Women and Leadership in the Church
Insights from Gender and Management Literature

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A tale of two studies

In 1977, Rosabeth Kanter published her seminal text on the workings of a large American industrial company: *Men and Women of the Corporation*. It portrays a workplace where bosses are men and their secretaries are women, where senior managers' wives belong to the company almost as much as do their husbands, and where female professionals are scarce and face barriers of isolation and stereotyping invoked by their token status.

36 years later, Alison Wolf's 2013 study of professional women in the 21st century could almost be describing a different planet. Women are represented in significant numbers at the senior end of almost all professions; in fact, there is far greater equality and integration at the top of the workforce than at the bottom. With regard to finances and lifestyle, graduate women have less in common with their non-graduate sisters and more with their elite male counterparts.

Neither of these studies makes any reference to the Church of England, yet both are highly relevant: the first because Kanter's industrial corporation bears many echoes of the Church into which women and men are ordained today, and the second because Wolf's very different world is the one in which the same men and women live.

To the delight of some and the distress of others, the Church of England is undergoing a revolution in its positioning of women. After centuries of male leadership, women were admitted to the priesthood for the first time in 1994 and to the episcopate twenty years later. Roughly equal numbers of men and women are now being ordained each year; in January 2015 the first female bishop was consecrated, and women are being appointed to Archdeacon posts at a faster rate than men. Despite these changes, there remains a strong gender imbalance at both the bottom and the top of the informal ecclesial hierarchy. At one end of the scale, while women made up 46% of candidates recommended for ministry in 2013, only 22% of candidates in the under-thirty age group were female. At the other end the difference is even more striking: of the 177 churches with a usual Sunday attendance of

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at least 350, exactly three[2] are currently led by women. Why should this be the case? This paper draws together insights from the literature on gender and management in order to provide a deeper understanding of the specific context of the Church.

Approaches to gender imbalances in management

Despite Wolf's portrayal of an integrated and equal top quintile of the labour market, women still lag behind men in their presence in top positions. On the boards of FTSE 250 companies, women hold only 15.6% of directorships and make up at least 25% of only 51 boards. 48 boards are still entirely male (Vinnicombe et al. 2014). This represents an increase in women's representation from previous years, but still reveals a massive weighting towards men. In other areas of senior public life, business and professions, representation of women varies, as shown by the table below:

	% female
MPs (2013)	23
Lords (2013)	23
Cabinet (2014)	14
Board of public bodies (2012)	35
Senior civil service (2013)	36
Justice of the Supreme Court (2013)	8
GPs (2012)	47
NHS Consultants (2012)	32
Secondary head teachers (2009)	39
University Professors (2011-12)	21
FTSE 100 directors (2013)	17

(Baker & Cracknell 2014: 1)

The focus here is on senior roles relating to women and leadership; however, it is worth noting that when the workforce is examined as a whole, disparities increase. As Wolf (2013) points out, the lower ranks of the labour market are in many ways less balanced than the higher levels, with women concentrated into certain sectors as well as disproportionately represented in part-time and low-paid jobs. Even limiting comparison to full-time workers, it is estimated that 'an average woman working full-time from age 18 to 59 would lose £361,000 in gross earnings over her working life compared to an equivalent male' (Opportunity Now 2015).

Recent decades have seen the accumulation of a vast body of literature in the field of gender and management, seeking to document and understand these disparities. Several broad approaches can be identified: time-lag; discrimination; stable gender differences; socialisation; social roles and working conditions; and organisational structures and dynamics. Below is a brief overview of each of these perspectives.

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[2] CPAS figures, March 2015. Church of England Research & Statistics records indicate that the congregations of these three leaders all number fewer than 350, and that the total number of churches in this category is about 107.

