Women and Contemporary Roles: Bridging the Gender Gap for Organizational Effectiveness. The Case of Accra Polytechnic, Ghana

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Abstract
Leadership roles in the Ghanaian societies are determined by socio-cultural considerations and this appears to exist in all institutions where Accra Polytechnic is inclusive. Women leaders at Accra Polytechnic since 1993 are performing contemporary roles in realising the vision, mission and the five year strategic plan of the Polytechnic but they encounter some challenges. This study seeks to examine the contemporary roles and challenges of women leaders in the Polytechnic. The study examines the theory of gender equity as a theoretical frame using interview, participant observation and historical methods. The under representation of qualified women in decision making positions and those who are playing contemporary roles have created a gender gap that exists not only in Accra Polytechnic but in many areas of the workplaces in Ghana. The Ghanaian Society has determined that only males make good leaders; therefore it continues to deny easy access for women seeking leadership roles because they do not fit the norm. Women who seek leadership positions face barriers and many times give up because they become overwhelmed in dealing with obvious barriers. Though women at the Polytechnic are performing decision making roles; there are some socio-cultural perceptions that keep them from fully performing their roles. It is discovered from the field that women do not get access to occupy some of the top hierarchical positions at the Polytechnic like the Rector.
Keywords: Gender gap, Hierarchical; barriers, equity; leadership

1.1 Introduction
Women have been performing contemporary roles in the Ghanaian society and at Accra Polytechnic, they have taken leadership positions as Lecturers, Examination Officers, Human Resource Managers, Registrars, Auditors; HOD'S, Public Relations Officers, Academic and Admissions HOD'S, Counsellors and they have been members of the Academic Board. Even though the system looks like an all inclusive role performance, one finds it difficult to link the same with women aspiring for the topmost decision making positions, the Deans, Vice Rector and the Rector. There seem to be gender inequality in role performance which socially affects the plight of women in decision making positions. There is silence on the fact that there is social change in the Ghanaian society and as such women are performing equal roles with their male counterparts at the Polytechnic. This research investigates the contemporary roles, challenges and attitudes towards women, and how their roles are contributing in bridging the gender gap at Accra polytechnic for organisational effectiveness. There are some socio-cultural, religious and psychological issues that prevent women from occupying the topmost decision making positions in the institution. In some cases the women are prevented from fully performing their roles because some members (especially men) at the polytechnic continue to have socio-cultural/ religious perceptions on the roles of women as assigned mainly to the domestic domain. Some members also find it difficult to work with the women as leaders because they are women and the question about social change and contemporary roles still stands unanswered.

1.2 Accra Polytechnic, Vision, Mission and the Strategic Plan (1993 to Date)
Polytechnic education plays a crucial role in national development. It serves as a platform for providing opportunities for skills development, applied research and publication for research findings. A nation can only thrive on well-educated and skilled workforce. Women leaders at Accra Polytechnic are combing traditional and contemporary roles due to social change in the African society and at the Polytechnic; however, they encounter some major challenges based on socio-cultural considerations which should be critically looked at for sustainable development.

The Accra Polytechnic of Ghana has a vision and a mission which all her members aspire to achieve. It is the overall perception of the institution and its five year strategic plan in which women are partners with men in role performance. What the mission statement and the strategic plan seek to do is that women, who are more than men, contribute directly or indirectly to the educational growth and the development of the institution and the Ghanaian society.

The vision and mission of Accra Polytechnic state that '........ it is a centre of excellence for teaching, learning, and research and ...... it provides life-transforming opportunities and experiences for students through teaching, entrepreneurial skills development and research, in the fields of Applied Sciences, Engineering, Technology, Applied Arts and Business for the benefit of society' and the five year strategic plan (2013-2018), which aims at achieving the vision of the Polytechnic through thematic areas like '...... Academic, Research, Innovation and Publication, Community and extension Services, Linkages and Collaborations, Human Resource Development, Administration, Institutional Governance, Revenue Generation, Infrastructure Development and Financial Management....' includes women.

