Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation:
Clearing the Conceptual Cloud

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FOREWORD

Since its inception, CREA has focused on building leadership capacity, and particularly of younger women, to "… assert their rights by continually evaluating relevant experiences, questioning their roles in society, challenging power structures, and effectively catalyzing positive social change…" Within this, CREA's particular goal has been to foster such leadership in the fields of sexuality, sexual rights and women's human rights, which is the intersection at which we work.

This concept paper is part of a broader process launched by CREA to analyze and evaluate the impact of its leadership development strategies, and to explore how to strengthen these. The main goal of this exploration was not merely to create new theory – although that is valuable as well – but to advance our mission of bridging theory and practice to build feminist leadership for transformative social justice.

CREA's work over the past seven years has consistently tried to inform practice with the best available analysis and theory in the fields of gender, human rights, and sexuality, and to build theory from the knowledge and insights gained through practice. "Clearing the conceptual and strategic cloud on feminist leadership" is a further expression of this commitment. It has emerged out of what we realized was a major gap in our knowledge base about what sorts of frameworks, methodologies and curricula have evolved in this domain, and more importantly, about the effectiveness of current leadership development interventions to build inclusive, rights-affirming, and gender-just social change leadership.

This concept paper is part of a larger process that seeks to fill this gap, and to document both the strengths and successes of feminist leadership development so far, as well as the ambiguities, dilemmas and silences about its limits and shortcomings - what are they NOT doing? We felt there was a need for critical analysis of whether our current models of leadership development – and particularly feminist leadership development – are in fact equipping women to lead differently, to transform the architecture of power within their own organizations and movements, as well as the power structures in the world outside that continue to marginalize and oppress women and deny their human rights.

Towards this end, CREA commissioned feminist scholar-activist Srilatha Batliwala to help us design and oversee a study that could answer some of these questions, and to bring others interested in women's leadership development into the process of educating ourselves and sharing our experiences and knowledge. The process includes

➢ Analysis of the existing literature on leadership and building an analytical framework on feminist leadership for social transformation – of which process this paper is the product;

➢ A global meeting of women's leadership development organizations to discuss the framework and our various approaches, their strengths and limitations, held in Cape Town, South Africa, from November 12-13, 2008; and

➢ If resources can be mobilized, a set of case studies of the curricula and frameworks of those engaged in women's leadership development, a comparative analysis of our approaches; and possibly, toolkits for designing future efforts and specific monitoring and evaluation frameworks for assessing the impact of feminist leadership development initiatives.

We do not see this concept paper as the final word on feminist leadership – it is a work in progress, an attempt to nail down and structure our approach to a critical but amorphous

component of our movements and organizations. Our hope is that the analytical framework and ideas articulated here will generate new levels of thinking and action that will strengthen and sharpen our collective praxis on transformative feminist leadership.

Geetanjali Misra

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New Delhi, July 2010

Introduction:

Over the past fifty years of development history, a series of abstract notions and concepts have entered the development lexicon and the vocabulary of activists. Many of them became widely used buzz-words and mantras long before they were defined or deconstructed – take for example, concepts like "participation", "empowerment", "civil society", "movement", or "rights-based approach." In the world of feminism, women's rights and gender equality, terms like "liberation", "autonomy", "women's empowerment", and "gender mainstreaming" became widespread. The concept of *feminist leadership*, has also been widely discussed, described and analyzed. But the last thirty years of feminist experiments with building alternative organizational forms and leadership practices needs to be interrogated and theorized, particularly in light of the far deeper understanding of power and organizational behavior that has emerged during this time.

This task assumes urgency given the widespread use of terms like leadership and leaders, particularly in the context of social justice and women's empowerment; but even more because entire programs of leadership development, or leadership building, have been framed and launched without adequately analyzing the past decades of experience and struggle in creating feminist leadership practices, or re-framing our concepts with the advances made in fields like power analysis and organizational theory. Perhaps this is because leadership is one of those ideas that is considered self-evident, and hardly in need of explanation or deconstruction – or perhaps because it is one of those hard-to-define phenomena that is clearest when it is absent! Or because "...leadership is like the Abominable Snowman, whose footprints are everywhere but who is nowhere to be seen."[1]

This paper is therefore an attempt to pull together existing definitions and concepts around leadership, view these through a feminist lens, place them in the context of social justice and feminist leadership, and then attempt to articulate a new and more rigorous conceptual framework for *feminist leadership*. Hopefully, this will help feminist organizations and capacity builders, as well as donors interested in advancing effective leadership by and for women (such as foundations and women's funds), to look more critically at our current leadership development approaches, and strengthen our practice in this vital arena.

Why does this matter?

Does conceptual clarity about leadership – especially feminist leadership - really matter? If we all know what it is, surely definitions are a matter of semantics? On the contrary, there is a very important reason to try to "nail the jelly to the wall": if we can't define and

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[1] Warren Bennis & Burt Nanus, *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge*, New York, Harper Collins, 1997, P.19

deconstruct leadership, especially the kind of feminist social justice leadership we are talking about, then we have no way of assessing the value or efficacy of the leadership development interventions in which we are engaged. As social justice organizations, women's organizations, capacity-building organizations, and donors – we have all invested enormous energy, human resources, creativity and money in building leadership for social transformation. How do we know whether our models are building the kinds of leaders we need, and how do we measure their impact? How do we know what critical but hidden aspects of leadership our approaches are not addressing, and hence failing to build the very alternative leadership that is their goal? And most important of all, how do we integrate and advance our approaches by harvesting the learning from the last decades of feminist leadership experience in both organizations and movements around the world? None of these goals can be effectively achieved without clearing the conceptual cloud – without conceptualizing the theory and practice of feminist leadership more clearly.

Another imperative for creating more clarity is that leadership is a *means*, not an end. We build leadership capacity and skills *for* something, *to do* something or *change* something, and not because leadership is a product or service for consumption. This is especially true in social justice contexts. Without understanding clearly the concept and practice of leadership for feminist social transformation, and how the two are related to one another, we are walking down a blind alley. Worse, we are making assumptions about the links between the two that may or may not be valid.

Indeed, a critical analysis of the material on leadership development in the social justice context is rife with assumptions, though few of these are explicit. For example, there is a ubiquitous assumption that strong, coherent leadership – and strong, competent individual leaders - will inevitably strengthen and enhance the impact of social change organizations, interventions, and movements. But there is documented evidence of social movements with highly dispersed and non-individualistic leadership that have achieved remarkable results – the Piqueteros and Piqueteras of Argentina, for example, or the campaign to ban landmines. So perhaps strong leadership is a useful but insufficient condition for effective change.

Finally, we need greater clarity and a more analytical approach to leadership in order to distinguish between the different forms, models, and styles of leadership, the diverse purposes to which it is applied, and the ideological frameworks that inform its practice. This is where we move beyond the descriptive - looking merely at what leadership *is* - towards the normative, which is concerned with what good leadership should be. This is critical in the context of *feminist* leadership, since our concern is not merely with capacitating more women to play leadership roles, but to lead differently, with feminist values and ideology, and to advance the agenda of feminist social transformation in a way that other forms of leadership do not and cannot. Such clarity would also enable us to build feminist leadership capacity in non-feminist women and men!

So for all these reasons, it is time we confronted the ambiguity and at least attempt to deconstruct what leadership might mean to those of us committed to feminist social transformation.

Nailing the Jelly to the Wall: Defining Abstract Ideas

Defining and unpacking abstract ideas is a challenge, but not impossible. Over the past two decades, great strides have been made in deconstructing a number of abstract but vital

social realities, and in finding ways of measuring them. Perhaps the most historic was the concept of "human development", pioneered by the late Mahbub ul Huq at the UNDP, as part of his struggle to counter the highly economistic approaches to development advanced by the Bretton Woods institutions. The Human Development Index (or HDI), for all its shortcomings, became a widely accepted proxy for the level of disparity / equity in a society. It has grown to be one of the most powerful advocacy tools in the world, and evidence that creating an accessible and dynamic but not *simplistic* measure of an abstraction like human development is very useful in the "real" world.

Along similar lines, creative researchers and activists have developed frameworks for assessing such complex and abstract phenomena as world values (the World Values Survey[2]), corruption (Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index[3]), and democracy (Freedom House's Democracy surveys and the Polity project series[4]). All these different methodologies have attempted to capture social and political phenomena through concrete indicators, since they reveal the inherent challenges involved in measuring and concretizing abstract ideas that are experienced and seen in reality.

Finally, a plethora of feminist researchers and innovative thinkers have for decades developed frameworks and indicators for translating the reality of gender discrimination into manageable and compelling data and assessment tools – e.g. we have frameworks for assessing the status of women, violence against women, and gender disparities. Surely pinning down the concept of leadership for feminist social transformation is equally feasible!

A study of all these different frameworks and measurement tools reveal that getting to grips with abstract ideas involves attempting to fix, with as much clarity and precision as possible, at least four key dimensions:

1. **What is it?** Defining the concept as clearly as we can;
2. **What's in it?** Unpacking the core components of the phenomenon;
3. **Where is it?** Locating the sites where the phenomenon occurs; and
4. **What does it look like?** Analyzing the key characteristics of the phenomenon in practice.

This document will address the first four questions, so that its users – leadership practitioners and leadership capacity builders in different locations, socio-political contexts, thematic areas, and levels of engagement – can answer the fifth. We hope the conceptual framework we present here will help you to look at how leadership works in your contexts and understand what changes need to be made to make it work as it should!

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[2] See www.worldvaluessurvey.org

[3] See www.transparency.org

[4] See www.freedomhouse.org and www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm

I.   What is it? Defining leadership

"[There are] almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept."[5]

"Always, it seems, the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it . . . and still the concept is not sufficiently defined."[6]

These are unavoidable truisms. After sifting through literally hundreds of definitions, I found that they fall into two categories: definitions of *leader/s*, which mainly focus on the attributes and practices of effective leaders, and definitions of *leadership*, as a process and practice. These definitions come largely from the management and organizational development fields. I also found that in the recent past, the "feminine style of leadership" has become popular in the corporate world, as larger numbers of women entered companies and began to demonstrate that they could produce results and profits through different means from the testosterone-driven male style the "boys" had used (competitiveness, aggression, etc.). And while some of these essentialize women and seem to build on gender-stereotypes about women's ways of working and dealing with others, they do recognize indirectly that gender construction processes result in women negotiating inter-personal and collective processes differently, and possibly more effectively.

Appendix (i) provides a selection of mainstream definitions of leaders, and some provocative and interesting definitions of leadership; they help to get us thinking about the content and characteristics of leaders and leadership more generally, and about how these diverge or converge with feminist definitions. Reviewing these definitions, It is striking that the vast majority are of Northern/Western origin, barring the ones from Chinese philosopher Lao Tse, and that they are overwhelmingly male. Most recent scholarship on leadership and leadership development also comes out of the management schools and management research, and hence tends to focus on the accomplishment of corporate goals and the effective management of organizations and systems. The definitions of "feminine leadership" recognize that women bring different qualities to leadership, with a greater attention to collaboration, cooperation, collective decision-making, and above all, relationship-building. But these come hazardously close to essentializing women (and axiomatically, men too!) and playing into long-standing gender stereotypes, even if unintentionally. These definitions also reveal some common threads, viz.:

➢ The individual as leader, and the leader as (usually) a man
➢ The leader as hero, and leadership as heroism
➢ The leader as decision-maker
➢ The leader as embodiment of character and integrity
➢ The leader as provider of vision, mission, goals and strategy for the enterprise, and motivating others to share those goals
➢ The capacity to influence, inspire and motivate others, directing others' behavior and actions

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[5] Ralph M. Stogdill, *Handbook of Leadership – A Survey of Theory and Research*, New York, Free Press, 1974, P. 259
[6] Warren Bennis, management guru, 1959

Creating a composite of these core ideas would yield a definition of leadership along these lines:

…a set of actions and processes, performed by individuals of character, knowledge, and integrity, who have the capacity to create a vision for change, inspire and motivate others to share that vision, develop ideas, and strategies that direct and enable others to work towards that change, and make critical decisions that ensure the achievement of the goal.

The obvious lacuna in this definition is the absence of any politics, context, or vision about the nature of the "change" that leadership seeks to bring, as though the *purpose* of leadership does not alter its *nature*. This is the gap that sociologist James V. Downton filled when he articulated the concept of **transformational leadership**[7], a style of leadership "where one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality." James MacGregor Burns, a political scientist, scholar of political leadership and American presidential biographer, further developed Downton's work[8], and their ideas had considerable resonance with emerging thinking on feminist leadership.

