

3 Gender and Union Leadership A Force Field Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Why are there fewer women in formal leadership positions than expected, even today? While women have achieved much in the last few decades, they still hold fewer leadership positions than men in labour unions, business, government and non-profit organisations (Eagly and Carli 2007; Kaminski and Yakura 2008; Ledwith et al. 1990; Milkman 2007). This holds after more than two generations of striving (since the 'second wave' of feminism began in the 1950s) by highly talented, achievement-oriented women, and the passing of equal opportunity legislation in many developed nations to prevent such inequities. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 56) refer to this situation as 'no longer' what it was, when women focused their lives and identities on care-giving and support of others, but 'not yet' what women would hope to accomplish in environments free from bias.

To understand this phenomenon, we sought a theoretical framework that was broad enough to encompass the complexity of union leadership experiences and the diversity of women's paths to leadership, and to identify mechanisms which help and/or hinder their accomplishments. With some modifications, Lewin's (1947) force-field analysis was well-suited to addressing such issues. In this study, we aim at understanding the experiences of union women leaders as they strive to achieve and maintain formal leadership positions by identifying overarching supportive and restraining forces and their impact on union women leaders' achievements. We focus on gender as one of the key explanatory factors in understanding paths to leadership. Where participants highlight how their ethnicity interacts with gender or with their union work, we include those views in the analysis. Participants in this study do not vary much on factors such as age and social class, and so they will not be a focus of our discussion.

As organisational psychologists, our theoretical influences are rooted in the Human Relations School, which includes works by Kurt Lewin and Rensis Likert in the US, the Tavistock Institute in the UK and the organisational development schools they spawned. We believe leadership capabilities are distributed equally among women and men, and the under-

representation of women in leadership positions is attributable to factors other than the women's own merit. Our feminist training is based on socialist feminism and the proposition that discrimination based on race, gender and other factors is firmly rooted in the economic system, specifically capitalism. Yet we are sympathetic to liberal feminist efforts to improve women's circumstances in the here-and-now, within the existing capitalist structure. We also concur with Ely and Padavic's (2007) proposition that organisations are active determinants of gender identities. Based on the first author's experience as a university-based labour educator, we call attention to the role played by unions in creating and maintaining gendered systems of power and leadership. Therefore, our goal is to identify the overarching forces that place artificial limits on women's leadership within labour organisations and propose ways to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, those restraining forces.

FORCES IMPACTING LABOUR UNION LEADERS' ACHIEVEMENT

Lewin (1947) uses the concept of a quasi-stationary equilibrium to describe the status quo, which is not completely static but remains balanced between opposing forces. Lewin focuses attention on a field of forces, or the environment in which the individual is situated (Burnes 2004). The status quo is determined by a set of supporting and restraining forces in one's particular force field. A post-modern interpretation of Lewin's work would also include gender regimes as a key force within the field. Changes in one's situation or behaviour occurs when the relative strength of these forces changes. In this study, we define the status quo as the position of leadership achieved by a woman, and seek to identify the forces that support and restrain her advancement into higher positions of formal leadership in labour organisations. Some of these forces have already been identified in previous studies which provided a much-needed focus on the experiences of women leaders: restraining forces such as family responsibilities, male-dominated union hierarchies, and low priority placed on women's issues; and supporting forces such as being raised in a pro-union family, having access to women's committees or women-only training, and reserved seats for women on executive boards (Colgan and Ledwith 2002; Curtin 1999; Kirton 2006; McBride 2001). We add to this work by comparing the dynamics encountered by women and men in a framework that can be used to integrate a wide range of results.

To create a more comprehensive picture of the force field in which union women leaders are situated, we apply an organising heuristic from organisational psychology and organisational behaviour (with one modification) used to study phenomena in organisations. Organisational scholars typically utilise individual, work group, organisational, and societal/historical levels of analyses. We add a non-work level, which covers factors in the individual's personal life that can impact the amount of time and effort

spent on union activities. Examples include childcare, eldercare, relationship with significant others, hobbies, community activities, or other personal factors independent of work and union functions. The non-work domain is a key part of gender identity, and can affect career options. In examining these five levels, we posit that individual women may experience supports for achievement of their union leadership career goals at some of these levels but restraints at others. Moreover, the sources of support and restraint may change over the course of a woman's career as a union leader. Ultimately, we propose that the alignment of these five levels, towards more or less achievement, determines a woman's likelihood of achieving formal positions of leadership in union organisations.

Figure 3.1 illustrates a hypothetical example of how the levels may support or hinder a union woman's formal leadership career. It is common for female union members to be less active in union work when their children are young but become noticeably more active when they have grown (i.e., movement of non-work forces from restraining to neutral and therefore towards achievement). However, this woman may work in a group whose members believe men are better suited than women to hold key leadership positions (restraining force). Yet, she might be supported by the larger organisation through formal mentoring and participation in leadership development programmes (supporting force). A shift in either of these levels of forces could position the woman towards or away from achieving formal leadership in her labour organisation.