1. Time-lag

The first approach asserts that, with equal rights in law along with changing social attitudes, women no longer face any particular obstacles to success relative to men. The righting of the gender imbalance in management roles is therefore simply a matter of time, as more and more women gain the necessary qualifications and experience (see Hoobler et al. 2014: 704-5). The figures quoted above on women's representation in various senior roles are generally increasing year on year: as Wolf comments, 'it's the speed of recent change that startles', noting that, for example, the proportion of America's practising lawyers who were female rose from less than 5% in 1970 to 40% in 2002 (Wolf 2013: 20). Many young women today see their sex as completely irrelevant to their choice of career and chances of success, and perceive gender issues to have been 'solved' (Broadbridge & Simpson 2011: 475).

2. Discrimination

In contrast to the time-lag perspective, the argument that women are discriminated against as they seek to progress in the workplace remains powerful, most commonly referred to as the 'glass ceiling'. In most contexts such discrimination is not (and cannot be for legal reasons) explicit: rather, for example,

> stereotypes of what women "are like" in the workplace clash with male leadership archetypes, resulting in women being judged as ill-suited for leadership positions. While women may reach middle and upper-middle management, the top jobs are visible to them yet not attainable (Hoobler et al. 2014: 704).

3. Stable gender differences

A third approach to the gender imbalance in leadership argues that stable gender differences exist between men and women, which result in different roles and preferences. While the first waves of twentieth century feminism fought against 'traditional' views of male and female attributes and roles, urging women to take up male-dominated jobs and men to abandon machismo and become 'New Men', towards the end of the century a new wave of feminism reasserted gender differences to reclaim femininity. Whether through evolution or creation, this perspective claims fundamental physical and psychological differences between women and men. It points to claims from evolutionary and developmental biology and psychology that men and women are 'wired' differently in terms of brain shape and hormones (for example Wolpert 2014), and to aggregate social statistics that indicate different overall behaviours and tastes. It has been popularised by Gray's (1992) bestselling *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, among a vast range of other books designed to help each sex understand the other.

Concerning the world of work, a body of literature known as 'women's voice' developed from the 1970s, seeking 'to show that women manage, speak, learn or negotiate in a different (but not inferior) way from men as well as encountering different problems' (Broadbridge & Simpson 2011: 472). Research from this approach focused on demonstrating that male-oriented workplace cultures formed barriers to women's success. Women's difference from men is presented by some as an asset, for example emphasising 'women's

strengths and their "special contribution" to organizations through their supposed predisposition to transformational leadership' (ibid.: 472; see also Fletcher 2004).

Some authors have built on this perspective to interpret the dearth of female leaders as a result of women choosing to opt out of a working culture that does not suit their natural preferences. Hoobler et al. summarise this approach as arguing that 'while men may prefer the high-stakes environment of top management, women find they instead prefer positions with greater job security and fewer challenges. Moreover, the maternal instinct will trump women's career motivation' (Hoobler et al. 2014: 705).

4. Socialisation

Gender differences can also be understood as a result of socialisation. From this perspective, women and men may enact contrasting roles and view themselves differently from each other such as described in the previous section; however, this does not stem from innate biological or psychological difference:

> These beliefs that are part of women's and men's self-concept are learned very early through social training, expectations, observation of gender-related social roles (e.g., men in leadership roles, women in subordinate roles), and role modeling; … they are also maintained and reinforced by schools, work settings, and the media (Bosak & Sczesny 2008).

Proponents of this approach point to gendered social and cultural practices that ascribe particular roles and attributes to women and men. For example, Kirkpatrick (2014: 11-12) notes the very different ways in which women are portrayed by the media compared to men, in terms of proportion of news subjects (only 24% female), occupational categories (predominantly homemakers and students), reporting style (more emotional language, paraphrasing and negative gender references) and clichés (mother, blonde, teacher, iron lady, witch, ice queen, seductress, old maid). She goes on to highlight research showing that female sexualisation impacts girls' cognitive function (e.g. a reduction in the ability to concentrate), physical and mental health, sexual behaviour, and attitudes and beliefs, particularly regarding self-worth (p. 17-18).