Burns contrasted Downton's concept of transformational leadership with **transactional leadership**, which accepts the goals, culture and structure of the existing organization or enterprise, and is essentially based on conventional motivation, reward, punishment, and compliance; change is achieved incrementally, and the motivators are *extrinsic*. In contrast, **"Transforming leadership... occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Their purposes, which might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused. Power bases are linked not as counterweights but as mutual support for common purpose. …..transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both."**[9]

While feminists would question the use of terms like moral and morality, these advances in thinking on leadership models help us recognize how, depending on cultural context and history, dominant models and practices of leadership are deeply embedded within us, even if we are feminist women – and men - seeking to change our own practice. One recent and useful analysis of how gender, feminism, and leadership come together and affect one another also helps us place these various definitions in a feminist perspective. In the volume "Women and Leadership,"[10] Bernice Lott's introduction offers us three insights about prevailing approaches to leadership and women[11]:

- ➢ That mainstream research and theorization only engages with the '*feminine*'– not *feminist* - style of leadership;
- ➢ Even works *devoted to women's leadership* do not address or discuss feminist leadership; and
- ➢ The *attributes of feminine leadership styles are all within the accepted gendered roles of women*, i.e., nurturing, caring, sensitive, cooperative, consultative, inclusive, etc. etc.

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[7] James Victor Downton, *Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process,* Basingstoke, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1973

[8] James MacGregor Burns, Leadership, New York, Harper Collins, 1978

[9] James MacGregor Burns, 1978, op.cit., p.20

[10] Jean Lau Chin, Bernice E. Lott and Janice Sanchez-Hucles (Eds), Women and Leadership: Transforming Visions and Diverse Voices, Blackwell Publishing, 2007

[11] Bernice Lott, *ibid*., p.24 - 27

Lott asserts that it is critical to make a distinction between feminine and feminist leadership, since the former does not engage with gender power and women's lack of access to formal positions of authority. She proposes very sensibly that both the terms "feminism" and "feminist" have to be understood more clearly before clarity can be achieved on feminist leadership. So let us turn now to how feminists have defined and understood the notion of leadership.

Defining Feminist Leadership

The search for definitions of feminist leadership is more challenging than one would imagine[12]. As a feminist labor scholar recently wrote, "The exact term 'feminist leadership' proved to be scarce in the literature that discusses women in leadership positions."[13] Indeed, I found the results of my early web-based research equally disappointing. Others who have worked consistently on unearthing definitions, ideas and information about feminist leadership find that while some data exists about feminist leadership in different domains (in grassroots groups, community work, business management, and teaching), it has not been fully explored or developed as a feminist construct.

This does not mean that feminists have not interrogated and analyzed leadership as a concept and practice, or that it has not occupied an important place in feminist debates in different parts of the world. On the contrary, our research reveals that since the dawn of early modern – or "Second Wave" – feminism in the Seventies and Eighties, feminist thinkers and activists addressed the question of leadership very actively[14],[15], believing that "… leadership is a crucial make or break issue for feminism."[16]

Much of the early feminist work on leadership emerged from North American feminists, and occurred within larger discussions of power, and of alternative, non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical structures and organizations[17]. Southern feminists were perhaps less focused on leadership per se at this time, but equally engaged in experiments with alternative structures and processes, and with deep analyses of the gendered nature of power in the social, economic, and political realm. And in both North and South, there was widespread research and analysis of women's exclusion from power and authority in the public realm, with accompanying advocacy campaigns for increasing women's access to political power, and for greater representation of women in leadership positions in government, business, and civil society.

Consequently, feminist approaches to and definitions of leadership were often indirect products of their struggles to examine their own relationship to and practice of power, to advance gender equality in positions of power in the public and private sector, and to create

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[12] The dilemma was captured by the plaintive plea of a Canadian graduate student I found during my web research: "I have to do a term paper on feminist leadership and I can't find a single definition – can someone help?"

[13] Lisa Mitchell, "Feminist Leadership in the Private Sector: Somewhere Out there?", Labour Studies Dept., University of Waikatu, New Zealand, Feb.2004, P.2

[14] Early feminist journals like Quest: the Feminist Quarterly, carried discussions of feminism's intersection with leadership from as early as 1976; the writings of Lorraine Masterson, "Feminist Leaders Can't Walk on Water" (II {4} 29-40), Flora Crater, "Leadership, Growth, and Spirit", (II {4} 60 – 66), and Jackie St. Joan, "Who Was Rembrandt's mother?" (II {4} 67 – 79) are quite interesting glimpses into early Western feminist thinking on leadership issues.

[15] Mary S. Hartmann, 1999, Talking Leadership: Conversations with Powerful Women, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press.

[16] Quest, A Feminist Quarterly, 1976, "Leadership", II (4).

[17] E.g., Charlotte Bunch and Beverly Fisher, 1976, "What Future for Leadership?", in Quest: A Feminist Quarterly II (4):2-13

feminist structures that would not reproduce the patriarchal models that dominated most societies and cultures. There was a very vibrant search for theory and practice in alternative ways of using and applying power, new, non-hierarchical organizational forms, and thus, new ways of leading.

Unfortunately, much of this earlier feminist analysis is invisible to us because it is not available online or in management or scholarly social science journals – it is located in the libraries of universities or independent women's studies centers, in unpublished reports of meetings, or in individual women's personal archives of the debates and discussions around the subject in the 70s and 80s. The following definitions, therefore, have been culled from both online and offline source material, spanning at least thirty years of feminist thinking about leadership:

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Definitions of Feminist Leadership

Leadership from a feminist standpoint is informed by the power of the feminist lens, which enables the feminist leader to identify injustices and oppressions and inspires her to facilitate the development of more inclusive, holistic …. communities. Feminist leaders are motivated by fairness, justice, and equity and strive to keep issues of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and ability at the forefront ….. The elements particular to a feminist leadership construction include a focus on both individual or micro-level and societal or macro-level social justice concerns, a desire to bring marginalized voices to the center of the conversation, and a willingness to take risks as one strives to enact a transformative agenda. Tracy Barton[18]

…. feminist …. leadership is … women and women's organizations sharing power, authority and decision-making in our common pursuit of social, legal, political, economic and cultural equality. DAWN Ontario[19]

[S]ociety has tended to mystify leadership skills as somehow belonging only to a few people who are then seen as better than everybody else. But if we view leadership skills as something that many people have to varying degrees – skills that can be built upon, supported, and enhanced because they are needed in the world, not in order to make one person superior – then we might have a better way of dealing with leadership. Charlotte Bunch[20]

We are not interested… in leadership for leadership's sake. We are interested in bringing women's talents to bear, along with men's, in addressing major social, political, and economic concerns. Mary S. Hartmann[21]

[T]he question is not whether we should have leaders, but how we develop all women as leaders… Leadership as a function of growth is also, then, the process of building confidence, not only so that others will follow, but also so that others will attempt leadership

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[18] Tracy Barton, "Feminist Leadership: Building Nurturing Academic Communities", in *Advancing Women's Leadership* Online Journal, Vol.21, Fall 2006.

[19] DAWN Ontario, http://dawn.thot.net/feminism11.html, The Feminist Principle of Leadership, accessed October 2008

[20] Institute for Women's Leadership. 2002. "Power for What? Women's Leadership: Why should you care?", National Dialogue on Educating Women for Leadership 1, New Brunswick, Institute for Women's Leadership, 16.

[21] Institute for Women's Leadership. 2000. "Are Leaders Made or Born? Educating Women for Leadership", National Dialogue on Educating Women for Leadership 1, New Brunswick, Institute for Women's Leadership , 9.

themselves… it is especially important that leadership be considered a form of stewardship. Flora Crater[22]

If you want to do something big, it's not just you. You have to have people with you who see the common goal or objective. I think the most important thing in taking initiatives is to make people part of it so that all of them will feel that they are responsible… If you work to make something grow and to share the results with others, then the thing in itself has a life… So I understand that leadership is related to the possibility of creating solid initiatives that last. You can go away, and the structures or whatever you have created remain, they are there. Jacqueline Pitanguy[23]

There is a difference between women's leadership and feminist leadership, because the latter has a particular political standpoint. Nevertheless, it is important to increase the number of women in leadership, period, regardless of their politics. … Studies have shown that women tend to lead more inclusively. They have been peace-makers and reached across ethnic lines. Leaders are born in part, but leaders must be fostered; many people get discouraged from trying to be leaders. Women have led a lot, but their leadership is not recognized. Charlotte Bunch[24]

[In building Feminist Leadership] I saw the need to work at two levels: first, building women's self-esteem in order to strengthen their leadership, and second, giving women the skills, resources, and access to decision making which would enable them to have more power to make a difference in their own communities. In other words, leadership for change. Peggy Antrobus[25]

Transformational leadership is leadership concerned with causing social change; feminist transformational leadership is concerned with achieving gender justice. For any kind of feminist transformational leadership, leaders need to undergo a process of personal transformation, consciousness-raising, and internalization of feminism. Peggy Antrobus[26]

Patriarchy, reflected through all the structures and institutions of our world, is a system that glorifies domination, control, violence, competitiveness and greed. It dehumanizes men as much as it denies women their humanity. So we need leadership that will explore and expose these links and challenge patriarchy. The only leadership that does this is feminist leadership. Peggy Antrobus[27]

Words like 'sacrifice', 'altruism' do not settle well with many feminists because these qualities have been abused by society… My argument is that we can make ourselves powerful by celebrating our very own strengths and not letting it be judged by the normative values of the male world… Why not suggest that leaders are those who can lead communities to well being and peaceful living? Leaders are those who make sacrifices, who are altruistic and look after others?... Unless we do that, and raise our own consciousness of the quality and content of feminist leadership, putting ourselves in the place of men in a

[22] Flora Crater. 1976. Leadership Growth & Spirit. *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* II (4): 60-66.

[23] Mary S. Hartman, Ed., "Jacqueline Pitanguy: In Conversation with Charlotte Bunch and Barbara A. Shailor," In Talking Leadership: Conversations with Powerful Women, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 167.

[24] Excerpted from Institute for Women's Leadership, 2002, "Power for What? Women's Leadership: Why should you care?", National Dialogue on Educating Women for Leadership 1, May 2002, New Brunswick, Institute for Women's Leadership

[25] Peggy Antrobus: In Conversation with Charlotte Bunch and Marianne DeKoven, "Talking Leadership: Conversations with Powerful Women", New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1999, P. 29-44

[26] Peggy Antrobus, 2000, Transformational leadership: advancing the agenda for gender justice, in *Gender and Development* 8(3): 50-56

[27] Peggy Antrobus, 2002. Feminism as Transformational Politics: Towards possibilities for another world. Development 45(2): 46-52.

male driven and designed political and cultural space is really quite pointless if not invalid. Devaki Jain[28]

[G]ood leadership – leadership that serves both women and men, poor and rich, and the powerless and powerful – is inclusive, participatory and horizontal… leadership should be about capitalizing on the ideas and skills of as many individuals as possible… A good leader is also conscious that the processes – the means by which she carries out her objectives – are just as important as the objectives themselves. Mahnaz Afkhami, Ann Eisenberg and Haleh Vaziri[29]

The point is that wherever we are as women, wherever we are situated in our lives, we can advance a feminist agenda if we stop thinking about how to be leaders and think rather about how to be doers, how to be agents. Gerda Lerner[30]

In modern leadership theory, the leader plays [a] star role (takes the lead, becomes the head), all others become bit players, supporting characters, and extras in the play, the theatrics of leadership. Modern leadership is by definition hierarchical, male and phallic spectacle. Feminist leadership is more circular, bottom up and less male. David M. Boje[31]

To create something that replaces and surpasses you, that has a life of its own because there are many people who will be drawn into it and who will give leadership to it as a group, even The point is that wherever we are as women, wherever we are situated in our lives, we can advance a feminist agenda if we stop thinking about how to be leaders and think rather about how to be doers, how to be agents if you move on or go away. To me, that has always been the measure of leadership. Gerda Lerner[32]

==*Feminist leadership [is] oriented to a different arrangement of the human order: re-distribution of power and re-distribution of responsibilities. Fighting societal inequalities. Changing economic and social structures, beginning with transformation of psychic structures. Bridging personal freedom with collective freedom. Aiming at cooperation instead of competition. …. In feminist leadership equality, mutuality and absence of sex role behavior should be visible. Feminist leadership should promote (or even rehabilitate) emotionality and the values of relationships. Feminist leadership renounces external paraphernalia of power and their influence."* Admira Toolkit[33]==

Some people claim that feminist leadership and good leadership are synonyms. In a sense it is, as long as the beholder also claims that feminism, considered as a set of values, is THE good set of values. …. Others think that feminist leadership is a kind of contradiction in terms, feminism being contrary to power and feminist equality contrary to leadership itself. …. On behalf of the subject we renounce both positions, and define feminist leadership as leadership congruent with feminist principles. (emphasis mine) ." Admira Toolkit[34]

And CREA's own definition:

[28] Devaki Jain, 1995, "Why Women? Is There a Special Quality in Women's Leadership?", unpublished paper available at the Center for Women's Global leadership, Rutgers University.