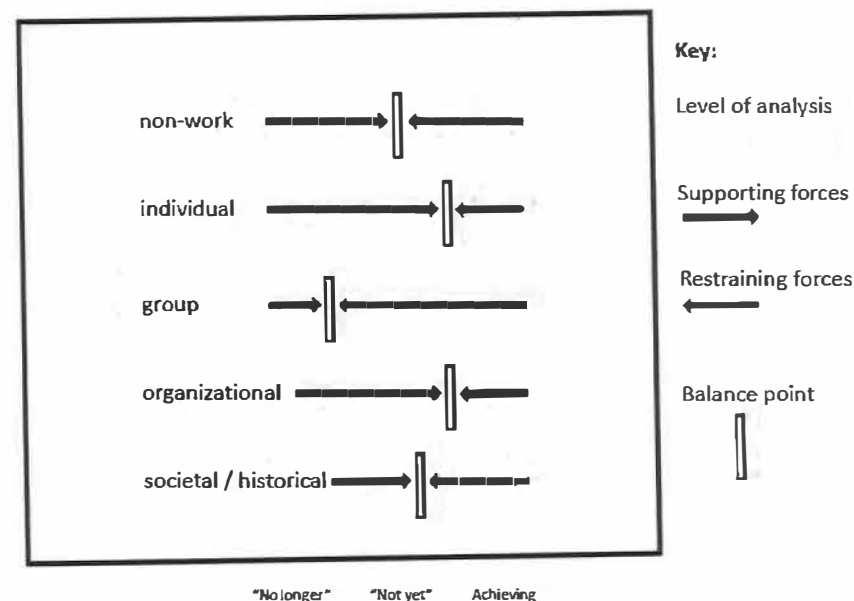


Figure 3.1 Levels of forces impacting union women leaders' achievement.

Five Levels of Forces

Non-work Level Forces—Personal factors may support or hinder a labour union woman leader. For example, women still perform the larger share of child-care tasks (Højgaard 2002). The mere perception of limited availability in the workplace due to childcare can be enough to limit options for women leaders. Conversely, belonging to a pro-union family is often a factor in choosing to enter union leadership, and a likely on-going source of support.

Individual Level Forces—Individual characteristics such as personality traits, needs for power and achievement, experience and education have long been used to predict leadership attainment. With some exceptions (e.g., assertiveness, extraversion, high school mathematics), empirical evidence has generally identified small to moderate differences between men and women on individual difference variables utilised in the context of leadership selection (Eagly 1995; Feingold 1993, 1994). In addition, since 2006 women surpassed men in completing secondary and post-secondary education in the US (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008). Yet, although American women held more than 50 per cent of business, financial, professional and related positions in 2009, they only held 37 per cent of the management positions (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009). Schein (2007) asserts: “All things being equal, a male appears more qualified, by virtue of his gender alone, than does a female to enter and advance in management” (p. 7). We suspect these same dynamics apply to leadership of labour organisations.

Work-Group Level Forces—Several aspects of interactions between leaders and their work groups can support or hinder women leaders’ advancement. For example, some group members may display resistance to women leaders in either overt or subtle ways such as silence regarding inequities, avoidance, exclusion, and discrediting of ideas that differ from the norm (Thomas and Plaut 2008). Fairness in evaluation and promotion are also important for advancement into formal leadership positions. However, literature reviews suggest biases are often present in women’s evaluations because of dominant male leadership stereotypes (Eagly and Carli 2007). Women who express their views and exert influence, for example, tend to be judged unfavourably although similar behaviour is accepted from men. Also, some may devalue women’s performance by attributing the source of their success to someone else or by using ambiguous or shifting performance criteria (Heilman 2001). Just as significant for leadership advancement, mentors provide advice and counsel, access to a larger network, and perspective on organisational values. Mentoring studies consistently find that women are as likely as men to have a mentor (Ragins 2007). However, women perceive greater barriers to finding mentors and are more likely to be in cross-gender mentoring relationships than men (Eby 2010).

These dynamics, typically described in management studies, seem especially likely to apply to union staff who are appointed, hired, or promoted

into their full-time positions. They are selected for jobs and promoted to formal leadership positions by those of higher hierarchical rank, just as in corporations. However, the dynamics of winning elected positions are different and may support women who are outspoken and present new ideas.

