

Debebe, Gelaye

**Article**

## Navigating the double bind: Transformations to balance contextual responsiveness and authenticity in women's leadership development

Cogent Business & Management

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Taylor & Francis Group

*Suggested Citation:* Debebe, Gelaye (2017) : Navigating the double bind: Transformations to balance contextual responsiveness and authenticity in women's leadership development, Cogent Business & Management, ISSN 2331-1975, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon, Vol. 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2017.1313543>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/205966>

**Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

**Terms of use:**

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Received: 12 January 2017  
Accepted: 27 March 2017  
Published: 21 April 2017

\*Corresponding author: Gelaye Debebe, Department of Organizational Sciences and Communication, The George Washington University, 600 21st Street NW, Washington, DC 20052, USA  
E-mail: [gdebebe@gwu.edu](mailto:gdebebe@gwu.edu)

Reviewing editor:  
Sandy Nunn, Foreign Affairs Council, USA

Additional information is available at the end of the article

## MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Navigating the double bind: Transformations to balance contextual responsiveness and authenticity in women's leadership development

Gelaye Debebe<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** Women leaders' double bind arises from followers' contradictory expectations that are rooted in the societal female gender role and the organizational leader role. Using qualitative data from alumnae of the Women's Leadership Series (WLS) of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research, this paper examines whether and how formal training enables women to more effectively navigate this double bind. Findings show that the WLS fostered four types of leadership transformations: hidden to visible leadership, inflexible to receptive leadership, attenuated to expanded leadership, and discouraged to inspired leadership. Interpreting these transformations through the lens of three ideas from the leadership effectiveness literature—context, authenticity, and behavior—this paper proposes a grounded theory, dual contingency model of leadership effectiveness for women. The model suggests that effective leadership behavior accounts for the demands of context *and* authenticity and identifies four unique pathways through



Gelaye Debebe

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gelaye Debebe is an associate professor in the Department of Organizational Sciences and Communication where she is Director of Organizational Sciences Graduate and Undergraduate Programs. Her research is in the areas of women's leadership, cross-cultural coordination and qualitative methods. She has published articles in, among others, *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Management Education*, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, and *Human Resources Development International*.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Although interest and investment in women's leadership programs has grown rapidly, little is known about the impact of these programs on women's leadership development. This paper analyzes data collected from senior and midlevel women scientists and managers who participated in the Women's Leadership Series of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and four types of leadership transformations experienced by CGIAR alumnae. These transformations were accomplished through deep learning that produced a shift in habitual patterns of thinking that previously inhibited the participants' leadership effectiveness. My findings have implications for researchers, women leaders, and leadership development practitioners. For women and researchers, my findings emphasize that although women must contend with gendered structures, they can increase their agency by changing habitual patterns of thinking that limit their growth. Additionally leadership development practitioners could focus attention on helping women in leadership development achieve internal transformation instead of focusing only on external barriers.

which inattention to either contingency arises and how imbalance is identified and balance is restored. By elucidating these four pathways, the model enriches the literature on leadership effectiveness and provides insights into how women may successfully navigate the double bind.

**Subjects:** Social Sciences; Work & Organizational Psychology; Leadership

**Keywords:** leadership effectiveness; women's leadership; double bind; gender; training

## 1. Introduction

This paper addresses the overall question of whether and how leadership development training can help to improve women's leadership effectiveness. I explore this question from the point of view of women who participated in the Women's Leadership Series (WLS) of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). By looking at training impacts from learners' perspective, this paper illuminates an often-ignored but critical aspect of leadership development, namely the transformation of habitual thought patterns. Since shifts in unhelpful and habitual thought patterns may precede behavior change, it is important to identify the various forms these patterns might take and how they might change to improve leadership practice. The *objective* of this paper is to offer an interpretive analysis of qualitative data obtained from interviews with 24 WLS alumnae to illuminate how critical learning experiences can produce transformation in habitual thought patterns, which in turn result in leadership transformation.

WLS alumnae were interviewed regarding three broad topics: their leadership experiences prior to the WLS, critical learning experiences within the WLS, and leadership experiences after the WLS. Data analysis shows that the WLS fostered four types of leadership transformations: hidden to visible leadership, inflexible to receptive leadership, attenuated to expanded leadership, and discouraged to inspired leadership. Each pair pertains to pre-WLS and post-WLS leadership patterns, respectively. The analysis demonstrates that the four transformations were propelled by shifts in pre-WLS thought processes that fostered new ways of thinking and behaving after the WLS.