[29] Mahnaz Afkhami, Ann Eisenberg and Haleh Vaziri, 2001, "Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Handbook for Women", Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development and Peace (WLP), Bethesda MD.

[30] Gerda Lerner, 1995, "Leadership: Feminist, Spiritual, Political", in Woman of Power, 24 (44).

[31] David M. Boje, Postmodern Leadership Theory, December 2000, at cbae.nmsu.edu/~dboje/teaching/338/postmodern_leadership_theory

32 Gerda Lerner, 1995, "Leadership: Feminist, Spiritual, Political", in Woman of Power, 24 (44)

33 http://www.zenska-mreza.hr/prirucnik/en/en_read_management_leadership_8.htm , accessed October 10, 2008

[34] Admira, no date, Section 8, Management & Leadership: Feminist Leadership, available at http://www.zenska-mreza.hr/prirucnik/en/en_read_management_leadership_8.htm

"CREA visualizes leadership as a dynamic quality that is present and can be enhanced in most individuals… [and] that enables people to live their lives as they choose, with dignity and with sensitivity to other people's choices and decisions. [CREA's] leadership programme works on the assumption that leadership is not a fixed state of being but a process through which women assert their rights by continually evaluating relevant experiences, questioning their roles in society, challenging power structures and effectively catalyzing social change."

Several important factors must be borne in mind when we examine these [and other] definitions of feminist leadership:

- The above definitions are by no means a comprehensive or representative sample of the full diversity of feminist thinking. We cannot homogenize the feminist discourse – and hence definitions - of leadership, as though there was one single global conversation about it. In fact, there were debates and experiments all over the world, on every continent, with new forms of organizations, movements, and leadership structures and practices, with marked differences in concerns and frameworks. In the South Asian context, for instance, the 80s and early 90s saw a much stronger focus on transforming gender power relations through building collective power, and far less on leadership, which became either a given, or an invisible element that did not receive much emphasis[35],[36]. Having been very much involved in these debates and activism, I cannot recall, for instance, any "leadership building" courses for Indian women in the 80s or 90s – but plenty of "awareness building" and "empowerment" programs and interventions. And if at all, there was greater concern with creating *collective leadership* models, rather than individual "heroines"[37] who would inevitably succumb to the politics of domination and control.

- There were also contestations and resistance from grassroots, black, indigenous, Southern, and otherwise marginalized voices, to the definitions and approaches of what they considered mainstream, privileged, elite feminists. Albino and Caldwell-Colbert are among the feminist leadership scholars who address the issue of how women's social diversity influenced the feminist construction of leadership: *'The distribution of power and seeking egalitarian relationships are complex goals of feminism that necessitate that we attend not only to gender, but also to other systemic forms of oppression and privilege. The inclusion of varied life experiences and literature reflecting the impact of ethnicity, race, class and gender are especially important in our constructing feminist leadership and considering its practical enactment."[38]*

- Much of this rich diversity of debate and innovation remains hidden or inaccessible to a work like this document, because of language barriers[39] - blinding us to the powerful critiques and conceptualization of Latin American feminists, for instance - or because so much of it was not recorded / documented, or if it was, because it's not available online or in some set of identifiable institutions or archives. These factors have inevitably biased the discussion in favor of the recorded history of feminist thought on leadership

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[35] See for instance, Nandita Shah & Nandita Gandhi, 1990, "The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Indian Women's Movement", New Delhi, Kali for Women, or

[36] Radha Kumar, 1993, "The History of Doing – An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990", New Delhi, Kali for Women

[37] An ironic term used by many of us in India in the 80s to signal our criticism of the single-leader model of leadership.

[38] Judith Albino and Toy Caldwell-Colbert, "Women as Academic Leaders: Living the Experience in Two Perspectives", in Chin et al, 2007, *op.cit.*, p.69-87

[39] E.g., the huge body of Latin American discourse on the subject, which is in Spanish or Portuguese, or the thinking of non-Anglophone European feminists, which is available only in German, French, or Spanish.

in English, and consequently, towards the work of Western / Northern feminists and feminist knowledge centers that worked in the English language[40].

Bearing these qualifications in mind, let us focus on several important features of the definitions:

- It is striking that many of them are descriptions of *a set of attributes/behaviors, values, and practices*. They are often constituted by adjectives and verbs like inclusive, participatory, collaborative, nurturing, empowering, consensus building, valuing and respecting others, and valuing growth and development.
- But more importantly, we see that the definitions deal with *power and politics,* dimensions that are almost invisible in the mainstream definitions of leadership, even of feminine leadership.
- Some of the definitions also hint at the critical issue of *feminists' own use and practice of power when they occupy leadership positions*. This is a very sticky and uncomfortable point, but one that has become increasingly central to the challenges that feminist organizations are dealing with today, especially in the context of sustaining their organizations and movements, and in making way for young women's voices and leadership.

Drawing upon these richly layered interpretations, a composite definition of feminist leadership would be something like this:

Women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilize others – especially other women - around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation for equality and the realization of human rights for all.

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[40] Much of what is presented below is the result of CREA's research[40] at the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, the first international feminist center to focus on the theory and practice of feminist leadership, and to dedicate itself to the development of feminist leadership in the women's movements worldwide.

II.   What's in it? Unpacking feminist leadership

Unpacking the content of feminist leadership would not be possible without the pioneering and innovative leadership development work of feminist women's organizations and capacity builders around the world. We are indebted to trailblazers such as Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN), Women's Learning Partnership (WLP), Gender at Work, Just Associates, International Women's Rights Action Watch (Asia Pacific), GROOTS International, MADRE, ADMIRA, DisAbled Women's Network Ontario, the Forum of Women's NGOs in Central Asia, and CREA itself. In addition, the approach to broadening, deepening and democratizing their leadership base of some key women's movements around the world has greatly informed and enriched the analysis in this section – e.g., movements such as the Domestic Workers Alliance of the USA, the Mothers Centers of Western and Eastern Europe, the indigenous women's movements of Latin and Meso America, the One in Nine Campaign, the disabled women's movements, and other urban and rural women's movements around the world.[41] Based on our analysis of these and other feminist definitions and thinking on leadership, and their feminist leadership capacity building programs and strategies, we find that feminist leadership for social transformation contains four essential components, which might be termed the "Four Ps", viz.:

1.   **Power**
2.   **Principles / values**
3.   **Politics / purpose**
4.   **Practices**

These four elements can be represented in the form of a diamond – what we might term the feminist leadership diamond:

Fig.2 – The Feminist Leadership "Diamond"

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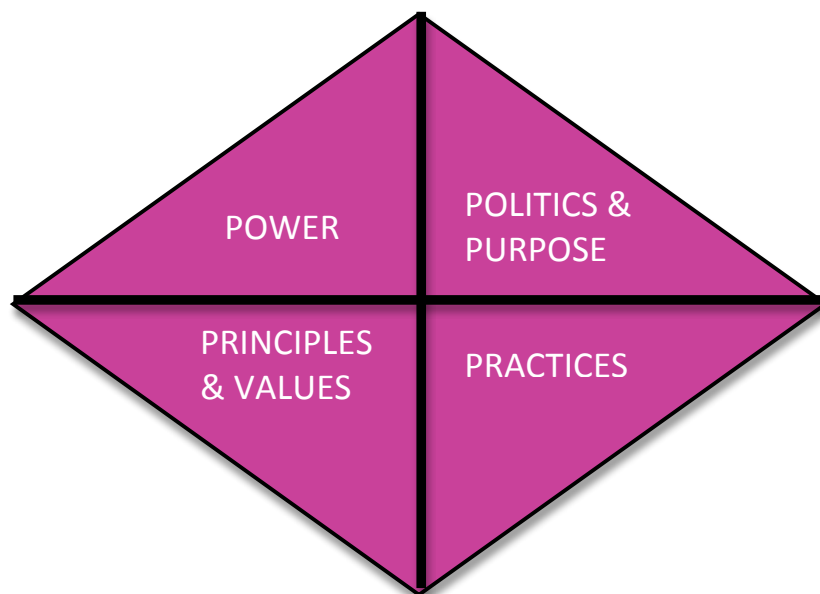
[41] For more information on the leadership development approaches of these movements, please see Srilatha Batliwala, 2008, "Chaning Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements", AWID, available in English, French and Spanish at www.awid.org/eng/Media/Files/ENG-Changing-Their-World

It is useful to explain and examine the content of each of these components, particularly in relation to the leadership development modules and approaches that are widely in use today.

1.   Power

Leadership is first and foremost about power – it is about holding power, exercising power, and changing the distribution and relations of power, in multiple forms and settings. Feminist leadership means functioning with a greater consciousness not only of others' but one's own power, but intentionally moving away from how leadership and power have intersected in mainstream organizations and structures, and from feminists' ambivalent historical relationship with power. The DAWN Ontario framework on feminist leadership analyzes the challenge thus:

> Within feminist organizations, leaders work from a vision of shared power, providing opportunities for all members to develop and use their leadership skills. This idea may feel unfamiliar at first, as we often think of leaders in the traditional sense: a handful of people with high-ranking positions who have claimed the most power within their organization. Power is not shared in these structures, because being successful means always competing to be "number one."

It is not surprising, therefore, that a number of feminist leadership development programs prioritize power analysis in their curricula, enabling participants to deconstruct and examine the different forms and ways in which power operates in the social context. Unfortunately, most of the other leadership development programs aimed at social change activists – including women activists – tend to take a more instrumental and managerial approach, giving greater emphasis to mechanical management and resource mobilization skills, but barely touching upon the fundamental concepts and dynamics of power. But even feminist leadership programs rarely address the internal power dynamics of women's organizations and movements. These are serious omissions, since the most overriding goal of feminist leadership is not creating well-managed organizations that maintain the social status quo, but working to transform the relations of power in society, and to create alternate models of power within their own structures. Consequently, it is useful to focus this section on strengthening our own understanding of power and the different ways it operates within and between individuals, groups, and systems.

Dimensions of Power in Leadership:

Veneklasen and Miller - two practitioner-scholars who have greatly advanced our understanding of power from a feminist perspective – provide an enormously helpful starting point by identifying the three realms in which power operates[42]: ***the public*** (where it is visible, such as the power of the government, military, police, judiciary, corporations, etc.), ***the private*** (within institutions like the family, clan, ethnic group, or in marriage, friendships, and other relationships), and ***the intimate*** (the power – or powerlessness – that we feel within ourselves, expressed usually in terms of self-confidence, self-esteem, control over our bodies, etc.). This takes the first feminist step of acknowledging, naming, and analyzing two important spheres of power that affect women's lives deeply: the private and the intimate. Even more importantly, this framework helps us recognize the vital issue of the power within us, so drawing upon feminist notions of the *agency* that even the most seemingly powerless and marginalized women have. Recognizing the intimate realm of power means

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[42] Lisa VeneKlasen with Valerie Miller, (co-editors, Debbie Budlender and Cindy Clark), 2002, A New Weave of Power and Politics – An Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation, Oklahoma City, World Neighbors, P.51

we are not empty vessels tossed around by the forces of power operating *upon* us, but that we possess power too, though we often don't recognize this, or use it negatively or reactively, to resist or subvert the forces acting on us. This is an important idea to hang on to as we begin to tackle the dimension of power in feminist leadership.