Labour Union Organisation Level Forces—Although women make up about 45 per cent of union membership in the US (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010), due to job segregation within industries the percentage of women members of individual unions varies greatly. These patterns of gender segregation by job and industry are mirrored in union leadership (Milkman 2007; Cobble and Bielski Michal 2002). Unions in the US also vary on structural factors that support the advancement of women leaders such as having committees that focus on training women in the skills they need to become union leaders. Reserving seats on executive boards for women and other disadvantaged groups, for example, is a controversial structural element. Nevertheless, it has also been found to support union women leaders’ advancement (Kirton and Healy 1999; Briskin 2002).

Societal/Historical Level Forces—As a group, women are living the transition from societal norms of ‘living for others’ to ‘a life of one’s own’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 55). This transition, however, is fraught with both emotional challenges and structural obstacles that men have typically not experienced. Riley, Kahn and Foner (1994) describe the problem of a structural lag, in which societal norms change far more slowly than people’s lives. One consequence of the structural lag is that family structures have not adapted to gender work roles. Højgaard (2002) reports that top males leaders have more traditional family arrangements than female leaders and are more likely to benefit from current societal structures supporting traditional families than women. Aspects of gender regimes (Sümer 2009; Walby 2004) may also be included at this level. However, because the US gender regime tends toward market-led solutions that are individually based, some of the gender regime factors are included elsewhere. For example, childcare for working mothers in the US varies widely in cost and availability, and individual families are left to find their own solutions without the support of welfare state or regulatory polity institutions.

Outcomes

We suggest that the array of restraining and supporting forces will be a better predictor of union leadership attainment for women than individual skills and abilities alone. In addition, we anticipate the levels of forces will more often be aligned towards less achievement for women than for men.

Combining the various supports and hindrances into one framework and organising the forces into levels as we suggest here has some advantages. First, it provides a framework for a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of women leaders. Second, it allows for the integration of available findings in the leadership and career literatures

so we can begin to ask questions about the relative significance of the five levels, and how we can change them to create labour organisations more supportive of union women leaders. Third, this framework can provide union women leaders with a reference to assess their own situations and ascertain supports needed towards achievement.

METHODOLOGY

We interviewed 10 of the 35 participants in the Harvard Trade Union Program. This is a six-week, residential training programme about the political, economic and social factors affecting the labour movement and the process of organisational change within unions. One of the authors was a programme guest speaker, and presented a session on the gender gap in union leadership (2 hours in the 6-week programme). The framework used in this chapter, however, was not included in the presentation. Following the presentation, she asked for volunteers—women and men—to be interviewed about their experiences as union leaders. Two to four weeks after the conclusion of the programme those who volunteered were contacted by email and phone. The interviews were conducted over the phone and tape recorded for accuracy.

Programme participants come from the US, UK, Canada and Australia. To be admitted into the programme applicants go through a selection process and must be supported by their unions, which typically pay the substantial tuition of US\$12,000 or about €8,500. Often, union members compete to be sent to the programme. The Harvard faculty and programme administrators screen participants to ensure they have sufficient experience in the labour movement. This results in a group with both substantial experience within and support from their unions. Participants are typically mid-level paid staff or elected leaders and come from a variety of industries, with about equal representation of public and private sector workers.

Interview respondents were five women and five men. Three women were members of racial or ethnic minorities. Interviewees ranged in age from 40 to 57 (mean = 50). All had at least some college education, 80 per cent had at least a bachelors' degree and 30 per cent had a graduate degree. They included three union staff representatives or business agents; three research, media or communications staff at the national, state or provincial level; two elected officers (president or vice-president in their local unions); and two in leadership positions with significant supervisory, administrative and/or executive responsibilities at the state or provincial level.¹

Their positions point to a dichotomy within the labour movement that complicates the study of leadership in labour organisations. Specifically, elected labour union leaders typically hold the highest positions

within their organisation. Thus, some union leaders are more similar to elected government leaders who need to campaign and work to maintain a positive public image. To study these leaders, literature from both political science and psychology are relevant (Barbuto and Burbach 2006; Hollander 2002; Little 1994). However, many other leaders are appointed or promoted. These union staff might lead a department or be staff representatives who oversee contracts and coordinate a number of bargaining units. Therefore, they are more similar to middle- and high-level managers in civil service positions who carry out high-level work but whose positions do not change when the top elected office changes hands. The majority of participants in our sample held non-elected positions.

Interviewees came from a range of unions with different gender power dynamics. Public sector unions represented in this sample tended to have diverse membership in terms of type of work and demographics, and thus are also more likely to have relatively diverse leadership representation. The private sector unions, in contrast, tended to have more traditional gender power relations. For example, one building trades union was very male dominated. Another private sector union in the sample traditionally had a manufacturing base but was moving to become a general union. Whilst trying to develop a diverse leadership, one male leader from this union indicated it was still an 'old school, old boys union', and needed to change.