Three specific ideas from the leadership effectiveness literature—context, authenticity, and behavior—were used to frame and interpret the four transformations. The grounded theory, dual contingency model of leadership effectiveness was the result of this analytic process. The model suggests that ineffective leadership behaviors are shaped by patterns of thought characterized by inattentiveness to the demands of context and/or authenticity, while effective leadership behaviors are characterized by attentiveness to both context and authenticity. Based on this, I conclude that the four leadership transformations of the WLS produced improved leadership effectiveness by fostering capacity to attend to these dual contingencies.

Given that this study focused on the development of women leaders, I also situate my work in the women's leadership literature. Women's leadership is often analyzed with reference to what has come to be known as the *double bind*: when women leaders observe societal gender role expectations and exhibit feminine behaviors, they are seen as weak (Eagly, 1987), but when they observe organizational role expectations and exhibit masculine behaviors, they risk being seen as aggressive. As a consequence of this double bind, any course of action can result in negative evaluations of women's leadership capacity (Eagly, 1987; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Spender, 1982). The question is whether this double bind represents an insurmountable barrier to women's leadership development, or whether it might be possible to effectively navigate around it. By asking women leaders how they have managed to develop the skills necessary to lead effectively in the context of the WLS, the paper shows that navigating the double bind may be possible by building women's ability to attend to both context and authenticity.<sup>1</sup>

While the paper's central empirical contribution pertains to the four leadership transformations, its theoretical contribution is the grounded theory, dual contingency model of leadership

effectiveness. This model enriches contingency theories of leadership effectiveness literature by incorporating the notion of authenticity into contingency models. It also makes two additional contributions. First, it addresses leadership ineffectiveness in addition to effectiveness, the latter being the primary focus of contingency theories. Second, the model moves away from the static and objectified way in which contingency theories conceptualize the process by which leaders “read” context and formulate appropriate leadership behaviors. Specifically my analysis suggests that, people’s behavioral flexibility is constrained by their habitual thought processes that in turn color their perceptions of and response to context. Thus, engaging in new, more effective behaviors require unlearning past conditioning by reversing unhelpful thought processes.

This paper also makes a practical contribution to individual women, trainers and instructors, as well as organizations that sponsor women’s leadership programs. My experience has shown that women might find the analysis applicable to diagnosing and addressing their leadership challenges. Recognizing that every leadership situation is different and that circumstances can change over time, the dual contingency model offers ideas that are applicable to a wide range of situations, and avoids static frameworks that narrowly conceive of a complex and dynamic process. Trainers and educators may also find the empirical analysis and framework useful in helping to think about differences among women learners and their developmental needs, as well as to consider teaching/training designs to effect transformation in habitual patterns of thought to address leadership challenges. Finally, the analysis of this paper provides a unique perspective on the question of whether and how investments in training women leaders may help women become more effective. Sponsoring organizations may find the conclusions of this study reassuring.

The next section reviews the women’s leadership and leadership effectiveness literatures, respectively. This is followed by a description of the research methodology. Four findings sections illustrate the four leadership transformations, implicitly introducing the grounded theory model that follows. The final discussion section formally presents this model and describes its theoretical and practical implications.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The origins of the double bind

The women’s leadership literature helps to frame how we think about a key dilemma in women’s leadership in the context of gender norms. Although we frequently conceive of gender as a property of individuals, feminist sociologists offer a more systemic view in which gender refers to a set of assumptions, ideas, beliefs, and expectations about the roles of women and men that serve as a basis of social organization (Acker, 2006; Ely & Padavic, 2007; Holmes, 2007; Wood, 1994). The gendered system is achieved through a socialization process that involves the development of masculine orientations and roles for men and feminine orientations and roles for women (Gilligan, 1982; Lorber, 1994; Miller, 1986), as well as a hierarchy between these two based on the dominance of masculinity over femininity. Because this view of gender is pervasive and legitimated, individuals experience it as natural rather than socially constructed (Ely & Padavic, 2007; Lorber, 1994; Ridgeway & Correll, 2000).