Veneklasen and Miller also talk about the "three faces of power", which they identify as *visible, hidden* and *invisible*[43] - these closely intersect with other power frameworks that identify *direct, indirect*, and *agenda-setting power*[44], [45], [46]. Since these forms of power play a critical role in sustaining patriarchal privilege and subordinating women, it is vital to unpack and understand them clearly[47]:

Visible power is the one we are most familiar with, and have all experienced. It determines who participates – and who is excluded from – decision making in the public realm. Decisions, for instance, about what a country's development priorities should be, or how the village council's budget will be spent. Visible power is held by political leaders (elected or not!), police, military, and the judiciary; it is also held by the heads of multinational corporations, of clans and tribes, of social movement organizations like trade unions, or in the leadership of NGOs and women's organizations. *Direct power* is similar, though it operates in both the private and public realms, and determines how power, privilege and opportunity are allocated, and who is given authority to control resources, other people, or access to knowledge and information. A good example of this for women is the direct power held by male heads of households, and the gender division of labor and decision-making power, which dictates that women will perform certain household and production tasks that are critical for household survival, but they will not have the right to equal wages, control over their income, inheritance rights, or even control over their bodies in terms of their mobility, relationships, sexual expression, or reproduction. Visible or direct power also explains phenomena like son-preference, or how the interests of powerful economic and social groups (by virtue of their assets / wealth, position, gender, race, class, ethnicity, or caste, for instance) are able to dominate political systems at the cost of poorer people.

Hidden power – sometimes called *agenda-setting power* - is about who influences or sets the agenda behind the scenes, and the barriers and biases which determine which issues can be addressed, whose voices are heard or who is consulted on a particular issue. Again, hidden or agenda-setting power operates in both the private and public realms. In the public realm, for instance, we see hidden power operate when violence against women in conflict is not considered as critical as the loss of territory or military losses. Hidden power is also evident in the nexus between political leaders and fundamentalist lobbies with whom they have close, but covert, links, so the latter are able to influence political decisions and policies without any visible power or legitimacy. Within families, we also see how "good women" – those dutifully carrying out the patriarchal agenda and protecting male privilege – often enjoy behind-the-scenes power to influence male decision-makers, without any formal authority.

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[43] Veneklasen with Miller, 2002, *op.cit*., P.46 - 48

[44] Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, London, MacMillan, 1974, and second edition, Palgrave, 2005

[45] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Part I*, London, Allen Lane.

[46] John Gaventa and Andrea Cornwall (2001) "Power and Knowledge," in Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2001) (Eds), Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (Eds) *Handbook of Action Research – Participative Inquiry and Practice*, London, California and New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2001 above, pp.70-80.

[47] I would like to thank Jethro Pettit of the Governance and Participation Unit, Institute for Development Studies, Sussex, UK, and Just Associates "Power of Movements" workshop in December 2009, for contributing greatly to my own clarity on power!-

Invisible power – or **indirect power** - is in many ways the most insidious and problematic of all to challenge and confront, because it is the capacity to shape people's self-image, self-esteem, social attitudes and biases, without any apparent role in doing so. The media and marketing / advertising industries are classic purveyors of such invisible power. The media exercises invisible power by constantly making choices about what issues to highlight and what to ignore, and by constructing images and shaping meaning in lasting ways. Every day's television news, for instance, is instilling in us a sense of what are the most important issues of the day – but what they ignore and don't cover in the news is also important, but by making those issues invisible, they are shaping our sense of social, economic and political priorities in profound ways that we are barely aware of! To understand the power of the media, we have only to consider the widely held image of the man-hating, family-breaking, hard-as-nails, promiscuous feminist. Most people have never met this creature in real life because she doesn't exist – she is a media creation, but one that has taken such powerful hold of people's imaginations everywhere, that few women who believe in gender equality and women's rights are willing to call themselves feminists! Similarly, the advertising industry exercises invisible power by shaping meaning and creating new norms about what is good, desirable, positive, or bad, regressive, negative – the almost universal desire for fairer skin and thin bodies among Southern women, for instance, which in turn affects their sense of self-worth, is testimony to the invisible power of these forces.

These facets of power remind us that while leadership is primarily associated with decision-making power, it is about much more than that. As Devaki Jain argued over a decade ago,

> *"Leadership as a concept is much stronger than and different from the concept of decision-making. Participation in decision-making does not necessarily include, or address, the power hierarchy. One could be part of a decision-making process and not be powerful enough to influence that decision. Leadership, on the other hand, has a hierarchical significance. The demand from everywhere, whether from women, the Platform for Action in Beijing, or the "Human Development Report 1995", is for participation, for fixed shares in decision-making. That is not enough. To make effective demands for change, there is a case for the feminist movement to claim leadership and claim it because of its ethics and not only its gender."[48]*

At the highest level, therefore, the goal of feminist leadership is two-fold:

1. To challenge visible, hidden and invisible power wherever it operates, and especially where it constructs and reinforces women's subordination in both gross and subtle ways, or furthers discrimination against women; and
2. To construct alternative models of power that amplify the visible form to the maximum extent possible, and gradually eliminate invisible and hidden power. In other words, ***feminist leadership will strive to make the practice of power visible, democratic, legitimate and accountable, at all levels, and in both private and public realms.***

Let us now look more closely at power within leadership roles. Here, it is useful to first make a distinction between the *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* power of leadership, mirroring feminism's long-standing slogan of the personal is the political.

- ***Instrinsic power – or intimate power -*** is the force of the personality traits, charisma, talents, capabilities, knowledge, and experience that the individual leader

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[48] Devaki Jain, "Women and Ethical Leadership", in Bella Abzug and Devaki Jain, Women's Leadership and the Ethics of Development", Gender in Development Monograph Series #4, UNDP, August 1996, P.7

has, that have been acquired through the circumstances of her life, and are hence unique to her. This could also be termed the role of the SELF, of our psychic structures, experiences, and attributes in a leadership role. Recognizing that we bring both negative and positive qualities, and a willingness to examine and address our negative traits, is a vital component in feminist leadership, since by tackling the personal effectively, we are also enabling ourselves to tackle the political goals of equality, human rights and justice.

- ▪ *Extrinsic power* – or the authority that comes to a feminist leader from outside herself, which includes
  a. the *assigned authority* she is given by others (e.g. a board of directors or trustees, the people who elected her the leader, etc.);
  b. the *positional authority* that her leadership role gives her (hiring, firing, managing people and finances, representing, raising resources, making strategic decisions, etc.);
  c. the *earned authority* that she gains by using her assigned and positional authority carefully and fairly, by sharing her power with others, by acting inclusively, and because of the personal attributes, experience, and skills – or *intrinsic power* – that she brings to her role. There is a lot of evidence that the best feminist leaders are those who convert their assigned authority into earned authority in a short space of time, so that their leadership is supported by all those engaged in the enterprise with them, and not just a set of external actors!

At the organizational or movement building level, feminist leadership must also wrestle with five key *expressions of power* that are attendant in such processes[49],[50]:

Power to – refers to the agency and capacity to act that leadership must leverage, within itself and in others, to create change; it is about the strategic skills, experience, insight, etc., that can be marshaled and mobilized towards the transformative agenda that has been adopted; *power to* is the recognition of what we, the change makers, bring to the table – the intrinsic power described above;

Power over – derives from direct power and positional / assigned authority, the control (direct or indirect) over the human and other resources within the process, and the way such control can very quickly slip into domination; also control over the use and deployment of resources, decision-making, etc.;

Power with – the effective empowerment and enabling of all those engaged in the transformative process to create solidarity, mutual support systems, safety nets, etc. [This is the power that tests whether leaders are acting as individual heroes / heroines with followers, or as initiators and sustainers of collective processes of change with a number of fellow-travellers!] ;

Power within – this is often the source of the sustainability of feminist organizations and movements, since this relates to the intrinsic power mentioned earlier, but also to the capacity to regenerate oneself and one's strategies in response to the challenges and reversals that feminist change processes inevitably unleash. The power within also includes, in Naila Kabeer's classic term, those "intangible resources"[51] – such as knowledge, access to information, influence, contacts, etc. - that can be leveraged for the cause or organization, and make up a distinct characteristic of leadership; and

Power under - in many ways this is the most complex but pervasive expression of power in women's organizations, and helps us understand why people who have experienced abuse,

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[49] Jo Rowlands, 1997: Questioning Empowerment – Working with Women in Honduras, Oxford, Oxfam.
[50] Veneklasen with Miller, 2002, *op.cit*.
[51] Naila Kabeer, 1994, "Reversed Realities: Gender hierarchies in development thought", London, Verso Press

oppression and trauma, when they gain power (especially power to and power over), often become abusive, authoritarian, and oppressive themselves. Steven Wineman, who has developed this concept through his work on survivors of conflict, trauma and violence, posits that *power under* emerges from *powerless rage*, which unleashes both the destructive power of sabotage and subversion that is often unconsciously deployed by those who have experienced severe oppression or trauma, as well as the constructive power for building movements to confront and overcome injustice[52]. Internally, survivors of trauma and violence find it difficult to transit from being objects / victims of oppression to subjects and agents of change; they are unable to hold and exercise power non-oppressively. Since feminist organizations are often created, led, and staffed by women, many of whom are survivors of various traumatic or oppressive experiences, the *politics of powerlessness* creates behavioral patterns that affect organizational functioning in profound and disturbing ways:

We have known for a long time that tendencies toward domination and top-down practices don't just exist in mainstream society, but also within progressive… movements and organizations – that we internalize these tendencies and carry them with us, no matter how honestly and deeply we believe in egalitarian principles and values. As products of a society organized around domination, the struggle to create equal power relations is always internal as well as external. I am suggesting that the same is true regarding powerlessness, and that we need to pay the same kind of scrupulous attention to power-under within social change movements that is needed to struggle against tendencies toward power-over. In fact domination and powerlessness are two sides of the same coin, and are interrelated not only between individuals but also within individuals in ways that are critical to examine and understand.[53]

An excellent example of the destructive and constructive capacity of *power under* is what many seasoned African feminists call the " The Zanzibar Experience" - a promising meeting that turned into a nightmare of pain, anger, and recriminations. In 2003, a group of feminists met in Zanzibar to plan the African Feminist Congress. Thirty-five of them met on a Monday, and soon discovered that assumptions each woman had made about the others' unarticulated individual and organizational politics weren't holding up – in other words, there was a lot of *powerless rage* playing itself out in the process. By Thursday, back-biting, hostility, tears, bitterness and chaos reigned. The Congress didn't happen, and the participants learned the difficult lesson that theory and practice don't always go together. On the positive side, the Zanzibar experience led African feminist leaders to realize that one of the first steps to effective feminist leadership is to acknowledge that we come into the movement with different histories and experiences, and consequently, we need to create basic rules of engagement to govern how we treat each other, and how to handle our own destructive tendencies. The African Feminist Charter[54], the first such code of conduct in the feminist world, was the powerful gift of the Zanzibar debacle.

Power in organizations:

Leadership is practiced, for the most part, in organizational settings. Having unpacked a whole range of concepts about power, it is now necessary to understand the dynamic of power within organizations, in order to address how feminist leadership can create

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[52] Steven Wineman, 2003, "Power-Under: Trauma and Nonviolent Social Change", Cambridge, MA., downloadable from www.TraumaandNonviolence.com , P.47 - 118

[53] Steven Wineman, 2003, *ibid.,* P.48

[54] Downloadable from www.africanfeministforum.org/Charter

genuinely different structures for the achievement of their goals. So it is important to understand organizations more clearly. An organization is defined as *"a social arrangement which pursues collective goals, controls its own performance, and has a boundary separating it from its environment."* [55] Organizations can be either **formal** (legally constituted and recognized entities like cooperatives, trade unions, companies, foundations or NGOs) or **informal** (not legally constituted, but structures created for the fulfillment of some purpose or goal – such as a farmer's group, women's savings and credit groups, collectives, etc.).

Organizations – whether formal or informal - are microcosms of the social environment from which they emerge. But most of us assume that unlike social structures like the family or clan, which are replete with gender and other biases and hierarchies, organizations are rational, logical entities where stated values, goals and policies will be operationalized in all its processes. Unfortunately, research in organizational behavior has shown that this is simply not true – organizations, after all, are created and run by human beings, and human beings are not entirely rational! What is more, organizations emerge from social institutions in which a wide range of power imbalances and inequalities are embedded. Rao and Kelleher note, for instance, that

> "Organizations swim in a sea of societal norms, which not only influence organizational behavior but often operate below the level of consciousness…. They constrain organizational efforts to challenge gender-biased norms both in the society and in the organization…. [but] The building blocks of many of our organizations are gender biased in ways that are quite invisible." [56]

Consequently, another social scientist, Geoffrey Wood, argues that despite the formal norms and values that we may create for our organizations, we are not always able to leave behind our familial and social conditioning when we enter our offices[57]. Wineman would probably add that we are also unable to leave behind the early experiences of powerlessness that damage our self esteem and disable us from using our *power within* constructively. To make the point, Wood asks: "What social and cultural distance does an official have to travel from home to work every day?"[58], and this question applies equally to any of us in our diverse endeavors. We clearly bring to organizations – whether at leadership level or otherwise – the biases, conditioning, experiences with power, and other psychic baggage, as well as our aspirations, high-minded goals, and good intentions.