We conducted semi-structured interviews of 60 to 90 minutes in duration. To learn about the range of experiences respondents had had over the course of their union careers, we asked them to describe three different leadership positions: one early in their union career or activism, their current position and a middle leadership experience between the two. In total, they described 28 leadership experiences ranging from activist, volunteer organiser or steward to unit chair and regional director. For each leadership experience, we specifically asked about supports and hindrances at each level of the framework. The questions were broad and designed to elicit any factors that might be perceived by respondents as a supporting or restraining force (e.g., 'In what ways, if any, did the union as an organisation support you in your union career? In what ways, if any, did the union as an organisation hinder you in your union career?').

Responses were coded by the researchers as supportive, mostly supportive with some restraint, about equally supportive and restraining, mostly restraining with some support, or restraining. For example, in the non-work category, interviewees who said their spouse cared for their children while they themselves travelled or worked long hours was coded as supportive. In contrast, spending large amounts of time caring for a sick parent or family member was coded as a restraining force. Figure 3.2 presents the percentage breakdown of coded responses.

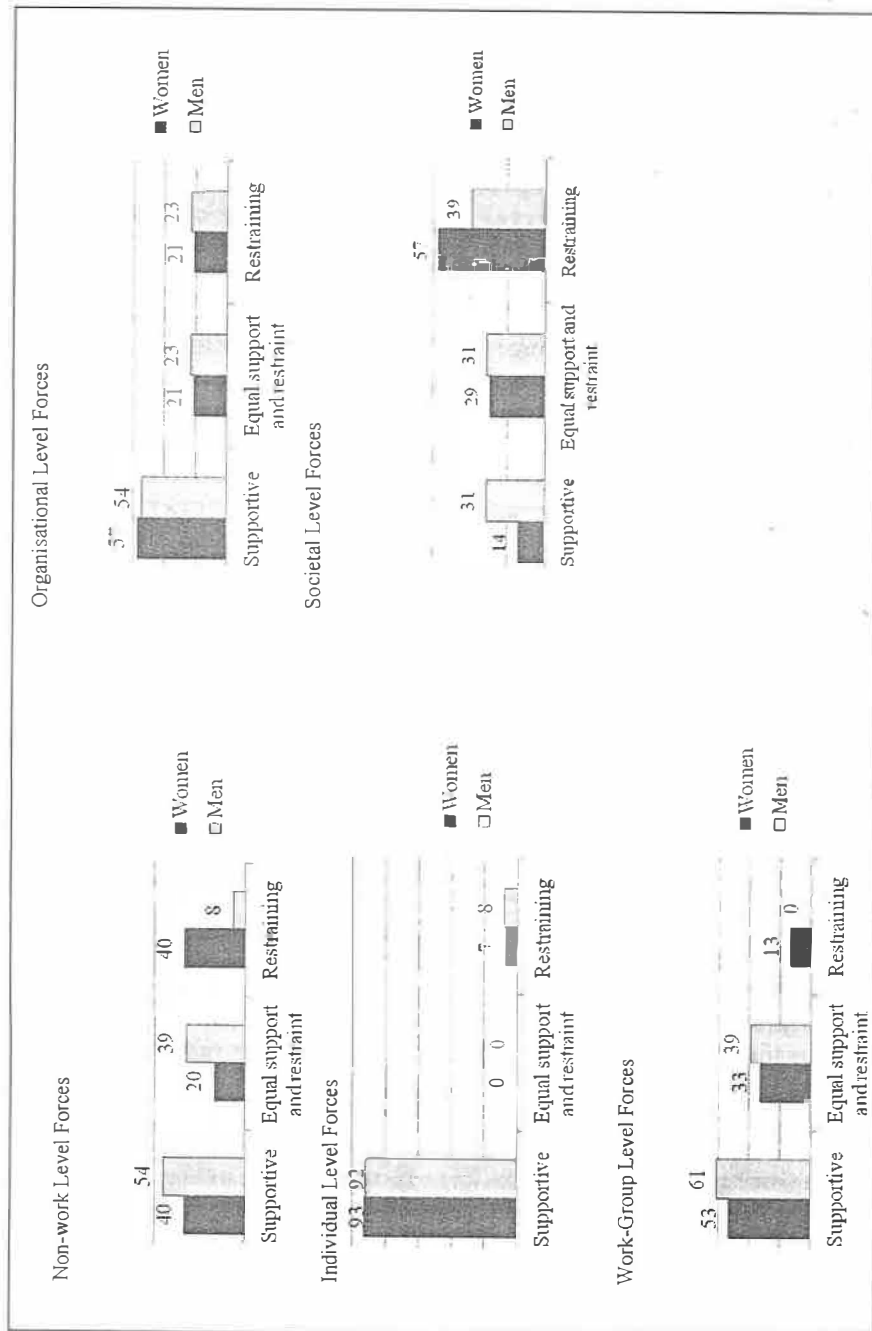


Figure 3.2 Percentage summary of interview responses.