Internalised gendered messages affect men's and women's career development, influencing how employees and potential candidates perceive themselves and others. Bosak and Sczesny (2008), for example, have shown that the extent to which management students consider themselves suitable for a job is strongly related to self-perceptions of agentic (i.e. assertive, controlling, confident and individualistic) leadership rather than gender; however, because fewer women than men perceive themselves in this way, women are less likely to view the job as suitable. They argue:

> these data may dispel the set of myths suggesting that women in general are not suited or do not feel themselves suited for management positions as it is only women and men low in agency that report low suitability ratings (Bosak & Sczesny 2008: 686).

Unlike the 'women's voice' perspective, in this view 'opt-out' decisions by women are caused by self-perceptions ascribed through socialisation rather than based on natural preferences. On this basis, the key focus for change is often placed on women themselves:

> women are hindered by barriers that exist within ourselves. We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in. We internalize the negative messages we get throughout our lives—the messages that say it's wrong to be outspoken, aggressive, more powerful than men. We lower our expectations of what we can achieve. We continue to do the majority of the housework and childcare. We compromise our career goals to make room for partners and children who may not even exist yet. Compared to our male colleagues, few of us aspire to senior positions (Sandberg 2013: 8).

Social forces shape how people view and are viewed by others, as well as themselves. According to social role theory,

> Gender roles foster expectations for the appropriate conduct of both sexes. People believe that the sexes have typical—and different—traits and behaviors … Literally hundreds of studies have illustrated that humans harbor rather inflexible views of men as more agentic and competent and of women as more expressive, communal, nurturing, and supportive (Hoobler et al. 2014: 708).

Because these traits are associated with particular roles and occupations, such as management (agentic) and nursing (nurturing), this leads to gendered expectations such as that women are less suitable than men for leadership positions, encapsulated in the phrase 'think leader, think male' (Schein 1973). However, studies also show that women who step outside their expected gender roles and enact 'masculine' traits associated with agentic leadership risk being penalised and rejected for contravening prescribed social norms. Women thus find themselves in a 'double bind' which bars them from career progression and/or social acceptance (Eagley & Carli 2007; Hoobler et al. 2014: 708; Rudman & Glick 2008). Managers in particular play a key role in the career progression of subordinates, acting as gatekeepers to development opportunities such as mentoring and challenging assignments, and advising on potential flexible work arrangements. Gendered expectations on the part of managers can therefore disadvantage female workers (Hoobler et al. 2014). More widely, the issue of gendered oppositions and roles is addressed by a strand of literature that

> complicate[s] the binary divide of male/female and masculine/feminine to incorporate complexities of difference as well as how gendered norms may be contested and experienced (Broadbridge & Simpson 2011: 475).

In the field of careers research, several theoretical frameworks have been developed on the basis that women's (and men's) career choices and behaviour are shaped by social forces. Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise posits that, as individuals move through cognitive developmental stages, they successively reject occupations that are deemed inappropriate first for their gender, then their social class and finally their personal

interests and values (Bimrose 2008: 387). Another approach, Career Self-Efficacy Theory, 'places a strong emphasis on thinking processes (in contrast to behaviour) and focuses on the strength of the individual's belief that they can successfully accomplish a task' (ibid.: 388); while Systems Theory Framework maps the processes and influences affecting career development within both the individual's own life and wider society (ibid.: 391). Such theories suggest ways of improving women's career potential by addressing identified barriers (ibid.: 386-91).

5. Incompatible social roles and working conditions

A fifth approach to the deficit of female leaders focuses on the difficulties faced by women in managing their lives inside and outside the workplace:

> the way work is structured today … the time and energy needed from all workers in today's business environment and the "24/7 economy" is incompatible with the resources (e.g., time, energy) necessary for women to care for children and other dependents (Hoobler et al. 2014).