This is equally true for feminists, but harder to address since we see ourselves as the agents of transformation of the inequalities created by others, by mainstream ideologies and institutions. Indeed, there is now much more open discussion, in spaces like the AWID Forum internationally, as well as in domestic spaces, that feminist organizations and feminist leaders have not always succeeded in creating environments remarkably different from those of their male social justice activists. A range of issues – "the founder syndrome", misuse or abuse of power, lack of space for younger women's agendas and leadership, and so forth – have emerged much more openly in recent times. Perhaps much of this is because of our failure to "walk the distance", or recognize our own internalized experiences

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[55] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organizations

[56] Aruna Rao and David Kelleher, 2008, "Unravelling Institutionalized Gender Inequality", Gender at Work Occasional Paper, www.genderatwork.org/learning , P. 5-6

[57] Geoffrey D. Wood, 1994, "Bangladesh: Whose Ideas? Whose Interests?", London: Intermediate Technology Publications, and "Social Dimensions of Governance", World Bank / Bangladesh National Institutional Review, cited in Rao & Kelleher, 2008, *op.cit*.

[58] Geoffrey D. Wood, "Social Dimensions of Governance", World Bank / Bangladesh National Institutional Review, cited in Rao & Kelleher, 2008, *op.cit*.

with power. Feminist leaders are usually more conscious and sensitive to their visible power than to their hidden and agenda-setting power; i.e., to their power *for* and *to*, not their power *over*. But unless we get past this, there is little chance that our leadership will be transformative, or even particularly feminist.

In order to move towards more effective and transformative engagements with our power, and create more effective organizations and movements, it is useful to examine the concept of the ***"deep structure" of organizations and movements***[59],[60], where most of the indirect and hidden power and *power under* is located, and from where direct and visible power is resisted, sabotaged, or subverted.

Fig.1 – Some Facets of the "Deep Structure" of Organizations
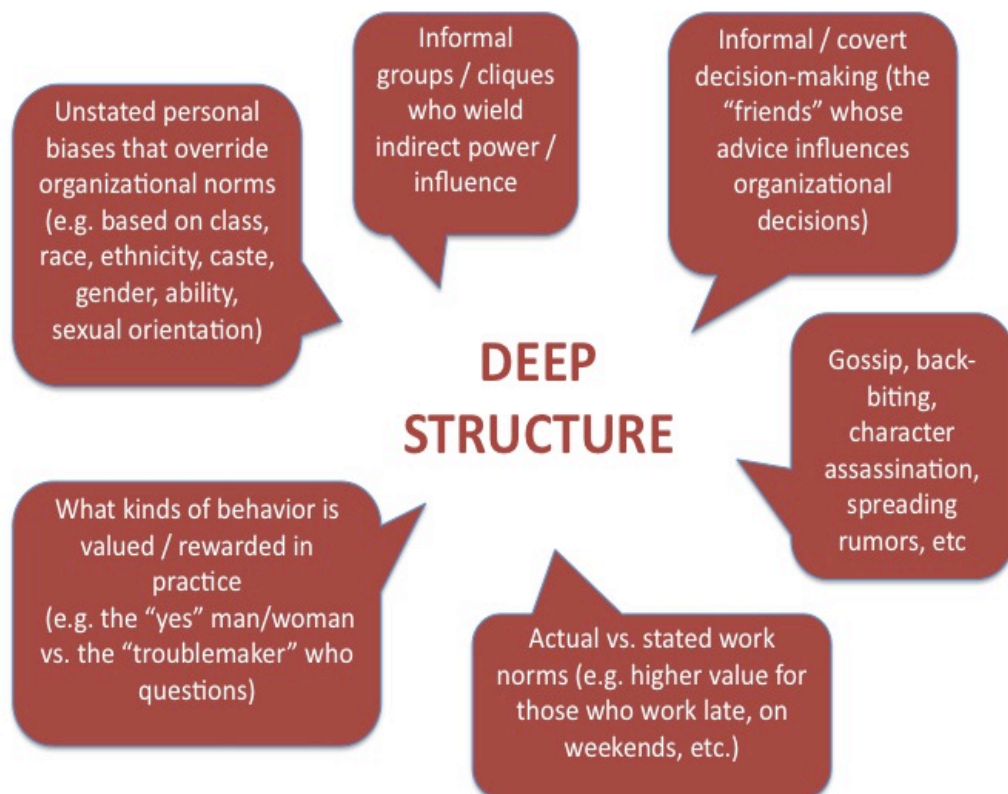
Deep structure is a vital organizational concept, and refers to the hidden sites and processes of power and influence, the implicit culture, the informal values and systems of reward and recognition, all of which have enormous impact on how people and the organization actually function. Deep structures are, in a sense, like the elephant in the room – we all know they're there, but we don't know how to name them and tackle them analytically or practically. To illustrate the point, some common dimensions of organizational deep structures is presented in Fig. 1 (next page).

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[59] Aruna Rao, Rieky Stuart and David Kelleher, Gender at Work: Organizational Change for Equality, Bloomfield CT, Kumarian Press, 1999

[60] Aruna Rao and David Kelleher, "Leadership for social transformation: some ideas and questions on institutions and feminist leadership", Gender and Development, Vol. 8, No. 3, November 2000, pp.74 – 79, P.75

Feminist organizational development practitioners have found that deep-seated resistance to organizational change, especially towards more gender equal and just practices, arises from the deep structure, and without specific tools to unearth and transform it, only superficial changes will occur. Within feminist organizations and movements, deep structures are even more complex, especially where there have been attempts to create "flat" or "circular" or "non-hierarchical" structures. Hierarchies and power structures have arisen in these regardless, but operate at the level of deep structure, making them even more difficult to see, address, or transform. As early as 1970, Jo Freeman wrote about "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" and the hidden power hierarchies that had emerged in the organizations of the American women's liberation movement of the time[61], and about the use of "trashing" to discredit / ostracise / demoralize / disempower someone[62]. At least some part of the "trashing" phenomenon is a manifestation of *power under*, and is a classic deep structure phenomenon that continues till today.

Deep structures are also important because this is where the culture of the organization is embedded and reproduced – no matter what the formal, stated, or aspired-for culture may be. It is also where people's internalized attitudes and behaviors are manifested, contributing to the construction of that culture. And the less the organization's visible structure enables open processing of its members' conflicts, aspirations, ideas, and problems, the more these are driven into the deep structure, making it a site of tension, resistance, subversion, and sabotage. In other words, the more open, transparent, and accountable an organization is, the shallower and less destructive will the deep structure be.

Popular Myths About / Within Feminist Organizations

- Women will lead differently because they are women
- Women will share power more readily, more equally
- Because we're all women, we don't have to worry about power within the organization/movement
- Because we are feminist women, we / our organizations cannot be oppressive, exclusionary, or undemocratic
- Our organization is "flat" - we don't believe in hierarchy, we are all equal here, and have equal say in all the decisions
- Having formal leaders and leadership roles will reproduce patriarchal organizational forms
- Formalizing decision-making power and accountability systems is patriarchal and bureaucratic
- We are accountable to "the movement" (Which one? Where? How?), so we don't have to be concerned about accountability

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Despite the experience and challenges feminist organizations and movements have faced, and the recognition, if not naming, of the problems that are lurking in their deep structure, there are a surprising number of myths that survive about them - idealized notions about their superior handling of issues of power, facilitated by the deep structures that submerge and hide the problems. Although some may seem clichés, the more widespread ones are worth noting (see box):

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[61] Jo Freeman, 1970, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness", downloadable from www.struggle.ws
[62] Jo Freeman, 1976, "Trashing: The Dark Side of Sisterhood" *Ms. Magazine* (April): 29-51, 92-98.

A key task of feminist leadership development programs is therefore to arrive at a much clearer understanding of organizations and their deep structures, and to examine and surface deep structure dynamics, in order to build more transparent, accountable, and democratic ways of dealing with power in our organizational and movement structures. Leadership development programs must strengthen inputs on organizational behavior, culture, and organizational power dynamics, including – or especially – the deep structure dimension, and equip participants with tools to address these. They also have to help participants come to honest terms with notions of internal equality – what that looks like and how it works in practice, and perhaps also get past fears of tackling power arrangements more openly.

2.   Principles and Values

It is a moot point whether principles and values should have preceded politics and purpose in a document on feminist leadership. Regardless, they are critical to our discussion because leadership does not occur in a moral or social vacuum – it is always informed by values, whether these are explicit or not; and values are not held only by progressive leaders, since even autocrats, warlords, terrorists and dictators create a moral justification for their tyranny and violence. Thus, leadership embraces the values and principles that are consonant with its mission and purpose, or which have framed or catalyzed that purpose.

It is useful to begin by distinguishing between values and principles, and that we need to discuss values before principles. ***Values are the ethical norms that guide behavior; principles are norms that guide action***. Obviously, they are not mutually exclusive – there is not only a good deal of overlap between them, but many principles derive from values. For instance, equality and equity are values as well as principles; but functioning in democratic, transparent and accountable ways are principles derived from the value of equality. Similarly, the value of gender equality guides the actions for empowering women.

Principles and values are particularly important in conflict situations, whether the conflict is within an organization, or the organization is dealing with the effects of conflict in the external environment - such as a political crisis or war. This is precisely when it is tempting to jettison principles and values in order to deal with the short-term crisis; which is why feminist leaders must ensure that their organizations and movements develop sound and explicitly-articulated principles that can inform strategic choices during precarious times. But building consensus about values and principles is itself a challenging task. Some feminist leaders stand vehemently for equal legal rights for women or women's right to choice, but are deeply uncomfortable supporting gay rights movements; others will gladly march with allies in demanding democratic governance, but avoid instituting the same principles in their own organizational structures. The value dimension is therefore more than rhetoric for creating a moral high ground, but an active, alive instrument of feminist politics.

There are several core values and principles that feminism has embraced throughout history, with some variation based on culture and context. The following table attempts to capture some of these in a simple form to advance our discussion, though it is not intended to be an exhaustive list:

Feminist Values and Principles[63]

Values	Principles

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[63] These draw heavily on Srilatha Batliwala, "The Power of Movements: Clarifying Our Concepts," in *Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements*, AWID, 2008, p.11-12.

Equality, equity, and inclusion for all regardless of gender, race, religion, age, ability, ethnicity, class, caste, nationality, location, or sexual orientation	Equality under law; Equity and equality in policies; Transform all social relations of power that oppress, exploit, or marginalize women and men, on the basis of their gender, race, religion, age, ability, ethnicity, class, caste, nationality, location, or sexual orientation
The human rights of all peoples to achieve their full potential, as long as it does not impede or constrain the rights of others	Enforcement of the full body of human rights through existing and new international instruments; Against fundamentalisms of all kinds
The basic right and entitlement of all people to food, shelter, health, education, and livelihood,	Economic justice, including equitable access to productive resources, employment, and basic services for all
Physical security and integrity, freedom from violence or coercion in any form, and the **right to choice** in reproductive and sexual life	Zero tolerance for gender-based and other forms of violence; Freedom of choice in sexual and reproductive life
Peace	Nonviolence; stand against all forms of war, conflict, militarization,
A healthy planet	Sustainable development; Ecologically sound practices in personal, organizational life; for public policy that promotes sustainability
Honor diversity and difference	Against religious, ethnic, racial, and other fundamentalisms
Democracy, transparency, accountability	Voice and vote for all people; Participatory, transparent and accountable governance at all levels and in all institutions, private and public; Right to public information; Associational freedom and right to freedom of expression
Changing the use and practice of power	Sharing power, consultative, collective, transparent and accountable decision-making

Another way of articulating core values and principles is through naming the "non-negotiables" that feminist leaders and their organizations will protect and advance. An example of such non-negotiables, listed by key feminist leaders and feminist leadership development experts at a recent workshop[64] are presented below:

Feminist Leadership – some "Non-Negotiables"

Feminist leadership *must* include an active participatory attitude, and inclusion, at all levels of the organization. This applies particularly to integration of people / women from marginalized groups.