The Polytechnic's Mission calls on the institution to involve women in the social, educational, health, and political aspects of life. Women have been performing a lot of roles at Accra Polytechnic since it attained the tertiary status in the 1990s, women have taken such leadership positions as lecturers, Examination Officers, Human Resource Managers, Registrars, Auditors; Heads of Departments, Public Relations Officers, Academic and Admissions HOD'S and HOU'S, Counsellors and they have been members of the Academic Board. Even though the system looks like an all inclusive role performance, one finds it difficult to link the same with women aspiring for the topmost decision making positions, the Deans, Vice rector and Rector despite the contemporary roles of the women leaders and there seem to be gender inequity which socially affect the plight of women in leadership. There seem to be silence on the fact that there is social change in the Ghanaian society and as such women are performing equal roles with their male counterparts at the Polytechnic which has bridged the gender gap.

1.3 Theory, Method and Barriers
This study examines the theory of gender equality as a theoretical frame using historical analysis. Gender equality refers to the view that men and women should receive equal treatment, and should not be discriminated against based on gender, unless there is a sound biological reason for different treatment. The existing structures within both the polytechnic and the society are patriarchal and the structures turn to focus more on men than on women in the various sectors of life. Oduyoye (1986, 121) argues that gender equity 'has become the shorthand for the proclamation that women's experience should become an integral part of what goes into the definition of being human.' Oduyoye (1986,121) explains that both men and women should be given equal opportunity to work together as partners in order to liberate the human community from entrenched attitude structures.

Gender based segregation is largely evident in the socio-economic activities, patterns and roles set for women and men in traditional African societies. Thus, women were not only prevented from occupying certain societal positions in the society because of their sex but also assign different roles that centre on the home. Thus Oduyoye (1986,123) argues that 'in Africa, women make pots which are sold cheaply; men make ritual objects and carvings that are highly regarded.

Emerging African Women Leaders have faced Resistance and in her Feminist Approaches*, for example, Morgan (2004, 42), gave a historical synopsis of some of what she terms as 'historical perpetuation of unjust, exclusion practices that have legitimized male superiority in the very social domain.' It is then clear that women have been unjustly discriminated against based on their sex. Such discrimination has always (or rather mostly) been purported to be supported by socio-cultural perceptions which are used to legitimize it. Women who tried to resist this institutionalized subordination of women were in one form or the other shut up or counter resisted.*

Morgan offered the historical development of feminist approaches that sought to highlight the role of women who in every historical period challenged the constraints placed upon them by societal authority. According to him, its origin can roughly be traced to 'a recognizable form of organized Anglo-American feminism that emerged in the nineteenth century.'[1] The dominant issues at the time bordered on the debate over equal access to leadership positions.

Roslin Growe (1994), thinks women in leadership; however, confront barriers or obstacles that men do not

realize exist She says some myths suggest women cannot discipline older students/subordinates, particularly males; females are too emotional; too weak physically; and males resent working with females (Whitaker & Lane, 1990). After the myths are dispelled, the "glass ceiling barrier" that limits women from achieving high ranking position must be overcome (Cullen & Luna, 1993).

The other obstacle is society's attitude towards appropriate male and female roles that identifies women as not task-oriented enough, too dependent on feedback and evaluations of others, and lack of independence. Women receive little or no encouragement to seek decision making positions, while men are encouraged to enter administration to a greater degree than women, despite the positive perceptions of principals towards female capabilities.

Many Ghanaian wives for example are expected to relocate to wherever their husbands find themselves, irrespective of the type of jobs they do before or after marriage or the type of schools their kids attend. As Sintim Adasi discusses a scenario where Grace a lecturer, whose husband is who is a bank staff, is promoted to the position of a bank manager and he is being transferred to another region in the country from where they live. The cultural and societal expectation from their context demands that Grace leaves her job and pack bags and baggage and move with the kids to join the husband in his new region, regardless of her job and the kid's school. On the other hand, if Grace's employees transfer her to another place in another town or region the husband according to culture and custom will not relocate with her. (Sintim Adasi, 2012 p.171)

Female staff at the Polytechnic have faced Grace's plight if they are wives. In other words one of the problems facing women is this cultural and societal demand that every wife, irrespective of who they are, relocate to wherever their husbands are transferred to. I think this issue of relocation has greatly influenced some of the Polytechnic men's attitude to married women aspiring to higher positions thinking what will happen if their husbands are transferred and they would have to accompany them. This is gender bias and feelings of barriers that women face. Again, there is lack of role models and mentors because there are fewer women in decision making positions (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Eakle, 1995; Hensel, 1991; Ryder, 1994; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Whitaker & Lane, 1990; Williams, 1990).