Since organizational leadership is associated with men and masculinity, gendered norms and practices facilitate men’s leadership, complicating that of women (Acker, 1990; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). The sex-difference in leadership literature suggests that women face contradictory norms and expectations that result in a leadership double bind defined above (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Eagly, 1987).

Empirical studies of “doing gender” identify two strategies used by women to cope with gendered expectations, neither of which enables women to overcome the double bind.<sup>2</sup> The first is to conform to organizational role expectations, either masculine or feminine. For example, in occupations such

as engineering (Miller, 2004; Powell, Bagilhole, & Dainty, 2009) or geology (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009), where masculine norms and identities are associated with competence, women may seek to suppress values, ideas and behaviors that are associated with femininity. In feminine professions such as nursing (Carvalho & Santiago, 2009) or clothing retail (Pettinger, 2005), where femininity is linked with competence, women managers may exaggerate their femininity. Conforming to organizational expectations may lead to a degree of acceptance and professional success (Miller, 2004; Pilgeram, 2007; Powell et al., 2009), but this is precarious because the conformity strategy can result in followers' perception that the individual lacks integrity (Vosko, 2006). It also diminishes the individual's capacity to take others expectations into account while also acting on chosen values and unique perspectives.

The second strategy of coping with the double bind involves resistance to societal gender norms. In contrast to conformity, resistance entails pushing back against problematic external expectations and demands. Resistance strategies are adopted to get work done (Nygren, 2010), reclaim avowed identities and guard against the imposition of ascribed ones (Kennelly, 2002; Tibbals, 2007), avoid harassment (Eveline & Booth, 2002), and fulfill the demands of work and life (Herman, Lewis, & Humbert, 2012). If resistance is the sole strategy, however, there is a risk of activating sexist stereotypes and engendering retaliation which in turn limit leadership effectiveness (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009).

There is a third strategy that is not identified in the doing gender literature, namely learning. Some research suggests that women's capacity to navigate the double bind increases as they learn from experience. An important part of this learning involves gaining clarity on personal values and interests and choosing to act on them consistently (Bierema, 1999; Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli, & Bilimoria, 2008; Kram & Gersick, 2002; Marshall, 1995; Rudderaman & Ohlott, 2002). As this paper attempts to show, this strategy has significant potential for thinking about how women might overcome the double bind.

## **2.2. Leadership effectiveness and training**

Decades of research on leadership effectiveness have produced sophisticated frameworks for understanding a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Early research focused on traits, innate dispositions presumed to contribute to leadership effectiveness. While this approach generated a great deal of empirical research, the accumulated evidence showed that there were no universal traits of effective leaders, and the effectiveness of a given trait depended upon the desirability of a trait in a particular situation (Stogdill, 1948). Therefore, researchers concluded that, depending on the situation, people with a wide variety of traits could be effective leaders. Although there have been recent attempts to revive interest in the trait approach, the literature as a whole has not moved in that direction (DeRue, Nahrang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991).

Given these limits of leadership trait research, attention turned to studying the behaviors of effective leaders. Pioneering work at the Ohio State University (Stogdill, 1950) and the University of Michigan (Bowers & Seashore, 1966) laid the foundation for this stream by identifying two mega-categories of leader behaviors: task-oriented and relationship-oriented. Although hundreds of studies have provided support for these categories, the cumulative evidence has failed to conclusively show that leadership behaviors were direct predictors of leadership effectiveness (DeRue et al., 2011; Yukl, 2012). Therefore, attention shifted toward context in an approach known as contingency theory.

Contingency theories seek to understand the types of traits and behaviors that would be effective in different contexts. Some contingency theories posit that effective leadership results when individuals are matched to situations that favor their disposition toward either task or relationship (Feidler, 1972; Singh, 1983). In contrast to this matching conception of effectiveness, other contingency approaches allow for leader behavioral flexibility in response to varying contextual demands. For example, situational theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) and path-goal theory



(Evans, 1970; House, 1996) view the follower as a key situational contingency and offer leaders a set of behavioral options matched to different degrees of follower task readiness. Despite allowing for behavioral flexibility, the options offered by path-goal theory and situational theory are narrow and mechanistic, devoid of the dynamism of situations and the trial-and-error involved in practice. Most importantly they do not account for how the leader's identity might also influence his or her behavior.