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[64] By participants of the CREA Workshop "Building Feminist Leadership: Looking Forward, Looking Back", November 12 & 13, 2008, Cape Town, South Africa

Feminist leaders must have extensive knowledge of the issues with which the organization engages.

Feminist Leadership is sustainable only when women are able to balance all aspects of their lives.

Decision-making must be transparent for a viable and vibrant leadership to flourish. This involves a clear, shared decision-making process that pools strengths of participants, and allows everyone to have some power, and an atmosphere that facilitates every person's strengths. Each person in an organization must have some authority, as well as tools, information, responsibility and accountability.

The organization's membership at large must understand their roles and be involved in certain decisions, and in the evolution of the organization's structure.

Feminist leadership must ensure that the same rights apply to all, and that these rights are indivisible. Organization members must have full knowledge of the organization's philosophy and agenda, and should be able to choose, as much as possible, how they work within the organization, and how much influence they have in decision-making.

Feminist leadership must be used to intervene in structures of power that keep the world unjust; it must challenge multiple oppressions, but gender justice must be a priority.

Leadership is a process, a goal, a practice and a means.

A feminist organization needs an affirmative vision of change that takes it forward, rather than focusing only on oppression.

Feminist leaders need to constantly challenge and rethink organizational structure.

There must be space for leaders of all generations, and we must embrace diversity, inclusiveness and mutual respect.

We must act as feminist transformational agents, and understand that people who hold [formal] power aren't necessarily the best leaders.

Since our politics is driven by these values, principles, and non-negotiables, our practice of power has to be transformed by them. Feminist leaders and organizations can use this normative framework in several ways, e.g.:

- to **articulate their values and principles in more specific, contextualized ways** to reflect the culture and socio-political environment in which it operates;
- to **translate them into *policies*, and more importantly, *practices***, within their organizations and movements;
- to **resolve problems and conflicts** in organizational life;
- **build more inter-sectional and less-fragmented strategies** in order to address multiple sets of principles; and
- **build its advocacy agenda and alliances** according to these values and principles.

These are critical priorities that leadership development programs should address. I emphasize this because very often, feminist leaders will stand vehemently for equal legal rights for women or women's right to choice, but their concept of choice may be limited to certain socially acceptable choices, and would be deeply uncomfortable or antagonistic to

supporting LBTI[65] rights; or they will gladly march with allies in demanding democratic governance, but avoid instituting the same principles in their own organizational structures. The value dimension is therefore key to sound feminist leadership - not as rhetoric for seizing the moral high ground, but as an active, alive instrument of feminist politics.

3. **Politics and Purpose**

A key component of feminist leadership is its ***politics and the nature of the mission*** (i.e. purpose) that guides it. By ***politics*** is meant the analysis of socio-economic realities, and the ideological lens that informs that analysis (e.g., profit and free enterprise, public good, gender equality, social justice, etc.). And ***purpose*** refers to the longer-term vision and mission for change that emerges from that politics.

Feminist politics, based on contextually defined and situated feminist ideology (not some universal form of feminism), must inform feminist leadership, and the political agenda it pursues. In other words, ***transformative feminist leadership*** will use the analysis of gender and social discrimination in a particular society, community, or setting as its starting point, and will attempt to transform the structures or institutions it engages towards a more gender and socially equitable architecture in both formal and informal terms. And of course, this politics must begin at home, from within the organization, movement, or other location from which it is attempting to change the larger reality.

This of course begs the question – can feminist leadership occur without a transformative goal? Can it, for instance, be applied or used within a more reproductive context – such as running a business, managing a service NGO, or administering a museum? Indeed, even within these seemingly less revolutionary and more static settings, the feminist leader is still transforming *something* – perhaps the "psychic structure" of staff, as the Admira toolkit puts it, or the way staff problems are dealt with, or what is an organizational issue and what is not. But for most of us in women's movements, our concern with building feminist leadership is for broader social transformation that puts gender and social equality at the center of the mission.

Since we said at the outset that leadership is a means, not an end, politics and purpose is a critical component. ***Leadership development must therefore bring to the surface and equip people to articulate their politics and purpose in clear, conscious ways.*** This is where inputs of information, analytical tools, concepts, and ideas play a big part – women unfamiliar with the human rights framework, or with feminist concepts like patriarchy, may articulate their politics very differently from those aware of these transformative ideas[66]. ***Expanding the repertoire of possibility and intellectual horizons, exposing participants to new analytical frameworks, information and knowledge to which they may not have had access, is thus an essential component of building more transformative politics and purpose through leadership development. These tools and frameworks can also become touchstones for strategic decision-making when they face dilemmas and crises.***

Politics and purpose also distinguishes feminist leadership from all other forms – including feminine leadership, women's leadership, etc. – where the leader/s may be female (or male), but does not adopt a feminist political agenda: i.e., an agenda that clearly privileges and centers women's empowerment and gender equality within its social transformation

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[65] Lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersex

[66] Which is why these inputs form a critical part of the leadership development approaches of organizations like Center for Women's Global Leadership, CREA, Just Associates, the Domestic Workers Alliance of the USA, the Forum of Women's NGOs in Central Asia, GROOTS International, International Women's Rights Action Watch (Asia Pacific), MADRE, Women's Learning Partnership, and other avowedly feminist organizations.

goals, internally and externally. Feminist politics – whether it is named or not – will analyze both the social order and the particular changes it seeks through a gender and social justice lens, and will assume that social justice (such as labor or land rights) cannot be achieved without centering gender justice within the process.

4.   Practice

And finally, we come to the largest domain of leadership – the transactional, lived, quotidian realm of practice. This is the component that constitutes the largest chunk of most leadership development and training programs. At the most primary level, transformative feminist leadership is about ways of doing and enabling a myriad things, which are categorized as the different types of "work" these practices fall into:

- **Visioning work**: developing and articulating a theory of change, clarifying vision and objectives, determining focus (issue or sector) and approach, etc.;
- **Political work**: assessing political environment and opportunities, social power analysis of the context and intervention area, anticipating political reactions, building alliances, etc.;
- **Strategic work**: developing and guiding strategies, monitoring implementation, evaluating impact, analyzing gains and setbacks, revising direction and approach, etc.;
- **Relationship work**: this is a critical component of leadership practice, and includes inducting and training others, mobilizing constituents / "target groups" /stakeholders, motivating and sustaining energy and morale, imparting and imbibing passion and commitment, building alliances and goodwill, resolving conflicts and tensions, etc.;
- **Communication work**: which includes internal and external communication systems, creating communication strategies, ensuring quality content, strategic communication when required (e.g. use of media), use of new technologies to create effective and strategic external communication, use of traditional technologies (folk theatre, song, etc.) where more appropriate, etc.
- **Resourcing work**: finding and sustaining financial and other resources (expertise, materials, information, ideas, etc.) that are critical to the transformation process; this may include some relationship building work with donors and supporters, and skills such as proposal-writing and building networks of contacts to access expertise, information, materials, trainers, etc.; and
- **Managerial work**: seemingly humdrum, but a very critical component of leadership practice, including democratic, transparent and accountable policies and mechanisms for internal functioning, managing financial and legal obligations and requirements, allocating human and financial resources, auditing correct utilization, reporting to external constituencies and stakeholders, etc. etc.

In examining current feminist leadership development approaches, we have to assess the relative emphasis given to *imparting skills* in the above areas, vs. *the normative framework* – i.e., transformative power, politics, and principles – that must underlie those skills. In other words, we cannot approach skill-building in an instrumental way, or separate them from our ideological position. Skills are not neutral, portable abilities – they are shaped by values and politics – as for example in the way relationships are managed, conflicts are resolved, or salary scales and job descriptions are framed. ***Our leadership development modules must therefore advance an approach that does not disconnect practices from power, politics, and values.***

What is more, feminist leadership training must enable practitioners to converge the four dimensions of leadership in any setting. Today, much of leadership training is focused on the practice piece, with little attention to equipping practitioners with concrete ways of

articulating and practicing the other three dimensions. This leads to further intensifying deep structures, as we have seen. One dimension of this is the failure, in many locations, of feminist organizations and movements to secure their future through supporting the growth and advancement of young feminist leaders.

Many long-established feminist women's organizations and movements are beginning to "age out" either because their leadership has failed to invest in developing younger leaders, or because their culture and environment are unwittingly unwelcoming to younger women. ***Without conscious attention to the way practices converge with power, politics and principles, younger feminists tend to be marginalized or even ousted from processes because they challenge established priorities, analyses, and ways of doing.*** Some leadership development initiatives are now specifically addressing this issue[67], but must not reproduce the gaps that older leadership programs contained. Several young feminist initiatives are in active discussion about these issues, and have attempted to create guidelines for more multi-generational approaches that are well worth integrating within organizational settings.[68]

Sometimes, this means moving out of our own spaces and comfort zones, going into the spaces of the women we wish to reach rather than inviting them into ours. Sanushka Mudaliar of AWID speaks of her experience of working with young Southeast Asian women in the garment industry in Cambodia. When activists went into the factories, and introduced concepts directly related to their work, the women were galvanized. In Sanushka's words, "When you show them where you want to go, not just what your values are, feminism is electrifying!"[69]

Fig.2 captures the inter-connectedness of these four elements in a "diamond" that can also be the basis of an assessment framework for our training approaches.

The Role of the Self in Leadership

When examining the leadership diamond, it is immediately obvious that it should not – and does not – float in the air like a kite without a string. Leadership is practiced by people, so the diamond is anchored within individuals, whether they are leading alone or together with others. The diamond, therefore, is shaped and transformed, in practice, by the SELF – the particular attributes, talents, histories, experiences, and psychic structure that each individual brings to the leadership role. And we have seen that certain kinds of life experiences can damage the self at deep psychic levels that then manifest themselves negatively when we gain positions of authority and power. The more accurate depiction of the diamond, therefore, is presented in Fig.3, where the self surrounds our implementation of power, politics, principles, and practices.

Ironically, it is feminism that first articulated the importance of the self in social change, with the coining of the slogan "The personal is political". A good deal of earlier research and analysis focused on the "work-family" divide, and the importance of self-care, self affirmation, healing, and less fragmented approaches to our change mission. But over the decades, thanks to a host of pressures that cannot be enumerated here, even feminists have forgotten these fundamentals as they struggle for the survival of their movements and organizations in an increasingly hostile social, political and funding environment.

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[67] See, for instance, the CREA South Asia Movement Building and Rights Institute, or the CREA- Akina Mama wa Afrika Feminist Movement Building and Advocacy Institute, www.creaworld.org
[68] See for instance, the Multigenerational Toolkit produced by the Young Feminist Activism initiative of AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development) prior to the 2008 AWID Forum in Cape Town.
[69] Experience shared by Sanushka at the

But recent research, by feminist capacity builders and other organizational development experts, has re-emphasized the critical role of the self in both constructing and destroying the best endeavors, and the importance, therefore, of addressing the self in leadership development work[70],[71]. And as we have seen in examining "power under", there is also a growing awareness that social transformation must include, if not begin with, transformation at the individual level.[72] The damage caused by the neglect of this dimension, and the importance of self-care and balance, was also a key theme of discussion among feminist movement actors at the 2008 AWID Forum in Cape Town, South Africa[73].