RESULTS

Non-Work Level Forces

Men reported that non-work forces in their lives tended to be supportive (54 per cent) or equally supportive and restraining (39 per cent). All of the men had children (or step-children) and supportive spouses. Some male respondents described the time spent raising children. One said:

‘I’ve got a wonderful wife, she’s extremely intelligent, career oriented. The kind of work I do requires a lot of time away. I’m away from home a lot. Union business is never done . . . Having a supportive wife, somebody that, she can raise my son—I do miss a lot of things—but having her there is a key element’.

However, both the percentages and the tone of the comments were quite different for women respondents. They described an almost equal mix of supporting (40 per cent) and restraining forces (40 per cent), and most women leaders in our sample were divorced or never married. Noticeably, none of them mentioned a supportive spouse or partner during their early or middle leadership experiences, although two did in their current positions. One specifically said that the amount of time she spent working for the union hurt her relationships.

Overall, women reported noticeably more non-work hindrances than men did. One woman was not active in the union whilst her children were young. Another felt especially strongly about this issue, and spoke in response to some comments by male union leaders at the training programme:

‘For men to sit there and say “we have a democratically elected leadership, and so there are no barriers to women in our union” just astounds me. Just to go to a union meeting a rank and file woman member has to pick the kids up from child care—if they’re lucky enough to have child care—rush home, do grocery shopping, cook the meal, clean up, serve the meal, clean up, put the kids to bed. We know that women still do the bulk of the domestic work and are still the nurturers in the family. So for women just to attend a union meeting and be elected shop stewards is a challenge. Not to mention the incredible guilt trip they feel when they do take on another volunteer capacity, like being a steward. And that’s the start of your union career’.

She also noted that ‘women staff who have chosen to have children, to have a family, have to step back in their career’.

Elder care was also increasingly an issue for female respondents. The illness and death of a parent was mentioned as a factor that made it harder to spend

time on union activities. One woman said, 'My father was very ill and going in and out of hospitals, and I was travelling about 50 miles each way, regularly'. This is an example of how women's family responsibilities are life-long, and clearly affect the amount of time they can spend on their union career.

In general, men described their non-work lives as largely supportive of their union careers whilst women tended to feel less supported by their spouses or partners, and families. We also noted that it was not just child-rearing that had an impact. Several female respondents did not have children or spouses, and yet non-work factors still imposed gender-based constraints on their union careers.

Individual Level Forces

Virtually all respondents believed they possessed the skills, knowledge and experience needed to perform in their leadership positions, and there were no differences in responses from men and women. They mentioned writing and oral communication skills, legal knowledge, bargaining experience and experience working in political campaigns. Although respondents acknowledged the need for learning additional skills—particularly when they were just starting out—most women and men reported that they already had the skills needed to perform their jobs. To the women leaders in our sample, skill level was not a factor in the under-representation of women in union leadership or associated with devaluing their contribution and/or performance.

Work-Group Level Forces

We asked participants to identify the work-group with which they interacted daily or weekly. Since interactions with work-group members are frequent, there are many opportunities for leaders to experience support, hindrance, or both. Men were slightly more likely than women to feel supported by their work-group, and women were more likely than men to describe experiences at the work-group level that primarily hindered their accomplishments. However, experiences with work-group forces were discussed in more personal terms by women, who reported sometimes being the target of personal and vindictive behaviour.

As examples of supports received from their immediate work-group, men identified being mentored or trained by a staff representative, working with 'kindred souls' or with a group of people who shared a common direction. One man reported that the president and vice-president at the national level of his union 'come to me directly, engage me, and ask me my thoughts'. Another said, 'The leadership group is open to discourse and new ideas. In terms of the president, we have a high mutual respect for one another'.

Men also experienced restraining work-group forces. One respondent, who received a promotion to a position with supervisory responsibilities, said:

'When I got that position, there had been a staff representative of long standing who was also in line for that promotion, and I was promoted on top of that person. So, when I entered [that] position, there was staff animosity, and I had, in quick succession, three turnovers—one who didn't get the promotion and two people who I felt were not adding to their professional growth in the way that needed to be done'.

In this case, because the respondent had the support of the president, he won that battle.

Women's experiences with their work-groups also involved both supportive and restraining forces, although they were described in a different tone than men's experiences. Only one woman described what we consider strong support from her work-group over the course of her career: she was mentored and 'praised in public'. Her director provided strategic career advice, and she reported feeling that 'my time would come' for a leadership position. Others received support to varying degrees. One mentioned that a staff representative steered her to a scholarship that would enable her return to school. The remaining women, however, described the support received in more modest terms such as 'they left me alone and didn't micro-manage me'. Another woman was more forthcoming. When asked 'In what ways does your work-group support you in your career', she laughed, saying her work-group was anything but supportive.

