

Foreword

This book is much needed and very timely. As we all emerge from, and indeed learn to live with, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, serious questions are being asked about what we want from work, how we work, and the kind of leadership we need for the future.

Pre-pandemic, the world of work and leadership was dominated by men, with some 80% of leadership positions held by men. The values, structures, and processes of work had been designed by and for men. In most societies we encouraged men to focus almost exclusively on work and on developing their careers. Additionally, our biases led us to think of leaders as being male and that successful leaders possessed ‘male’ qualities like being assertive, daring, decisive, and driving for results.

These factors made it very hard for women to succeed in the workplace. In the majority of our cultures, the responsibility for the home, child care, and elder care fell very much to women. In addition, skills women could bring to leadership at work, like collaboration, empathy, intuition, and care were not valued. This brought real challenges for women who wanted to combine careers and family and who wanted to take on leadership roles.

While many of these factors still exist, changes in technology, demographics, cultural shifts, and the impact of the pandemic mean that we are living in a time of big disruption and change. The acceleration of hybrid work has brought a massive increase in flexibility in how, where, and when work gets done. Equally, the ‘great resignation’ we are seeing is the result of most of us reassessing why we work, how we work, and the alignment we have with the values and purpose of the organizations we work for.

So, we now have the possibility of transforming how work and leadership get done. And also, we can dramatically shift how we care for the home, children, and our parents.

The central theme of this book is that the world is ready for, and will hugely benefit from, gender equality and female leadership. This means getting more women into leadership positions and bringing more 'female' skills into how future leaders act and behave. Equally, it means that men will need to rethink their approach to work and careers and share responsibility for the home and family. This can liberate men from the stereotypes and bias we face. It can also benefit us in a variety of ways, for example with improved mental health.

We gain so much from listening to the voices and perspectives of people with richly diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. This deeply thoughtful and inspiring collection of essays is the result of a unique collaboration from such a group of people.

The authors present a fascinating combination of conceptual and inspirational themes like the power of data, the importance of developing financial intelligence and stepping out of your comfort zone. There is also a deeply rich selection of practical tips on topics like mentoring, investment planning, and networking.

Very importantly, each essay ends with a call to action: I thoroughly recommend that you review these and make a resolution to take some of them on. Without action there will not be change. The world is ready for female leadership: it is up to you to play your part!

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