Fig. 3: The Self and the Feminist Leadership Diamond
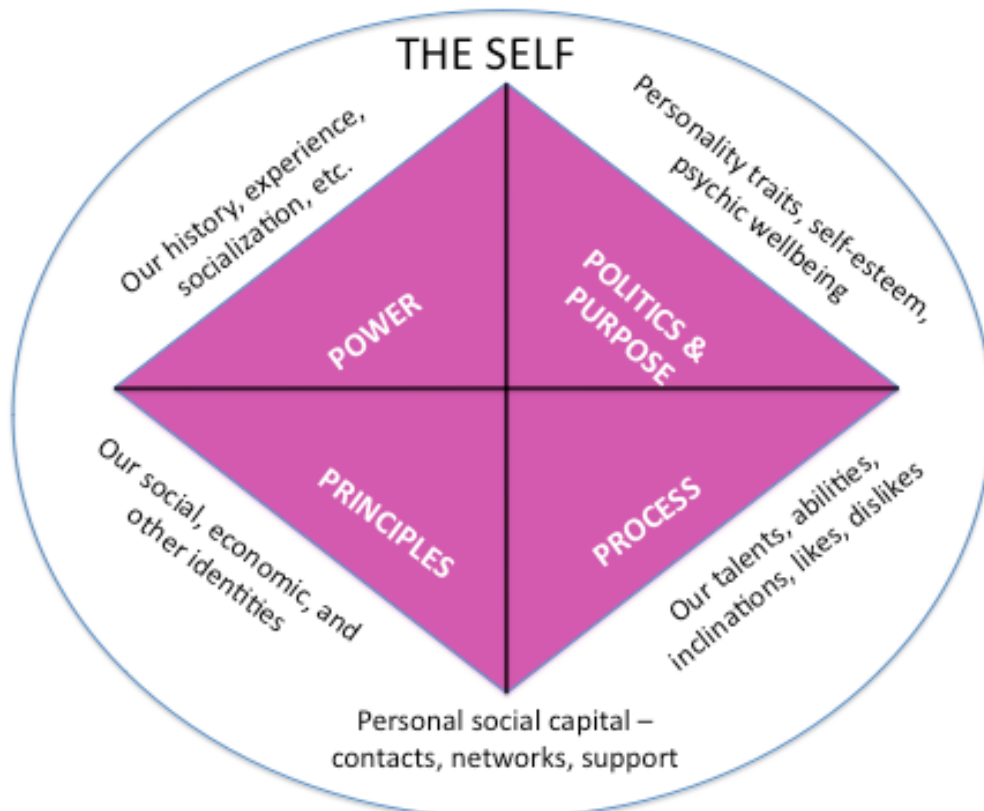
While the self comprises a wide range of factors – and some that are yet to be named or analyzed! – the most important from a leadership perspective are:

- **Personality and self-esteem** – people with low self-esteem tend to be insecure, and are more likely to become authoritarian in positions of authority, threatened by the competencies of their colleagues or subordinates, and less willing to share power. This is often not intentional, but the playing out of subconscious scripts, but create enormous problems in organizations. These are very deep dimensions of the self that need to be addressed and tackled with structured support.
- **History and experience** - especially experiences with power (both positive and negative) which shape our attitude towards it, and often override our intellectual understanding

[70] Kristen Zimmerman, Neelam Pathikonda, Brenda Salgado and Taj James, 2010, "Out of the Spiritual Closet – Organizers Transforming the Practice of Social Justice", Oakland CA, The Movement Strategy Center

[71] Michel Friedman and Shamim Meer (Eds), 2007, Change is a Slow Dance, www.genderatwork.org/learning-center

[72] Michael C. Edwards and Gita Sen, 2000, "NGOs, Social Change and the Transformation of Human Relationships: A 21st Century Civic Agenda", *Third World Quarterly*, 21 (4):605-616

[73] Srilatha Batliwala, 2009, "Feminism's Coming of Age: Celebrating Diversity and Power", in *Development*, 52 (2)

of it; history also includes the way our experiences in multiple contexts generate insight, political savvy, and strategic skills;

- **Personal social capital** – our individual histories and experiences also generate social capital - personal contacts, connections, support systems, networks – that are part of the unique resources we bring to our organizational role, and these become particularly important assets in leadership positions;

- **Talents, abilities, inclinations** – these are part of the unique package that every individual brings to leadership, and the special gifts that they can leverage in leadership roles (a good sense of humor, for instance, or skilled articulation – the "gift of the gab" – or artistic or musical skill); and finally,

- **Identities** – the multilayered identities based on our class, race, gender, ethnicity, caste, ability, religion, location, sexual orientation - that in turn shaped our histories and experiences in particular ways, especially of power - such as being a rural Dalit woman, a sex worker, a Muslim woman survivor of communal conflict, a woman with a disability, etc. Similarly, coming from a powerful social class or group also shapes our sense of privilege and the power we invisibly wield in an organization, regardless of formal position in the hierarchy. We bring these identities into leadership roles in both subtle and overt ways, and they sometimes determine how we respond to different kinds of leadership challenges.

Recognizing the powerful role of the self is critical in the feminist leadership context because women's psychic structures have been constructed not only through the usual institutions, socialization processes and experiences (like family, school, peers, etc.), but through the particular nature of the patriarchal structures in which they have lived and the oppressions they have consequently negotiated. So for instance, women are often less comfortable with holding overt power, and more comfortable exercising it indirectly, or with challenging or subverting it (power under) as they have done in most other locations (such as within the family or marriage). This leads to very specific distortions that need to be surfaced, and women often need additional tools to address their internalized – and often unrecognized – dilemmas with the kind of overt authority, responsibility and accountability that leadership roles bring.

On the other hand, leadership development from a feminist perspective has also been extremely transformative for individuals, enabling deep-seated changes in the self that have resulted not only in a sense of self-awareness, empowerment and liberation, but in new ways of acting for change in the external world. In CREA's own experience, for instance, women undergoing these personal transformations during training workshops have gone on to challenge violence, feudal oppression, and religious fundamentalism in their own families, communities and villages. Feminist leadership development programs must therefore integrate mechanisms for enabling participants to analyze their psychic structure – the SELF – in a safe space, with expert support, and provide longer-term support systems to not only deal with and overcome the negative baggage within the self, but also to unleash the profoundly transformative potential that lies within it.

This brings us to the end of the discussion of "What is it?", and leads us to address the remaining two facets of deconstructing abstract concepts like leadership.
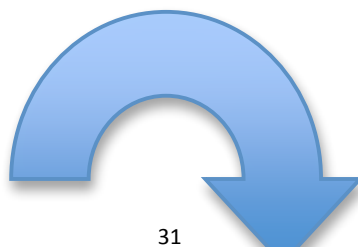
III. Where is it? Sites of Feminist Leadership

Many amorphous, hard-to-pin-down concepts can be grasped partly by locating them within specific sites in which they occur. In the case of feminist leadership, there are as many locations as there are power structures and institutions that subordinate women:

➢ **The family, clan, caste, tribe or community** – these are primary sites where feminist leadership for transformation is practiced, especially by feminists and their grassroots movements, seeking equality and transformation in these critical institutions where the majority of women must negotiate their lives and their rights.

➢ **The state** and its various arms – feminist leadership and movements have traditionally targeted the state, regimes, and public policies as key sites that can either enable or disable their empowerment. Legal systems have been particular targets, since they enshrine the socially prevalent systems of gender inequality and discrimination. But government policies, and the creation of enabling mechanisms like gender budgets and national women's commissions, have also been the targets of feminist leadership and activism.

➢ **The market and private sector** – this is a site where feminist leadership has gained a significant foothold, though feminist leadership principles and practices have also been instrumentalized to advance corporate and market goals[74]. Corporations and management schools have eagerly co-opted many leadership practices of women, feminist and other, and applied them to enhance productivity and motivation.

➢ **Civil society, women's movements and other social movements** – this is a more familiar site where we have seen feminist leadership transacted. While many civil society organizations – especially those led by men and non-feminist women – have attempted to incorporate elements of the feminine leadership "style", these are often cosmetic or superficial in nature. On the other hand, gender-sensitive male leaders can sometimes practice feminist leadership principles more authentically and effectively than non-feminist women leaders, or even feminist leaders who have not been able to deal honestly with their organizational deep structures or problems with handling power in more transparent and accountable ways. The most interesting civil society sites, however, are those where consciously feminist leaders experiment with creating organizational structures and systems that intentionally bring a transformative character to their power, politics, principles and practice.

➢ **Cultural and religious institutions:** for many feminist leaders, these are critical sites of engagement and transformation. Indigenous women in Latin America, Roma women in East Europe, feminist Christian women, and even HIV/AIDS activists in Africa, have confronted the gender discrimination embedded in cultural and religious norms, and challenged the re-construction of tradition and religious norms to enforce male privilege. Mexican indigenous women, for instance, have insisted that oppressive elements of pre-colonial indigenous culture be acknowledged and discarded in the larger (and male-led) indigenous people's movements[75]; similarly,

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[74] Yvonne Due Billing & Mats Alvesson, "Questioning the Notion of Feminine Leadership: A Critical Perspective on the Gender Labelling of Leadership", in Gender, Work & Organization, Volume 7 Issue 3, Pages 144 – 157. Dec 2002.

[75] Marusia Lopez, "Las mujeres en el movimiento indigena de Mexico: Nuevas Rutas para Transformar el Poder" (Women in the Indigenous People's Movements of Mexico: New Paths for Transforming Power), case study

> Roma women are demanding that oppressions arising from patriarchy be separated from other cultural expressions in articulations of "Roma Culture."[76]

All these are key sites of learning for feminist leadership development programs. Specifically, they challenge us to help practitioners unravel the particular ways in which each site reacts to feminist power, politics, principles and practice, and equip them with analytical and practical tools for authentic and transformative engagements in each location.
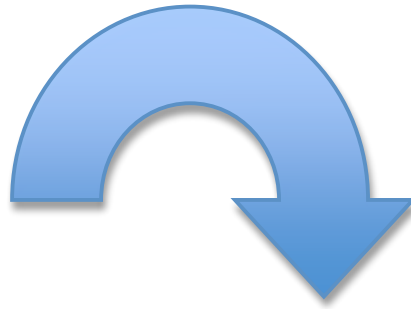
prepared for AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development), December 2007, available soon at www.awid.org .

[76] Rita Izsak, "The European Romani Women's Movement: International Roma Women's Network", case study prepared for AWID, October 2007, available soon at www.awid.org

IV. What does it look like? Feminist Ways of Leading

There are several illustrations of what feminist leadership looks like in practice, and these are worth examining to ground our discussion. One set of principles-in-action and leadership practices emerged out of a study of twenty women leaders from around the world, some openly feminist, some not, but all acting for gender equality, and practicing what we would describe, in terms of the definitions offered earlier in this paper, feminist leadership[77]. After in-depth interviews, the study located the following common elements in the way these women transacted their leadership:

➢ They create and sustain social change strategies that place ***changes in gender power relations at the center*** – They see gender justice and social justice as interconnected changes, and felt that male social justice leaders do not always see gender justice as integral to their agenda.

➢ They are not different just because they are women leaders, but because they are women leading with a ***transformative agenda*** that connects gender power to social change.

➢ Feminist leadership requires incredible ***agility and resilience*** because each step forward creates new and sometimes graver challenges or backlash. This makes feminist leaders stronger and smarter strategists and negotiators.

➢ The mission of gender equality and social justice is infused into ***every job, every activity and every location*** (running a journal, an NGO, an academic teaching program, a grassroots program).

➢ The mainstream does not reward and may even ***penalize feminist leadership*** – pressures come from family, community, church, party, government, or one's own organization. So feminist leadership requires risk-taking.

➢ Feminist leadership means the ***ability to influence agendas even without the formal power or authority to do so***, and the capacity to leverage larger-scale changes (in policy, legal rights, social attitudes, and power relations) with very marginal resources.

➢ Many of the leaders in the study did not see themselves as leaders in an individualistic sense, but as ***people at the vanguard*** of broader processes of change.

➢ ***Feminist leaders are often uncomfortable with their power***. Leadership had a negative connotation for many of them, and were uncomfortable being characterized as leaders. As one leader said, "Leadership is a condition that others attribute to you, not you to yourself."

➢ Feminist leaders emphasize the ***value of collective and multi-layered leadership***, the sharing of power and responsibility, and generally reject the male and "Western" "lone ranger" model of individual leadership.

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[77] Srilatha Batliwala and Aruna Rao, Women, Leadership and Social Change – Report of a Sounding Study conducted for the Ford Foundation (unpublished), July, 2002, p.11 - 18

➢ Consequently, feminist leadership is **not a one-way or top-down process**, but leads through consultation, participation and consensus-building. These leaders do not preach participation and responsiveness to their constituencies as much as they practice it. This approach, they felt, is both a weakness and a strength. It is slower – leading to shorter-term losses - but deeper, leading to longer-term gains.

➢ For feminist leaders, good leadership is about **relationship-building** - within their organizations, with their constituencies, and with both allies and opponents. They invest time and energy in building a broad range of relationships, and see no short-cut to this.

➢ They bring *"the feminine universe"* into their organizational practice – a resource that male leaders lack or are afraid to use in their workplace. They use women's traditional nurturing roles and relationship skills in their leadership practice.

➢ They are concerned with the **empowerment and transformation of men** – particularly from oppressed and excluded groups – as well as women. They work for gender and social equality, not just women's empowerment .

➢ Feminists are **introspective and critical about their own leadership** and the failings or shortcomings of their own movements and organizations. Feminist leaders emphasize the importance of constant self-examination with regard to power and its effects. They acknowledge the corrupting possibilities of power, especially formal power – egotism, arrogance, authoritarianism, selfishness - and create mechanisms to check their own use and abuse of power.