We also asked respondents whether their work-group hindered the advancement of their union career. One man described conflicts about issues in which the union was involved, with one side supporting a campaign and the other opposing it. However, these were generally not perceived as obstacles directed at them personally. In contrast, the work-group level hindrances faced by women were more often experienced as attempts to attack or harm them individually. Here are some examples:

One woman was an elected officer in a unit which regularly turned incumbents out of office. She won an elected position and then later lost it. The newly elected group retaliated by trying to rescind her college scholarship (mentioned earlier). When they were not successful in doing so—because the national level of the union indicated that the scholarship was hers whether she was in office or not—the group asked the employer to rescind her already-approved vacation time so she would not be able to attend classes. In her interpretation, this was a personal attack, contrary to norms of solidarity and of abiding by the collective agreement. None of the male respondents reported being the target of such personal retaliation.

Another woman leader, a woman of colour, described a complex mix of supports and hindrances often with the very same individuals who said supported her, yet behaved in ways that undermined her advancement. She had just moved into a leadership position in a male-dominated building trade and was initially treated in a paternalistic manner:

'They made sure to check in frequently. I would get calls from the [staff] representative, just to touch base that I was doing well in the facility. I was the only female in [that position], and they kept a "big brotherly" eye out for me . . . [But] when it came to comparing me to the others, I was always a step-child. They were supportive, but I also knew where my place was in the group, which was, I was still a female, and they, at times, let it be known. I was getting mixed signals all the time'.

Despite—or perhaps as a result of—the mixed messages received, she was promoted to a position she had not sought. Some leadership research suggests that women are promoted into leadership positions that are 'glass cliffs'. That is, they are promoted specifically when circumstances are difficult and any leader would be expected to fail (Ryan et al. 2009). We do not know if this applies in her case. But her promotion came in the context of a difficult merger and involved a period of substantial budget cuts. In addition, this woman leader encountered some classic barriers: she was expected to perform at a higher level in order to receive the same evaluation as men, and achieve the higher standard only to find the bar had been raised again. Like some of the other women, she also reported a personal component to the treatment received from her work-group:

'[I had a male peer in the same position.] They did not raise the bar for him. And . . . we were friends. We would at times get together away from work. [But] during work, he made sure to stay clear of me. He was cordial, but if I needed someone to support a position or to help me with something, [I didn't get help from him]'.

This respondent's experiences capture many of the challenges union women leaders face. Sometimes peers and supervisors who claim to be supportive are the same ones placing obstacles in the woman's path, creating a double-bind situation. The complexity of navigating this type of situation often takes an emotional toll on women leaders. It adds another layer of burden to the leadership experiences of women. In contrast, none of the men described this type of experience. We do not know whether men simply do not have these experiences or, if they have them, perceive and/or respond to them differently.

A special subset of the experiences with work-group forces for women is when another woman leader undermines them in some way. One respondent described such a conflict:

'I try to reach out and help other women, bring them into the organisation . . . It's a disappointment [when other women don't do that] . . . This woman that was in a position higher than me backstabbed me.

She was going to run for one position and I was going to run for a lower position, and we were going to run and support each other. But I was told she was backstabbing me. Until I saw it and heard it myself, I didn't want to believe it. And when I found out, I . . . confronted her and said, "Fine, I'm running against you". And neither one of us [won] that time. The next time, we ran for different positions and we both won. We had to work together after that'.

Male leaders typically do not expect that other men will support them simply because of their gender or racial identity, perhaps because they are in the majority in most unions. But women sometimes feel they should support each other. Our observation from working in the labour movement is that when this expectation is violated, it can result in long-lasting bitter feelings.

The experiences described with work-group forces seemed to be very complex for women. Based on some of the responses to the first few interviews, we added a question about the work-group.² As a shorthand measure of respondents' relationship to the work-group we asked whether they were members of the 'in-group' at their level of the organisation. All of the men, but only 40 per cent of the women replied that they were members of the in-group.

Labour Union Organisational Level Forces

Most interviewees indicated that they received resources, general support and recognition from the organisational level of their union. The women in the sample tended to describe higher levels of the organisation as supportive. In the example in which the peers were trying to cancel the respondent's scholarship, the woman leader received firm backing from the top union leadership. She credited the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the older and larger of the two peak labour bodies in the US; the Coalition of Labour Union Women; and her national union as making strong efforts to increase diversity in their leadership. She attended women's training programmes which helped her gain visibility and learn new skills, but she continued to face opposition at the local level. Her most significant step up in leadership came from moving into a staff representative position at a different union.

