic.

Description

This caucus provides attendees a forum to discuss the challenges and opportunities for advancing theories of women and leadership. Although there are many leadership frameworks, models, and theories, the majority of them were developed by men and are based on male-normed assumptions (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). According to Ely and Rhode (2010), “although theory is rich on how leaders develop, we have little direct empirical evidence about how these processes may differ for women and men and less still about how they unfold in organizations” (p. 395). Other researchers (Calas & Smircich, 1996; Stead & Elliott, 2009) argue that a scarcity of critical research on women’s leadership experiences combined with the dominance of leadership theory based on studies of men has resulted in a lack of work that attends to the theorizing of women’s leadership. The scarcity is also true for pedagogical theories that practitioners and educators need to design and deliver coherent, theoretically based, and actionable frameworks for women’s leadership development programs (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011).

These gaps in the literature mean we are unable to answer important leadership and leadership development questions confidently. At the same time, the demand for answers and insights about women and leadership continues to increase. New questions focused on internal and external barriers that may exist for women leaders have emerged, and insights from multiple theoretical perspectives and research paradigms offer diverse interpretations and potential solutions.

Likewise, the topics of leadership and leadership development for women continue to increase in importance in multiple sectors (e.g., higher education, business, government, and nonprofit) and contexts. New opportunities for women and leadership research and practice are emerging in many countries and regions around the world, and many strategic leaders and managers (both men and women) are particularly concerned with developing women for global leadership roles. A focus on rigorous applied theory building for women and leadership is one way to accomplish the goal of more women leaders—thus, opening governance to their often-unheard voice.

The goal of this session is to provide Academy members the opportunity to engage in an innovative caucus where they can meet with others from across divisions to discuss this multidimensional and multifaceted topic. If the group is large enough, roundtables will be available for participants to convene based on specific interests. A 10-minute introduction will provide background for the need and current applied theory building efforts that participants can use as a framework to guide their discussions. The

introduction will include an outline of potential opportunities, issues, and challenges that can be considered in their discussions. The organizers will also collect names and email addresses of attendees interested in future networking. This list will be distributed by email shortly after the conference concludes. We believe that this caucus will offer a convenient, informal way for Academy members who share a topical interest and professional concern regarding theories of women and leadership to network and develop a sense of community around their shared interest.

References

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- Ely, R. J., & Rhode, D. I. (2010). Women and leadership: Defining the challenges (Chapter 14). In N. Nohria & R. Khurana, *Handbook of leadership theory and practice* (pp. 377-405). Harvard Business Press.
- Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women's leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 474-493.
- Jogulu, U. D., & Wood, G. J. (2006). The role of leadership theory in raising the profile of women in management. *Equal Opportunities International*, 25(4), 236-250.
- Stead, V., & Elliott, C. (2009). *Women's leadership*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Initiatives

1. Advancing Women and Leadership Theories Colloquium (May 18-20, 2014, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah)
2. Collaborative Theory-Building: An Exercise towards Responsible Leadership (July 2014, Developing Leadership Capacity Preconference, Lancaster, England)
3. Advancing Theories of Women and Leadership (October 29, 2014, ILA Preconference Workshop, San Diego, California)
4. Applied Theory Building for Leadership: Building Our Capacity for Sustained Research (November 12, 2014, AHRD-Asia Chapter Preconference Workshop, Seoul, Korea)
5. Advancing Women and Leadership Theory (February 20, 2015, AHRD Annual Conference, St. Louis, Missouri)
6. Applied Theory Building for Leadership: Building Our Capacity for Sustained Research (June 4, 2015, UFHRD/AHRD Conference, Cork, Ireland)
7. Advancing Women and Leadership Theory: Moving the Needle through Applied Theory Building (June 10, 2015, ILA Women and Leadership Post-Conference Workshop, Pacific Grove, California)
8. Women and Leadership Theory Think Tank (July 26-28, 2015, George Washington University, Washington, DC)
9. Advancing Theories of Women and Leadership: Challenges and Opportunities (August 10, 2015, AOM Caucus Session, Vancouver, BC)
10. Advancing Women and Leadership Theory into Diverse Contexts and Cultures (October 2015, ILA Preconference Workshop, Barcelona, Spain)

Questions:
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