➢ They create **innovative organizational structures and governance practices** to bring their transformative agendas into their own organizations. For instance, They create spaces and opportunities for other leaders to emerge – e.g. giving younger staff real organizational power – because they believe feminist leadership must enable the emergence and growth of other leaders, rather than holding on to power and control.

DAWN Ontario offers these insights about the struggles in the practice of feminist leadership principles, to provide an image of how things can look when these struggles are successful, and neatly summing up the implementation of the feminist values and principles we outlined earlier:

> We may expect that feminist groups will be problem-free, or that we will create inclusive environments by virtue of our collective work. As women, we must acknowledge that we come from different experiences of leadership, and that our practices are informed by traditional, hierarchical structures. Sometimes we repeat the very practices we dislike, even when we are trying to do things differently. We may encounter other challenges, including women who bring destructive behaviors stemming from issues or a lack of power within our personal lives into our organizations. As feminists, …. We need to examine the structures we have come from, and consider how our experience informs our current practices.

> Within equality-seeking organizations, we may expect that our feminist members will not struggle with issues of power. Leaders need to be aware that power dynamics happen in any organization, and that some women are supportive while others are more comfortable with conflict. For example, a woman may gain power

through manipulation, claiming disempowerment when she cannot have things her way. We may become so afraid of conflict that we stop challenging, allowing individual women to take power away from our organization. This does not serve our collective interest, as our work toward equality and inclusion becomes lost within our own practices. We may feel uncomfortable with power struggles, but we are more at risk when we do not challenge exclusionary or destructive behaviors. Feminist leaders challenge destructive patterns that emerge, while continuously drawing on the skills and talents of women in our group.

Leaders of feminist equality-seeking organizations are accountable not only to our members and service users, but to the global movement for peace, equality and justice. We typically expect our leaders to ensure that our organization's finances are in good order, projects are on track, and public relations are effective. Feminist leaders are also responsible for ensuring that the perspective and analysis of our equality-seeking organization is brought to the larger feminist community. Women in leadership roles need to take every opportunity to build links with other women and women's organizations that share our agenda for equality and inclusion. We need to consider how we are accountable to our group and community, and if our service and advocacy work is effective or appropriate to the needs of women. As feminists, we must always remind ourselves of the larger reasons why we are drawn to equality-seeking work, and of our desire to transform our organizations and communities into safe, equitable, and inclusive places for all women.

….. Within the feminist practice of leadership, leaders are members of a team of women working toward a common goal of equality and inclusion. Each woman on the team has a unique skill or ability that is valuable to our common efforts. This does not mean that our roles and responsibilities are identical, but that our contributions and participation are equally valued. Whether a woman chairs a meeting, or prepares the food for a meeting, her contribution is important in advancing our equality-seeking work. …..

Members of equality-seeking organizations choose our leaders. As willing followers and supporters, we invest power in our leaders. We entrust they will share their skills and abilities with our group and provide opportunities to develop other women's leadership potential. For example, feminist leaders create opportunities for meaningful discussions where every woman's participation is encouraged. We expect our leaders to mentor others, drawing out the ideas and analysis of every woman in making decisions and creating strategies for our organizations. Feminist leadership is a vehicle for women and organizations to find power to deal with issues, change policies, and transform communities.[78]

The Admira Toolkit on Feminist Leadership Components[79] (which echoes some elements of our leadership diamond), developed by examining both the literature on feminist leadership and good practices, summarizes the three dominant components of feminist leadership that emerged from their study: skills, norms and values, and personal characteristics (the "self"). The detailed attributes and dimensions of each are listed as:

Skills:

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[78] DAWN Ontario, The Feminist Principle of Leadership, *op.cit*.

[79] Admira, no date, Section 8, Management & Leadership: Feminist Leadership, http://www.zenska-mreza.hr/prirucnik/en/en_read_management_leadership_8.htm

- Learning ability, dealing positively with criticism, curiosity, receptiveness or susceptibility
- Empowerment, recruiting competent people, making use of diversity, creating conditions for empowerment, delegating
- Cooperating, networking, oriented at stakeholders, connecting and attuning, not being defensive, oriented at internal cooperation

Norms and values

- Guiding vision, a forceful own vision, being inspiring, capacity to conceptualize, transforming ideas into action
- Open engagement, visible emotional involvement, passion and compassion, commitment with people, societal involvement
- Being a moral authority, actively [practicing] morality, being recognized as a moral authority, applying moral standards

Personal characteristics

- Locus of control, internal locus of control, self-knowledge, self consciousness, autonomy
- Credibility, congruity, being trustworthy, authenticity
- Emotional intelligence, able to handle own emotions, introspection, optimism, empathy

There are several common threads running through these descriptions of what feminist leadership looks like: first, they resonate the four dimensions of the feminist leadership "diamond" – power, politics and purpose, principles and values, and practice. They also point to the embedded dichotomy of aspiration vs reality: the way things *should be done* by feminist leadership, and the realities that derail the aspiration because of the baggage of history, culture, experiences of power, and pain that we bring to the process. But most importantly, they stress the need for concrete tools and mechanisms to ensure that feminist leadership is practiced in the best possible way, recognizing that many of us need these to overcome our own fear of power, internalized ways of using – and misusing – power, and that creating appropriately democratic and transparent structures can help us achieve our aspirations for truly feminist enterprises.

The messiness and embeddedness of our own experiences of power and powerlessness is beautifully deconstructed in Gender at Work's excellent documentation of their action-learning program with three South African social change and human rights organizations, entitled "Change is a Slow Dance". Gender at Work facilitators worked to help staff and leadership of these organizations to deepen their capacity for improving gender relationships and power inequalities both within the organization and in their programs. In one case, of an organization founded by women survivors of violence in Pietermaritzburg, there was a critical moment when the leadership team recognized how their own need for victimhood – and their entrapment in the politics of powerlessness - was damaging their leadership practices and blocking the organization's growth. During one workshop with the Gender at Work team in Cape Town, when this realization struck them, they undertook a powerful symbolic act of liberation from this negative force: they went to the top of Tabletop Mountain and threw their victimhood over the side.[80] The idea of the "feminine universe", which echoes Knight's point on celebration, ritual, joy and sadness, is also a very interesting dimension, and points to the role of transformative feminist leadership in

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[80] Jenny Bell and Fazila Gany, Justice and Women (JAW), in Michel Friedman and Shamim Meer (Eds), Change is a Slow Dance, Gender at Work, October 2007, P.53

breaking the "private-public" and work-family divides that have characterized modern organizations.[81]

These live examples and insights lead us to think about to what extent our feminist leadership development programs help practitioners develop greater clarity, and access concrete tools and mechanisms, for their own leadership practice, and be particularly attentive to the architecture and dynamics of power in their organizational or movement contexts.

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[81] Rao and Kelleher, 2000, *op.cit*.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to provide a framework for unraveling the complex and generally amorphous concept of leadership, and to illuminate the concept and practice of feminist leadership. The goal of the paper, however, was not to provide solutions and recipes, but food for thought for those of us engaged in building, strengthening and advancing feminist leadership for social transformation. It has sought to deconstruct the concept into some hopefully useful components, based on an extensive review of literature – scholarly and popular – on leadership, organizational behavior theory, power analysis, as well as on and feminism and feminist leadership.

While this framework has hopefully nailed the jelly to the wall more firmly than before, it is still tentative, and intended only to advance our debate. There may be many flaws and gaps that need to be filled, or dimensions of leadership that have not been incorporated.

We also hope that this framework will inform, challenge and support those of us engaged in feminist leadership training and development to look more critically at our approaches, and identify components that are currently missing, weak, or in need of revitalization in our curriculae and pedagogy.

It is also a beginning in creating a structure and more sensitive indicators to track and assess the impact and usefulness of leadership development programs – a very important goal at a time when donors are increasingly reluctant to fund leadership development because of the difficulty in establishing that it does, indeed, make a difference.

Perhaps it is most appropriate to conclude this paper with a crucial reminder: that feminist leadership's fundamental attribute should be, as the Admira toolkit insists, to "make waves." In other words, there is little point in leadership development programs, if they do not equip women to deal with the messy, frightening, dangerous but exhilarating business of feminist social transformation. For every great feminist leader we can think of from anywhere in the world, past and present has one thing in common: she led by challenging and disturbing the status quo.

Feminist leadership must make waves.

Definitions of leaders:

As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear; the next, the people hate.

The superior leader gets things done with very little motion. He imparts instruction not through many words but through a few deeds. He keeps informed about everything but interferes hardly at all. He is a catalyst, and though things would not get done well if he weren't' there, when they succeed he takes no credit. And because he takes no credit, credit never leaves him.

<div align="right">Both, Lao Tse, 604-531 B. C., in Tao Te Ching</div>

The first job of a leader is to define a vision for the organization.... Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality. Warren Bennis

Be willing to make decisions. That's the most important quality in a good leader. General George S. Patton Jr.

Managers have subordinates—leaders have followers. Murray Johannsen

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader. John Quincy Adams

A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be. Rosalynn Carter

I am looking for a lot of men who have an infinite capacity to not know what can't be done. Henry Ford

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Definitions of leadership:

Leadership is an intangible quality with no clear definition. That's probably a good thing, because if the people who were being led knew the definition, they would hunt down their leaders and kill them. Scott Adams, The Dilbert Principle

Leadership revolves around vision, ideas, direction, and has more to do with inspiring people as to direction and goals than with day-to-day implementation. A leader must be able to leverage more than his own capabilities. He must be capable of inspiring other people to do things without actually sitting on top of them with a checklist. ….
Leadership is a function of knowing yourself, having a vision that is well communicated, building trust among colleagues, and taking effective action to realize your own leadership potential. Warren Bennis

Leadership is a combination of strategy and character. If you must be without one, be without the strategy. Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf

Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good. Joanne Ciulla

Leadership is a process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to collective effort, and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve [that] purpose. Jacobs & Jaques

Leadership is influence - nothing more, nothing less. John Maxwell

Leadership is about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished. Richards and Engle

One of the hardest tasks of leadership is understanding that you are not what you are, but what you're perceived to be by others. Edward L. Flom

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea. Antoine de St. Exupery

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Definitions of "feminine" leadership:

….feminine leadership is the key to transforming organizations, communities and us. Long-term change has to happen in a new model where values such as integrity, compassion, listening, receiving and a win-win approach to negotiation play key roles. Feminine Leadership inspires authenticity, caring and sharing, a new leadership style and feminine ways of doing business. www.feminine-leadership.com

The feminine leadership style emphasizes cooperation over competition; intuition as well as rational thinking in problem solving, team structures where power and influence are shared within the group . . . interpersonal competence; and participative decision making. Marilyn Loden[82]

Feminine leadership is a social demand coming from the economic world. The McKinsey Quarterly report claims that feminine talent in organizations has competitive value, it's not about "best practice". The statistics of the report show the necessity of incorporating feminine values and talents for the companies to be more competitive and innovative. Many European female Directors are setting standards to incorporate feminine talent that otherwise would be lost to society and to the economies of their countries. The egalitarian presence of women's positions in the organizations is an indicator of progress and the opposite is perceived as an indicator of social delay. European Union, European Directive 2004/113/EC, 2004

… Feminine Leadership is a new social paradigm that allows the emergence of the feminine talent… Feminine leadership is a social commitment, not a tendency for women only. It represents a new paradigm, answering many of the questions that are being posed in this historic moment. www.literagofemenino.com, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona

The "feminine leadership" style, characterized by cooperation, participation, sharing of power and information, teamwork, energizing others, enhancing self-worth of others, etc., is a leadership style of the future. Nina Poloski

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[82] Feminine Leadership or How to Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys (Times Books, 1985)

Sacred feminine leadership is not about women taking over control from men. It is not about replacing patriarchal hierarchy with matriarchal hierarchy. It's not about passivity. Rather, it is about contributing sacred feminine attributes [unconditional love, being, holding space, serving, facilitating, allowing] to the human psyche, so that the doing and the being, the outer and the inner, are balanced. And, while it may be generally easier for women to contribute sacred femininity and men to contribute sacred masculinity [doing, achieving, analyzing], a dynamic balance within each person is what is actually required. Carol Hiltner[83]

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[83] "An Invitation to Sacred Feminine Leadership", presented at the 2007 Global Leadership Forum, Novosibirsk, Russia