Societal/Historical Level Forces

We asked participants to identify larger factors in society that either supported or hindered their union work. There was a striking uniformity in responses from women and men. Although our prompts in the question included changes in laws, other social movements, new ideas or

new technology, respondents overwhelmingly focused on two factors we had not suggested: politics and the economy. They cited US presidents, congressional leaders and governors who were more or less favourable to the labour movement. One respondent said of the current situation: 'they're trying to do everything they can to kill [the labour movement]'. Some respondents viewed having unfavourable government leaders as a threat and hindrance to their union work because the unions themselves were under attack. On the other hand, some viewed it as an opportunity because the attacks on unions made the need for unions even clearer.

None of the respondents mentioned the women's movement or the civil rights movement as factors that supported or hindered their work. Although the larger system of gender identities and gender regimes influence women's leadership achievement, these large-scale factors were not mentioned by our respondents. The only exception was one woman who identified childcare and family responsibilities as a systemic issue.

Outcomes

What was the result of these leadership experiences? For each past leadership experience, we asked how it came to an end. For the current position, we asked about aspirations for their next career move. We coded responses as either moving up to a higher position, staying in place/making a lateral move, or moving to a lower position/withdrawing from the union. Here there were very striking gender differences, as shown in Table 3.1.

In their earlier leadership positions, men moved up in six out of eight leadership positions, and stayed in the same position in two cases. Some moved up quite rapidly. Four of the five men currently aspired to a higher

Table 3.1 Outcome of Each Leadership Experience

	Women	Men
Outcome of previous position ^a		
Moved up	30%	75%
Stayed in place	30%	25%
Moved down	40%	0%
Current aspirations ^b		
Move up	25%	75%
Stay in place	75%	25%
Move down	0%	0%

^a N=10 leadership experiences of women, 8 leadership experiences of men

^b N=4 women, 5 men

position, and one said he was happy to stay in his current position. When asked what it would take to move into a higher position, one male leader responded he was being groomed to move up to a very significant position and was told to 'be ready'.

For the women, their current aspirations were dramatically different. Two of them were thinking about retiring in five to 10 years, and one hoped to be re-elected to the same position. Another suggested a modest increase that would keep her at the same level in the organisational structure. Only one was hoping for a significant promotion, but she stressed that she would be happy to stay where she was 'if it doesn't work out'. However, these women leaders have at times felt devalued by their work-groups and their organisations. Their responses included comments such as: 'I got tired of the fight, tired of being seen as incompetent', or 'It's hard not to lose faith' that they will be recognised or promoted. In one of the more dramatic examples, one woman reported leading a key campaign, sacrificing a great deal for the union, and still not being rewarded for the leadership she exercised.

'The time when I demonstrated the most leadership was when we were under brutal attack by the government, and I really stepped up to the plate. We launched a fight-back campaign. That became personal for me. I was driven, to the detriment of my health. There was a period of time for a year, when I was coming in to work at about five o'clock in the morning and not leaving until ten or eleven at night. . . . It forced everybody else to step up their game as well . . . We really, really made an impact. . . . I take a lot of pride and credit for that'.

We asked whether this experience positioned her for a promotion. She replied: 'No. It was still a number of years after that when I was promoted into another position'. When asked what it would take for her to move up in the organisation leadership, her response suggested her promotion would involve some risk for the union leadership because she did not fit the traditional mould of a union leader.

'It's going to take . . . some will on the part of the leadership to take a chance on somebody who has been around for a long time and really put their whole life into this organisation . . . And if it doesn't happen that's fine, because I have achieved—we have over 200 staff and about 8 managers, and I'm one of them. If this is as high as I go and that's it for me, then I'm very proud of that and I've achieved more than I had hoped to, and I'd be content and happy'.

Because of her long commitment to the union and demonstrated success, we followed up by asking why would it be 'taking a chance'. She replied:

'I'm not your stereotypical trade unionist. I'm not loud and aggressive and blustery. I have a different style; I'm thoughtful and a thinker, and more reserved, and more strategic, and quiet. So that would be going against the norm. To be seen as an executive director, you have to be a bit of a hard ass. They have reservations about me, about whether I have what it takes to do that. My response to that is that you don't have to all have the same style of leadership. It's good to have a mix'.

Finally, through a follow up e-mail we asked all respondents whether they had ever run for office or applied for a position because of the support they received from their union leadership. Three of three men but only three of five women said they had. We also asked if they had ever decided *not* to run for office or apply for a position because of lack of support from leadership. Three of three men said 'no'. In contrast, three of five women said 'yes'. One of them said she had considered applying for a position in the education department. At the time, she worked in communication and her leader implied she had no experience in education. Yet she ran educational workshops for union activists as part of her communications job on a regular basis.

DISCUSSION

The interviewees in this study represent a select group of union leaders who participated in the Harvard Trade Union Program. They have worked hard, demonstrated leadership and accomplished goals for their unions. For the men, this was generally associated with being recognised and advancement to formal leadership positions. For the women, that was only sometimes the case. Through the framework adopted in this study, we observed different patterns of supporting and restraining forces for women and men. Furthermore, the restraining forces men encounter do not seem to impact their advancement to higher leadership positions.