In their review of literature relating to women's careers, O'Neil et al. (2008) highlight findings that 'women's careers comprise more than "work"; they are embedded in women's larger life contexts' (p. 729), while 'organizational realities demand the separation of career and life' (p. 730). In particular, families are central to women's lives, but also, despite flexible work arrangements such as maternity leave, job-sharing, reduced or flexible hours and remote working, 'families continue to be liabilities to women's career development' (p. 731). Whether through choice or not, women remain the primary carers. While flexible working patterns can enable women to combine family and career, they can also form a barrier to career advancement: they may 'at face value seem supportive but, in essence, serve to derail their careers' (Hoobler et al. 2014: 711).

The importance of family in shaping women's careers is demonstrated by Wolf (2013) in her assertion that elite, professional women have in recent years broken away from their lower ranking sisters:

> educated successful women today have fewer interests in common with other women than ever before … [and] now have careers which are increasingly like those of the successful men they work alongside (p. 13).

Top jobs require full-time work and, Wolf argues, rather than taking up flexible working practices, elite women are increasingly having fewer or no children and/or employing nannies, cleaners and au pairs to enable them to continue their careers.

6. Organisational structures and dynamics

The approaches outlined above are mostly based on perceived or actual biological, psychological and social differences between men and women. A further explanation for the gender imbalance in management focuses on the way organisations work and how this shapes their employees. This brings us back to Kanter's (1977) study of an industrial

corporation, where she argues that the scarcity of female managers has little to do with differences between the sexes *per se*:

> 'the fate of women is inextricably bound up with organizational structure and processes in the same way that men's life-at-work is shaped by them. Differences based on sex retreat into the background and the people-creating, behavior-shaping properties of organizational locations become clear. Findings about the "typical" behavior of women in organizations that have been assumed to reflect either biologically based psychological attributes or characteristics developed through a long socialization to a "female sex role" turn out to reflect very reasonable - and very universal - responses to current organizational situations. Even discrimination itself emerges as a consequence of organizational pressures as much as individual prejudice' (Kanter 1977: 9)

Kanter identifies three fundamental factors that influence the position of both male and female workers within an organisation. First, opportunity: a perceived lower likelihood of progression can lead to lower aspirations (p. 141), and reactions to blocked opportunities can result in behavioural outcomes often associated with women, such as a tendency to invest more in horizontal relationships (p. 159). Similarly, she argues that stereotypes of female leaders as controlling and demanding and the common belief that people prefer to be led by a man are misplaced: rather, controlling and demanding leadership styles are usual among leaders of either sex with little power, and people prefer to be led by a powerful person than a powerless person. Thus, in Janeway's words, 'the *weak* are the second sex' (cited in Kanter 1977: 205). Thirdly, Kanter introduces the idea of 'tokenism', where the existence of a minority group leads to high visibility, exaggerated differences and assimilation to stereotypes, resulting in pressure to conform to or actively resist stereotypes, as well as isolation, role segregation and performance pressure (p. 210-37).

Relevance to the Church of England

Each of the six approaches outlined above explains the dearth of women in leadership from a different, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, perspective. Some point to the cause of the imbalance lying with society, others point to organisations, to men, or to women themselves. It is likely that all the explanations hold some truth within the context of the Church.

Time-lag

Time-lag is certainly a key factor in the relatively low numbers of women in senior posts in the Church of England, given that women have only been admitted to the priesthood since 1994. For the cohort of men and women ordained since that year, for example, it has so far taken an average of 14 years to become an Archdeacon, which means that, regardless of other factors, the vast majority of ordained women have simply not yet had time to achieve such a post. In fact, of the same cohort, 15 women and only nine men have become Archdeacons, suggesting that despite the seemingly low overall figure of 21% female representation, women may currently be reaching such posts at a faster rate than men.

Time-lag may also be a factor in the leadership of larger churches, although the starkness of the gender imbalance suggests that it is not the only explanation.