2. Accra Polytechnic Women and Decision Making Positions: Barriers
Good institutional administration is more attuned to feminine than masculine modes of leadership behavior. Female attributes of nurturing, being sensitive, empathetic, intuitive, compromising, caring, cooperative, and accommodative are increasingly associated with effective administration. While these characteristics are innate and valuable, women possessing the qualities of a good leader still face higher attrition and slower career mobility particularly in higher education (Porat, 1991).   Equality of opportunity in educational leadership administration for example, reveals that gender, more than age, experience, background, or competence determines the role an individual will be assigned in education (Whitaker & Lane, 1990). Polytechnic women who hold leadership positions in the educational system face burdens of sexism and confront special challenges in selection and tenure. Since men and women have different leadership abilities, the difference do not mean that one has dominance over the other. The difference may be due in part to men seeing leadership as leading and women seeing leadership as facilitating (Schaef, 1985).

B. Sackey, in her *New Directions in Gender and Religion,* examines the new dimension in gender relations among Africans as concerns women in decision making positions in the society. She dwells on how women have managed to make a breakthrough or what she termed a 'reclaim' which is not new to the Ghanaian/African.

According to B. Sackey, women are not new when it comes to leadership positions in West Africa. Citing examples from Akan women in Ghana, Brigid Sackey (2006, vii) recounted that women have, over the years, enjoyed a high status of authority in socio-political and economic realms; (At Accra Polytechnic, women have been Registrars, Heads of Departments, Lecturers, Auditors, Public Relations Officers, Heads of Academic and Admissions, Hall Tutors and Mistresses as already stated).

Sackey says women particularly in African Independent Churches for example, have been involved in issues affecting the nation which have brought them into 'the high echelons of decision–making bodies'. Today, some women members, she observed, are directly involved in political decision-making in their capacity as members of parliament, negating the common ideas that women are generally apolitical. In spite of all these achievements, the statuses of women   in the various institutions have been challenged.

3. Perceptions: Narrowing the Gender Gap

The reason why few women occupy administrative positions in the Polytechnic is due to the gender gap. The gender gap may represent an impediment to potential institutional improvements (Chliwniak, 1997). Even though effective leadership is more behaviorally derived than gender based, gender remains an obstacle to women seeking and obtaining leadership positions (Getskow, 1996). Undoubtedly, the negative attitudes of the Polytechnic members reflect the socio-cultural gender constructions of women. For example as enshrined in some Akan proverbs such as '*wonya w'asɛm pa a, ɛnka nkyerɛ wo yere*' which is literally translated as 'men should not confide in their wives and tell them their secrets'. The underlying meaning is that women cannot keep secrets. Again the Akan proverb '*ɔbaa tɔn ntorewa na ɔntɔn etuduru*' translated as 'women sell garden eggs and not gun powder' which depicts the perception that women are weak, not bold, not courageous to the extent that they cannot handle military equipment.[1] In my opinion, this traditional mind set on women continues to affect the way some of the Polytechnic members perceive women in the institution. It supports the general perception of women that because they are not bold, courageous and are seen as physically weak people, women in general are not expected to venture in certain areas of life. In other words, in the traditional Akan communities, roles are gendered to the extent that, women are not expected to perform certain roles such as being leaders that demand courage, boldness and firmness. In the choice of careers, women tend to take courses in the female perceived careers such as Teaching, Nursing, Dressmaking, Hairdressing, Secretarial to mention a few and shy away from perceived male dominated careers like Accounting, Medicine, Insurance, Scientist, Engineering ,Piloting and others which still remain the preserve of men, to further deepen the gender gap. This is to say that the gender construction of women in the society is carried into the Polytechnic which ironically preaches that men and women are partners at work. (Sintim Adasi, 2012, 180). The Polytechnic women staff respondents again argue that the negative perceptions that some of the members have on them are based on culture. It is based on how some people have interpreted and reflected on African sayings as mentioned above. Women are portrayed as emotionally, spiritually and intellectually weak. This can be seen as psychological reflections on women. Some of the members argued that women have emotional imbalances to the extent that they weep on occasions of difficulties.

This notwithstanding, there has never been any case where women have not been able to control their emotions during difficulties. Such arguments are baseless. In fact, during the research, it was discovered that some of the women leaders at the Polytechnic have encountered a lot of confrontations and difficulties but they have overcome such problems. For example some female registrars encountered some difficulties to the extent that human excreta were deposited at their offices to frustrate them but they could stand the test. African women for example, have clearly demonstrated that if given the chance they perform creditably. They are capable of excelling in areas such as Education, Administration, Medicine, Engineering, Piloting, Aviation and others which were traditionally and culturally seen as the domains of men.

