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Honors: Leadership and IPC

Reflection #3

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Gender Leadership and Learned Culture

When I finished reading the chapter on gender and leadership I was first pleased to see that the gender gap is beginning to decrease with people learning and using ways to decrease it. Giving people the knowledge to see women as leaders is a strength for both women and men. I feel that most women are extremely underestimated when challenged with a leadership role because of gender stereotypes that people have before they even see a woman try the leadership role. Northouse explains that women encounter many barriers on their leadership journey called the leadership labyrinth. These barriers are described as human capital differences, gender differences, and prejudice “Removing these barriers will help ensure equal opportunity, access to the greatest talent pool, and diversity which has been linked to organizational success” (Northouse, p. 419). The chapter explains different reasons why there is a gender gap and it explains ways to decrease it as well. I found it reassuring that the chapter states that women are no less affective at leadership than men, and it gives ways for women and men to decrease their stereotyping. It explains that men and women attain different leadership styles, but overall women and men have the tools necessary to be great leaders. I see gender and leadership as a way to encourage women and men to not resort to stereotypes before a person takes on a leadership role.

The leadership instrument for this chapter was used to examine the gender stereotypes that contribute to the bias against women as leaders. The test had two different trials where you timed yourself to see how long it took you to categorize each word. For the first trial you either categorized the word with male/leader or female/supporter. The first trial took me 31.45 seconds to complete. I associated 8 of the words with male/leader and 12 of the words with female/supporter. I found it interesting that the test did not have an option for both male and female, but I figure that if most test takers would not believe that they do have gender bias if they pick both for all the words. For the second trial the categories were switched. You had to pick from either male/supporter or female/leader. I finished this trial with a time of 28.37 seconds. I associated 6 words with male/supporter and 14 with female/leader. I came to the conclusion that I have a bias associated with females. I think I have this bias because I am a female and drawing from my own leadership skills I put the words I associate with myself under female. Some of these words may not associate with everyone under that specific gender and that’s why I think stereotypes are such a dangerous concept. Stereotypes don’t always associate with everyone in a specific group and can have a negative effect on that group.

As a journalist it is part of my job to make sure I do not have bias when covering a story. Whether it be from different points of view, a man’s or woman’s perspective, or from the eyes of people from different backgrounds it is always best to get all sides of a story. I have to make sure all angles of the story are covered before the story is published and stereotypes and bias can give a journalist a hard time when writing a story because it doesn’t make the story factual it makes it opinionated. It can be hard for a journalist to deliver only the facts when people want to read an opinion. I am relieved that this assessment showed that my bias isn’t as severe as it could be. I am able to understand that I need to get all sides of a story before I come to a conclusion. I think I would be interesting if more people thought through situations this way because if people see all sides of a situation there might be less arguing and more understanding between different cultures of people. With the broad reach of stereotypes I believe that some people are scared of how different cultures can influence their own maybe through interactions or past events. But it is these stereotypes and bias ideas that cuts off the interactions of different cultures and makes it so difficult to make norms change. From this assessment I was able to understand how even my small amount of bias has damaged my views on women’s and men’s leadership roles. I am now able to see how even the different cultures of male and female are needed to be understood from experience not from stereotypes to come to a more valid and true conclusion of how a person, male or female, can perform.

The interpersonal topic I found to be most interesting in the culture section was how we all learn our unique form of culture. We all have these shared interpretations of beliefs, values, norms, and social practices that build our culture into what it is. We don’t know anything about our culture when we are born. We learn about our culture as we grown up and become adults. Through the set of shared interpretations communications and culture have a nice way of connecting and it explains how certain interactions create our own culture. “Beliefs refer to the basic understanding of a group of people about what the world in like or what is true or false. Values refer to what a group of people defines as good and bad or what it regards as important. Norms refer to rules for appropriate behavior, which provide the expectations people have of one another and of themselves. Social practices are the predictable behavior patterns that members of a culture typically follow” (Lustig, p. 26-27). These shared interpretations combine to make a way of life for all different cultures. When I was younger I didn’t know that while I was growing up that I was creating an idea in my head of how I thought the world worked. I didn’t know until a few years ago about all the different cultures in the world and how different they are from mine. It makes me think that if more children are exposed to different cultures throughout their adolescent years the idea of ethnocentrism wouldn’t be as severe as it is. It would still exist but it wouldn’t create as much prejudice as it currently does. These shared interpretations are found in all cultures but in thought if the actual interpretations, each culture’s values, beliefs, norms, and social practices, are known and shared with all generations of all other cultures the effect ethnocentrism has will decrease. In this case ignorance is not bliss. I knew that I learned my culture as I was growing up but I find it interesting that these four shared interpretations can create so many different cultures and still give us the chance to learn about and interact with each culture. It is interesting to see how these communication values can connect with our culture and leadership styles.

By combining gender and leadership with learned culture I was able to see how much culture can affect the way a leader leads especially when gender is involved. Both genders have different ways that they lead but both ways can be affective. The chapter says “that women are somewhat more likely to use democratic and transformational styles” of leadership (Northouse, p. 419). I found this interesting because transformational leadership has been one of the leadership styles like I have liked the best throughout this course. Most men have a more assertive and negotiating type of leadership style. I also found it interesting that both gender bias in leadership and culture are learned as children age starting when they are young. Some parents teach their boys to be tough and girls to be sweet, but what parents don’t know is that by making their children think boys have to be tough and girls have to be sweet they are creating gender bias in their children. It is hard for parents to work around gender bias because all they are trying to do is create an identity for their child. I think it would be better in parents taught their children they can be tough and they can also be sweet to try and get them to seem that it is alright to be gender neutral. I agree that men and women have different leadership style because of the different ways they are raised, but if gender bias was decreased women would be able to get more leadership positions getting through the metaphoric glass ceiling. I think gender gap and leadership will continue to decrease as more people become knowledgeable about how women handle leadership positions. In this sense I believe it needs to be more about what leaders, male or female, do to show their leadership style rather that what others believe their leadership style to be.

As a woman I know how gender affects leadership roles for females because some people have biases and stereotypes stuck in their minds that they can’t shake out. There are biases for both genders. And if these biases and stereotypes in culture and gender decrease I think leadership positions for not only females but people from different cultures will have a better shot at increasing. As a follower not having the biases will help broaden my outlook on different ideas for the future because when working with people from different cultures different rules and outcomes can happen making the group prosper. If a follower has more resources I believe they can accomplish tasks faster and with precision. As for a leader it would benefit them to have followers that don’t have biases because working with a more diverse group of people has led to more successful and accomplished teams. I will work on the small amount of gender bias I have to not only make myself a more diverse leader, but to also use all the different people as resources to accomplish goals and tasks in my group. For the future I will use this information to work toward becoming the leader and individual I want to be. One that has very little bias and a wide range of knowledge shared with a culturally diverse group of people.

References

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