Discrimination

The Church of England is one of very few work contexts in which discrimination by gender is currently legitimate, in this case on grounds of theological conviction. Individual churches with a vacancy may choose to make that position available only to men. Recognising that its diverse membership includes those who cannot with good conscience receive ministry from women, the House of Bishops has sought to affirm the commitment of the Church to those holding each perspective through the 'Five Guiding Principles' (Church of England 2014), which state that 'the Church of England is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender' (p. 1) while, regarding those 'who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests … the Church of England remains committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures' (p. 1). In order to achieve this, the Principles state that 'Pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority within the Church of England will be made without specifying a limit of time and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England' (p. 1).

There are therefore clear guidelines and provisions for churches and individuals who explicitly state that they cannot receive sacramental ministry from women, and clear official affirmation for women who do wish or feel called to ministry. Within this, however, the question of the 'glass ceiling' remains. In areas of the Church where it is openly accepted and even desired for women to take up ordained ministry, it is possible that stereotyping and indirect discrimination (whether based on theology or otherwise) exist as barriers to leadership.

Gender differences

The debate about how far women and men really are different is far-ranging. For example, Wolf (2013) points to the conscious and unconscious sexual signals sent between men and women, which affect relational behaviour in the workplace, while Kanter observes no difference in patterns of interaction between all-male and all-female groups when working on a task (1977: 340). Studying ministry style in four mainline Protestant denominations in the USA, Lehman finds:

> With regard to power, ethics, and decision making, there is some evidence to support the idea that some men and women do ministry differently. But with regard to authority, status, preaching, interpersonal style, or dealing with social issues, there is no independent evidence that differences in ministry style are inevitably defined by gender (Lehman 2002: 29, citing his 1993 study).

He notes that the differences identified only applied to White ministers: the vast majority of male and female African-American and Hispanic clergy tended to display a 'masculine' style of ministry (p. 29). Moreover, 'co-pastors' exhibited fewer sex differences, and where they

did differ 'it was the *men* who manifested the more feminine approach to ministry' (p. 29). Among senior pastors (those in charge of a large church with other clergy on staff), on the other hand, men demonstrated a more 'masculine' approach than women. A final variation from the overall findings was that '[c]lergy women and men who completed theological seminary prior to 1970 manifested virtually no sex differences in approach to ministry' (p. 30). 1970 is when US seminaries began to adapt their training to allow for growing numbers of women, for example introducing feminist perspectives and addressing the interests of female students. The latter finding highlights the importance of ministerial training in shaping leadership style and the interaction of this with authenticity, be that the 'masculine' pre-1970 or 'differentiated' post-1970 approaches.

Within the Church of England, along with other churches, the notion of innate and fundamental differences between women and men is widespread (particularly in Conservative Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic wings) and rooted in theology as well as biology and psychology. Thus, John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* (2001) and its counterpart, John and Stasi Eldredge's *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman's Soul* (2005) have each sold over a million copies. Debates continue over not only whether or not women should be ordained and hold authority over men, but also what kind of roles lay and ordained women and men should hold, and how they naturally carry them out. For example, if women are naturally more relational than men, it makes sense for them to take on pastoral roles; however, if that quality is socially ascribed or natural only for some women, there is a danger of women being channelled inappropriately into 'feminine' roles. The argument that there are distinct masculine (agentic) and feminine (communal) styles of leadership suggests that a male-oriented leadership culture poses barriers for female leaders and also denies the church the special contribution that only women can provide. In this line of reasoning, women are encouraged to minister authentically 'as women' instead of feeling under pressure to demonstrate 'male' traits (for example Shercliff 2014). From a social constructionist perspective, this approach risks essentialising both women and men and denying variation among people of the same sex.