4. African Women, Productivity and Organizational effectiveness

Indeed, we realized that the women have been performing creditably the roles assigned them. Similarly, the arguments used against women performance have also been challenged that women are portrayed as emotionally and intellectually weak. Some of the members argued that women have emotional imbalances to the extent that they weep on occasions of difficulties and women are not expected to perform certain roles such as being leaders that demand courage, boldness and firmness can be re-interpreted in positive ways that enhance the full participation of women in the society that has been discussed above. This not withstanding such negative perceptions based on several factors have impact on or challenged women in the performance of their roles.
However, in the research, the researchers discovered that other members of the Polytechnic have positive attitudes towards the women because they feel the Polytechnic women have very good communicative skills, they work hard and they can relate very well with their members (Interview, 6 June 2013). Some members prefer women to be heads of their departments and deans of the various schools for the following reasons. They see women as being the same as men because in any case, leadership transcends race, gender and ethnicity.

They prefer them because women are hardworking; have good human relationship, they are helpful and caring and they are easily approachable. They are helpful also in administrative duties they bring peace and harmony to the Polytechnic. According to the members of the Polytechnic community though women are very caring and motherly they are firm in taking decisions. They think they are trustworthy when it comes to financial issues. These qualities contradict the negative stereotypes of women discussed earlier on in this section. With these positive factors the women are encouraged to perform their duties creditably and this encourages other women in the other Polytechnics.

One answer to the barriers and obstacles women administrators at Accra Polytechnic deal with on a daily basis is mentoring. In order for women to succeed in acquiring administrative positions at the Polytechnic, mentoring must occur. Mentoring can significantly enhance income and promote possibilities for individuals experiencing these relationships. Mentoring can meet the needs of both women and institutions, and it can also assist in attracting and retaining women and minority professionals in the academic work environment. Mentoring of younger workers reduces turnover, helps mentees deal with organizational issues, and accelerates their assimilation into the culture. The mentees (those women being mentored) benefit because someone cares enough to support them, advise them and help interpret inside information.

The advantages of mentoring are felt not only by the mentees and their organization, but by the mentors themselves. They experience the fulfillment of passing along hard-earned wisdom, influencing the next generation of upper management, and receiving appreciation from a younger worker (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Hagevik, 1998; Whitaker & Lane, 1990).

5. Conclusion
The experiences of women leaders at the Polytechnic are underrepresented and it seems evident that the strong wave of transformation that has evolved in the institution will continue till things are normalized. In the aspiration for innovation or modernization recourse to the converse seems to have taken place and aspects of tradition have been retained through their very rejection. The women discussed in this work have demonstrated that the enterprising capabilities of the Polytechnic women leaders extend beyond the acknowledged physical boundaries of the institution. They have penetrated profoundly into the educational domain and challenged the prejudices of the arguments against their leadership roles, testified that there lies an inert inherent dynamism in women which, when given the appropriate recognition, would rekindle and be employed for the benefit of mankind in other dimensions. The accomplishments of the Polytechnic women leaders should be lauded. They should be honoured as having preserved a valuable women heritage. With their positions what came out was that some of them played multiple roles where they demonstrate certain outstanding qualities in the areas of networking and human relationship. In playing these roles, they bring out their gifts not only as women but as scholars with similar responsibilities as that of their male counterparts. This development in the Polytechnic seemed as a paradigmatic shift from traditional positions that define and limit roles performed by people in society based on gender disparities.

In this regard, the patriarchal system which took centre stage during the formative era of the Polytechnic appears to have given way to the gender theories of equality. This is the position which enjoined both men and women to play the same roles in society without discrimination. In the field; the women leaders partake in activities that are not very different from those engaged in by their male counterparts. In terms of performance the Polytechnic women are found to be better in certain aspects than their male counterparts. They are performing uniquely in the areas of lecturing, administration, finance and auditing, counseling, departmental projects and many others. Despite their outstanding performance in the various roles assigned them, the women are faced with challenges emanating from the socio-cultural issues.

From our findings, we are convinced that, it is worthwhile for women at the Polytechnic to be given equal roles in decision making positions. They qualify academically, psychologically and culturally as women. Psychological factors continue to follow Polytechnic women. They are the bases of the challenges that they encounter in performing their various roles.

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