Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership
by Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli

The Idea in Brief

Women occupy 40% of all managerial positions in the United States. But only 6% of the executives are female. And just 2% of those firms have women CEOs.

We've long blamed such numbers on the “glass ceiling,” the notion that women succumb to hierarchy until they're blocked just below the summit. But the problem stems from discrimination, not just the top, say Eagly and Carli.

Therefore, to move more women into your company’s executive suite, you must attack simultaneously. For example, prepare women for line management with demanding criteria to measure performance. And give working mothers additional time to prove the promotion.

Women’s leadership style—characterized by innovating, building trust and empowering—is today’s business challenges. Tackle the obstacles to women’s progress, and you’ll improve competitive prowess.

The Idea in Practice

Eagly and Carli recommend these strategies for increasing the number of women in top positions:

Understand the Career Barriers Women Encounter

Extensive academic and government research studies identify these obstacles:

- **Prejudice**: Men are promoted more quickly than women with equivalent qualifications, even in tradition and education.

- **Resistance to women’s leadership**: People view successful female managers as more deceitful, pushy, and critical than successful male managers.
• **Leadership style issues:** Many female leaders struggle to reconcile qualities people prefer in women—qualities people think leaders need to succeed (assertion and control).

• **Family demands:** Women are still the ones who interrupt their careers to handle work/family trade-offs engage in the social networking essential to advancement.

**Intervene on Multiple Fronts**

Because of the interconnectedness of obstacles women face, companies that want to apply a variety of tactics simultaneously:

• Evaluate and reward women’s productivity by objective results, not by “number of hours at work.”

• Make performance-evaluation criteria explicit, and design evaluation processes to limit the influence of

• Instead of relying on informal social networks and referrals to fill positions, use open-recruitment tools such as employment agencies.

• Avoid having a sole female member on any team. Outnumbered, women tend to be ignored by men.

• Encourage well-placed, widely esteemed individuals to mentor women.

• Ensure a critical mass of women in executive positions to head off problems that come with tokenism. Women become less salient to colleagues than their individual competencies.

• Give women demanding developmental job experiences to train them for leadership positions.

• Establish family-friendly HR practices (including flextime, job sharing, and telecommuting). You’ll help women rearing children, allow them to build social capital, and enable them eventually to compete for higher positions by providing paternity leave. When only women because companies expect them to be off the job while exercising those options.

• Give employees with significant parental responsibilities more time to show they’re qualified for promotion two more than childless professionals.

• Establish alumni programs for women who need to step away from the workforce. Then tap their expertise possible. Consulting giant Booz Allen, for example, sees its alumni as a source of subcontractors.

**Click here for the bibliography for this article.**

If one has misdiagnosed a problem, then one is unlikely to prescribe an effective cure. This is especially true of the scarcity of women in top leadership. Because people with the best of intentions have misread the signals managers are investing in are not making enough of a difference.
That there is a problem is not in doubt. Despite years of progress by women in the workforce of all managerial positions in the United States), within the C-suite they remain as rare as he paid executives of *Fortune* 500 companies—those with titles such as chairman, president, or operating officer. Of this group, only 6% are women. Most notably, only 2% of the CEOs are on the boards of directors are held by women. The situation is not much different in other ind largest publicly traded corporations in each nation of the European Union, women make up, executives and 4% of the CEOs and heads of boards. Just seven companies, or 1%, of *Fortune* female CEOs. What is to blame for the pronounced lack of women in positions of power and

In 1986 the *Wall Street Journal*’s Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt gave the world an who rose steadily through the ranks eventually crashed into an invisible barrier. The executiv but they just couldn’t break through the glass ceiling.” The metaphor, driven home by the arti resonated; it captured the frustration of a goal within sight but somehow unattainable. To be barriers were absolute. Even within the career spans of 1980s-era executives, access to top Consider comments made by President Richard Nixon, recorded on White House audiotape: Freedom of Information Act. When explaining why he would not appoint a woman to the U.S don’t think a woman should be in any government job whatsoever…mainly because they are erratic and emotional, too, but the point is a woman is more likely to be.” In a culture where s women had virtually no chance of attaining influential leadership roles.

Times have changed, however, and the glass ceiling metaphor is now more wrong than right absolute barrier at a specific high level in organizations. The fact that there have been female presidents, state governors, and presidents of nations gives the lie to that charge. At the san women and men have equal access to entry- and midlevel positions. They do not. The image suggests that women are being misled about their opportunities, because the impediment is distance. But some impediments are not subtle. Worst of all, by depicting a single, unvarying incorporate the complexity and variety of challenges that women can face in their leadership turned away only as they reach the penultimate stage of a distinguished career. They disappoint points leading up to that stage.

Metaphors matter because they are part of the storytelling that can compel change. Believing ceiling, people emphasize certain kinds of interventions: top-to-top networking, mentoring to requirements for diverse candidates in high-profile succession horse races, litigation aimed a suite. None of these is counterproductive; all have a role to play. The danger arises when the away from other kinds of interventions that might attack the problem more potently. If we war to rename the challenge.

**Walls All Around**

A better metaphor for what confronts women in their professional endeavors is the labyrinth. varied history in ancient Greece, India, Nepal, native North and South America, medieval Eu
contemporary symbol, it conveys the idea of a complex journey toward a goal worth striving for not simple or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one’s progress, and a careful attention. It is this meaning that we intend to convey. For women who aspire to top leadership, routes can be both unexpected and expected. Because all labyrinths have a viable route to the center, it is attainable. The metaphor acknowledges obstacles but is not ultimately discouraging.

If we can understand the various barriers that make up this labyrinth, and how some women can work more effectively to improve the situation. What are the obstructions that women run turn.

Vestiges of prejudice.

It is a well-established fact that men as a group still have the benefit of higher wages and faster career advancement. For example, women employed full-time earned 81 cents for every dollar that men earned in the United States in 2005, for example, women employed full-time earned 81 cents for every dollar that men earned in the United States in 2005. Because all labyrinths have a viable route to the center, it is attainable. The metaphor acknowledges obstacles but is not ultimately discouraging.

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