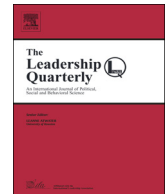




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Leadership Quarterly

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/leaqua

Performance feedback, power retention, and the gender gap in leadership

Julia B. Bear¹, Lily Cushenbery*, Manuel London, Gary D. Sherman

College of Business, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Harriman Hall, Stony Brook, NY 11794, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 February 2016

Received in revised form 24 January 2017

Accepted 7 February 2017

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Leadership

Performance feedback

Power

Gender differences

ABSTRACT

We propose that performance feedback can be a power retention mechanism that puts women at a relative disadvantage and contributes to the lack of women in leadership positions. Feedback is an evaluative process, with the (typically higher-power) source often having considerable discretion and means to deliver feedback and the feedback recipient often being at the mercy of the will of the source. The feedback process, therefore, has a built-in power component that preserves and amplifies existing power differences in organizations (e.g., differences in organizational authority and rank) and disproportionately harms women's leadership development. We develop a theoretical model concerning how power retention conditions (e.g., when giving feedback advances the source's personal status goals) lead to power retention mechanisms in the feedback process, such as patronizing feedback, particularly for female recipients. We discuss how gender moderates feedback delivery and reactions to feedback, which influence the persistent gender gap in leadership, subsequently reinforcing the power retention conditions. We conclude by discussing areas for future research, potential power equalization forces, and practical suggestions for how organizations can change this cycle.

© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The path to leadership is competitive, demanding, and shaped by experience. Leadership development is aided by opportunities, pressure, and elements of complexity (McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994), particularly when coupled with clear feedback on learning progress (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). Given the demands of leadership, individuals may self-select out of this path or else be selected out for various reasons, such as their abilities, character, motivation, preferences, and, most strikingly, gender. Indeed, women are less likely than men to (a) emerge as leaders in group tasks, especially when gender roles are salient (e.g., in mixed-gender groups) and the task is gendered (Eagly & Karau, 1991; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007), (b) occupy high-level leadership positions (Bertrand, Goldin, & Katz, 2010; Catalyst, 2016; Eagly & Karau, 1991), and (c) succeed as leaders in male-dominated organizations (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

Many factors contribute to the gender gap in leadership, such as perceptions of role incongruity between leadership and traditional gender roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012; Hoyt, 2010), stereotyping processes (Heilman, 2012; Rudman, 1998), and organizational barriers for women (Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2015; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1998). In fact, the path to leadership for women has been characterized as a labyrinth, given the many obstacles along the way (Eagly & Carli, 2007). We examine the role of performance feedback, particularly in relation to its inherent power dynamics.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: lily.cushenbery@stonybrook.edu (L. Cushenbery).

¹ All authors contributed equally to this manuscript. Author order is alphabetical.

Feedback is a key process in the life of an organization. It helps employees understand workplace expectations and opportunities for reward (Van Velsor, McCauley, & Moxley, 1998), provides an opportunity for employees to learn and improve performance (Smither et al., 1995; Wohlers, Hall, & London, 1993), and allows organizational leaders to identify and cultivate individuals for leadership positions (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998). Although previous research has examined differences in the structure of feedback processes (see for instance, Espinilla, de Andrés, Martínez, & Martínez, 2012; Jordan & Nasis, 1992; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), we focus instead on the interpersonal dynamics that are present in a variety of feedback contexts. Whether formal or informal, 360-degree or dyadic (leader-follower) in structure, feedback influences career development in general and leadership development in particular. However, men and women may have different experiences of feedback in organizations, which may be explained, in part, through the lens of power dynamics. Whereas previous research typically has considered power from either the perspective of the more powerful or the less powerful party, we provide a more comprehensive view that incorporates the interactions between both parties.

We argue that because feedback is an evaluative process, with the source (typically someone with authority over the recipient) having considerable discretion and means to deliver feedback and the feedback recipient at the mercy of the will of the source, there is an inherent power gap or asymmetry between the source of feedback and the recipient. As a result, the feedback process has a built-in power component that preserves and even amplifies existing differences in power in organizations, especially between supervisor and subordinate, and may exert a disproportionately negative influence on women's leadership development. We argue that the feedback process (both its delivery and receipt) often occurs under conditions that conspire to create and exacerbate gender effects (e.g., gender biases in evaluation, Heilman, 2001). These conditions, which we call power retention conditions, include: (a) when giving feedback is a high power experience, (b) when the source treats feedback delivery as a chance to advance personal status goals, (c) when cultural norms and stereotypes favor men as leaders, (d) when the source treats feedback delivery as a chance to affirm group-based power differences, (e) when the organizational hierarchy is unstable, (f) when women are more powerless than men as feedback recipients, and (g) when men have greater access than women to social networks within the organization.