Complicating the debate further, as Burns (2009) points out, are tensions within an ordained ministry whose Ordinal requires predominantly communal leadership qualities but whose patriarchal structures have been inhabited, until very recently, solely by men. Percy (2014) argues that masculine metaphors and language associated with ministry have only been adopted since women have been ordained, amid fears of feminisation of the priesthood. Moreover, it is important to remember that women have for decades played extremely influential roles in church leadership at all levels, as wives of ministers. The model of a Vicar-and-wife team seen in some (particularly larger) churches bears more than a passing resemblance to Kanter's 1970s corporation, which demands almost total involvement of both partners:

> at the top the wife may come into the picture as a visible member of the husband's "team"; she may be given a position and functions … Is the wife a helper to be embraced, or a danger to be minimized? Is she an unpaid worker, or...an independent person on whom the organization has no claims? (Kanter 1977: 118, 125).

Such significant involvement obviously has implications for leaders who do not have wives and, in the case of married women, whose partners are not willing or able to take on such a role. Indeed, when faced with a similar question, Kanter's corporation considered whether its few female professionals should be compensated for their lack of a wife (p. 125).

Conclusion

The gender imbalance in the church is complex and rooted in multiple fluid, interacting and contested factors. From the central church's perspective, if it is advocating 'leadership' as a key quality of its present and future ministers, it must think carefully about what that leadership—and the leaders who enact it—will look like. It must also recognise that, living in Wolf's world where graduates of either sex can be and do anything they want, and ministering (or potentially ministering) in Kanter's world of highly gendered roles and hierarchies, women have to negotiate a complex range of factors determining the roles they play and how they play them.

A 25 year old woman in 21st century England lives in the legacy, whether she realises it or not, of millenia of female subjugation. It is only recently, over the past 150 years or so, that the status of women has seen significant change, and this has come at an intense and rapid pace; perhaps, in some ways, too rapid for ingrained cultural mores to keep up. This young woman, potentially a candidate for ordination, is constantly absorbing multiple messages about her identity as a Christian, as a social and economic actor, and as a woman. Her world is different from her grandmother's and even her mother's world, and she probably recognises this. Yet she has been brought up by people from those past worlds; she has been influenced by the way their lives at home, in public and in the workplace have been lived. She is also receiving other messages from other sources: the media, her friends, the government. She hears that she has equal rights to men, that she can be and do anything she wants, that she can and should fly high in whichever career she chooses. Simultaneously, she hears—and sees—that she has to try her hardest to be a certain kind of beautiful, that she is a sexual object and a victim of men's desires, that her views are less worthy of serious public interest than men's, that essential leadership qualities are masculine, and perhaps that her career is less valuable than her partner's. She hears—whether from her own body or from society—that she must have children and take on the primary role in caring for them.

And from the church? She hears that women can lead but she sees male leaders. She hears that she should marry and that her ideal leadership role is ministry alongside an ordained husband. She hears that she should not lead and that she is not capable of leading. She hears that she should lead, and as a woman she has a special contribution to make to the Church. She hears that she is created in the image of God, to live life in fullness and freedom and to use and develop her gifts as she becomes the person she was created to be.

It is hardly surprising if she is a little confused.

Implications

These insights from wider gender and management research raise possibilities for the Church of England to further interrogate and improve its own practice, including:

- Investigating the question of time-lag in leadership of larger churches.

- Researching how female and male clergy experience ministry and which of the above dynamics are evident.

- Exploring careers theories as a way of understanding how women (and men) identify their potential roles within the church.

- Considering how the church can integrate rather than segregate men and women and recognise variation within as well as between the sexes, while providing communal support for women facing similar issues. This may entail:
    - Reviewing the role of women's groups and events;
    - Questioning the language used to refer to different personal and organisational traits, e.g. masculine, feminine, male-oriented, female-oriented, but also 'agentic' and 'communal' language;
    - Questioning the perceived qualities required in ministers for different roles, concerning both training and appointments;
    - Identifying and challenging stereotypes;
    - Weighing short-term (e.g. gender-neutral language in job adverts) and long-term (e.g. changing self-perceptions) strategies.

- Exploring how women and men engage with continuing ministerial development and whether good practice can be developed to facilitate women's development.

- Questioning how far gender is monitored in HR practices across the church, e.g. recruitment and appointment.

- Investigating the relationship between family and ministry.

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