The experiences reported by these union leaders suggest that the group level of analysis would be a fruitful area for further research. Although not reflected in Figure 3.2, during the interviews women had a noticeably stronger and more emotional response than men did to questions about hindrances at the group level. To us, this indicates they either face significantly greater restraining forces than men do at this level, or these forces have a greater impact on women's advancement than men's. Lewin (1947) predicted that removing restraining forces has a greater impact on changing the status quo than enhancing supporting forces. Thus, finding a way to address resistance to women leaders at the group level would seem to be a powerful way to promote the advancement of women in labour unions.

How might this be accomplished? In spite of the small sample size and unique characteristics of participants in this study, the experiences shared here suggest useful strategies when both endorsed and enforced by the top leadership. For example, rather than being elected to their positions, most women

in our sample were hired or promoted. They often talked about being passed over, or having their experience and credentials ignored or de-valued. Therefore, unions can remove a significant restraining force by ensuring that hiring and promotion practices foster inclusion. A key element in hiring practices to address potential discrimination is to ensure a diverse pool of candidates. This can be accomplished by assigning a member of the hiring committee the task of ensuring qualified women candidates apply for the position. We suspect that such a procedure could easily be put in place where current leadership supports the idea of a diverse leadership group. However, where current leaders are resistant, an enforcement mechanism would be needed. For example, local unions could be required to report to the national union on their hiring process, including the percentage of women and minorities they interviewed for each opening. It is likely that only a significant penalty for failing to comply would be sufficient to get the most resistant leaders to change.

Once on the job, staff evaluations should be based on objective, clearly stated criteria which capture what it means to be successful in specific positions. Biases in evaluation include placing higher value on aspects of the job men traditionally perform (e.g., demonstrating assertiveness) and lower value on aspects of the job at which women traditionally excel (e.g., encouraging cooperation), and rating women lower than men for the same objective level of performance. Those conducting evaluations can be trained to avoid such biases.

Fairness in hiring and promotion can remove some of the significant restraining forces for women. However, women leaders may also face hostility from peers. One strategy to address this is a combination of survey monitoring and training. Surveys can be utilised to assess perceptions of women leaders in the union and identify potentially restraining forces within a particular union. Such surveys should focus on the conditions at the work group level given the complex dynamics women leaders encounter there. Following up on survey responses, unions could conduct ally training. In addition to education about differences and focus on valuing all organisation members as is typical of diversity training, ally training includes a focus on action.

For elected leaders, developing a coherent training strategy might be more appropriate. The various women's committees, caucuses, conferences, and education programmes throughout the US labour movement vary widely in content and focus. In many cases, their original intent was to provide women with the skills needed to run for elected union office. A recommitment to that focus, by providing training on specific campaigning skills and strategies, and the capabilities to carry out the position effectively can provide an additional supporting force for women seeking elected office.

Most of the strategies discussed earlier address the work group and organisational levels. Yet, a notable difference in our sample was found at the non-work level. Although changes on non-work issues are not under the complete control of unions, they can use their bargaining power to improve work-life balance (e.g., childcare benefits, flex time, and equal pay) and political power to advance legislation impacting work-life balance issues

(e.g., the US is one of the few industrialised countries without legislation providing paid parental leave).³ Unions could also structure activism in ways that work for women (e.g., childcare at union meetings, utilising social networking and technology for activism on a personalised schedule).

We think that taking steps to remove restraining forces on women who strive for union leadership positions is important not only for potential women leaders, but also to the labour movement as a whole. The US labour movement is under attack politically and economically. One key component of a strategy to overcome those attacks is internal solidarity. In our opinion, the goal of having a leadership that looks like the membership helps to maintain solidarity by increasing members' identification with the union. Moreover, this goal helps create an environment in which the best and most effective leaders rise to top leadership positions, regardless of their demographic characteristics.

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NOTES

1. Union structures vary from country to country. For historical reasons, the national level of the union in the US is called the 'international union', but we will refer to it here as the 'national' level for ease of comparison to labour unions in other countries included in this book. Nine of ten interviewees held full-time paid positions, generally at the state (US) or provincial (Canada) levels. Two also held unpaid (voluntary) elected positions—president and vice-president—at the local level. Most of the state/provincial unions had between 20,000 and 100,000 members; two had memberships over 200,000. One participant worked for a large national union with 1.2 million members and was among the top support staff in that union.
2. We tried to re-contact the earlier respondents, and received responses from some, but not all of them. We received responses to these and another set of questions described later from 4 of 5 women and 3 of 5 men.
3. Unpaid parental leave is available.

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