During the feedback process, these conditions serve as antecedents that influence the proximate power retention mechanisms, which we define as processes that preserve pre-existing gender-based power differences in organizations and create barriers to advancement for women. We identify two forms of power retention mechanisms: feedback delivery and recipient's reactions to feedback. Regarding the former, biased feedback delivery involves feedback that is given, wittingly and unwittingly, particularly when evaluating women (e.g., different standards and expectations for men and women, patronizing feedback—meaning feedback that is less challenging and thus less helpful from a developmental perspective, and penalties for counter normative behavior). Regarding the latter, women are more likely than men to internalize feedback, make negative interpretations of ambiguous feedback, and attend to feedback concerning interpersonal processes. We discuss how the power retention conditions give rise to and exacerbate these power retention mechanisms, particularly when the feedback recipient is female. These power retention mechanisms subsequently reduce the likelihood that women will develop an identity as a leader, and ultimately result in women being less likely to pursue, and receive, opportunities for leadership development and advancement in organizations. Fig. 1 presents a model of these proposed relationships from power retention conditions to power retention mechanisms to leadership outcomes.

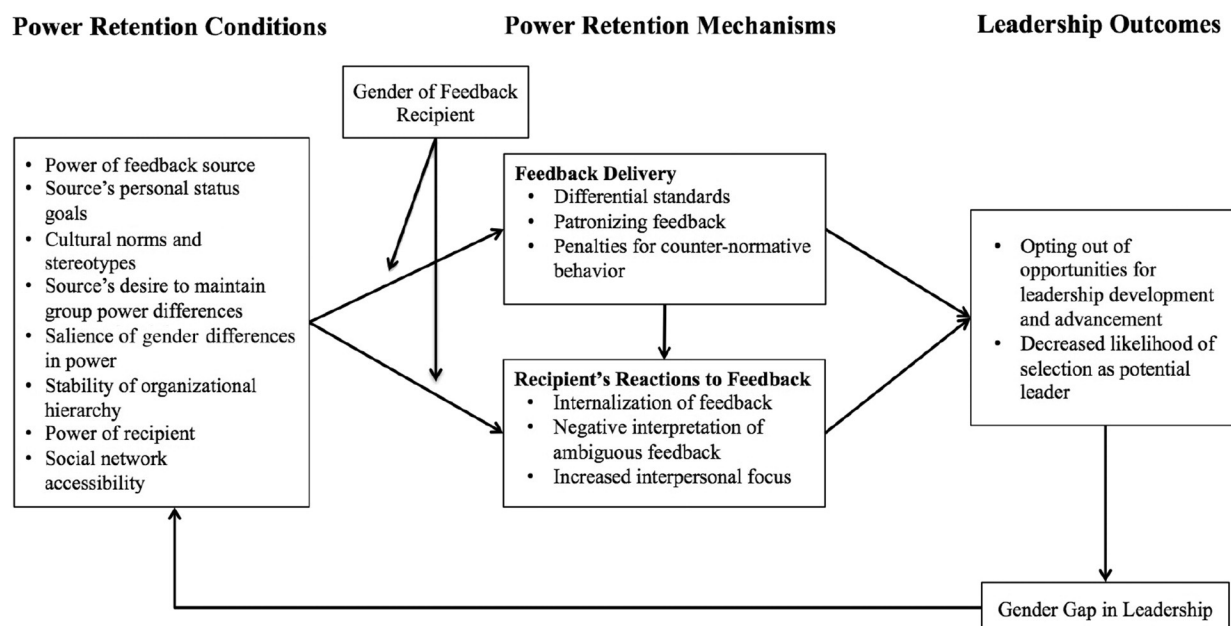


Fig. 1. Model depicting how feedback acts as a power retention mechanism that contributes to and widens the gender gap in leadership.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7247906>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7247906>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)