A growing and influential research stream on leader authenticity suggests that effective leaders are not only attentive to context but also to the demands of their identities (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, Douglas, & Walumbwa, 2005; March & Weil, 2005). Authenticity is defined as owning and acting in consonance with "... one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences or beliefs" (Gardner et al., 2005, p. 344). Authenticity is not a state, but an on-going process of becoming (Lawler & Ashman, 2012; Gardner et al., 2005) and identity revision (Debebe & Reinert, 2014). People's self-meanings originate in socialization experiences within the family, friendships, school, work and the larger societal culture (Burke & Stets, 2009). At the heart of the process of becoming authentic is a learning process that is activated by dramatic or subtle changes in an individual's circumstance (Gardner et al., 2005). The occurrence of these changes promotes reflection that produces greater self-awareness regarding "... how one derives and makes meaning of the world (and this encourages the) testing of hypotheses and self-schema ..." (Gardner et al., 2005, p. 347). This learning process can cultivate greater capacity for authentic self-expression if identity-relevant choices are made freely and in accordance with the individual's preferences (Debebe & Reinert, 2014; Gardner et al., 2005; Lawler & Ashman, 2012). The importance of chosen identities in guiding leader behavior is reflected in Bennis (1989) assertion that leaders have learned to "master context" and Zaleznick's (1977) idea that leaders are "twice-born" individuals.

In this paper, I utilize the ideas of context, authenticity, and behavior to interpret the four leadership transformation categories arrived at from the analysis of WLS data.<sup>3</sup> In the process, the analysis of this paper sheds light on three gaps in the leadership effectiveness literature. First, although the notion of authenticity has evolved somewhat independently of contingency theory, some researchers view the elements of context, behavior, and authenticity as related elements of effectiveness (Avolio, 2007; Hackman & Wageman, 2007; Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001; Sternberg, 2007). Consequently, we need to assess how authenticity fits into the contingency model of leadership effectiveness. Second, while contingency theories focus on leadership effectiveness, they leave ineffective leadership unexplored. However, the two are likely interlinked, and understanding the latter can be informative to achieving the former. Here we need to assess the processes that produce both leadership effectiveness and ineffectiveness, especially for women. Third, contingency theories employ a static and objectifying approach to characterize how a leader assesses or reads context and selects appropriate leadership behaviors. This obscures the way in which contextual cues are filtered through the individual's unique prism or habitual thought patterns that predisposes assessments of leadership situations and limits the behavioral options that an individual perceives and enacts.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Qualitative research

Qualitative research is grounded in a set of assumptions and purposes that distinguish it from quantitative research. These include studying individuals in natural settings, discovering the meanings individuals construct to make sense of their experiences, and attending to process and context (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 2005). Unlike quantitative research where research begins with hypotheses and a priori categories, qualitative research begins with questions, and categories are discovered through an iterative process of data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1996). Consistent with these purposes, I used semi-structured interviews to discover the impact of the WLS training from the perspective of participants. Although external perspectives were not obtained, alumnae perspectives on the impact of the WLS provide insight into the internal changes that are imperceptible to outsiders but form the foundation for noticeable behavior

changes.<sup>4</sup> In particular, examining the WLS impact from the perspective of participants provided understanding of and insight into the varieties of habitual patterns of thinking and acting that inhibited their leadership effectiveness prior to the WLS, as well as the ways in which leadership training fostered transformations of earlier patterns of thought and fostered new patterns and behaviors.

All researchers need to establish the trustworthiness of their findings. They must be mindful, however, to use evaluation criteria that are consistent with the paradigmatic assumptions of their research. There are three possible paradigms available in the conduct of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The first paradigm, post-positivist, represents a modified positivist view in which researchers believe that, while there is an objective reality that is knowable, pure objectivity is impossible. In the second paradigm, interpretivist-constructionist researchers believe that reality is multiple, co-constructed in the interactions taking place in different contexts and in fluid circumstances. Thirdly, critical-ideological researchers agree with the interpretive view that there are multiple realities, but they attribute this to individuals' differing positions within the social structure. Although qualitative researchers may be primarily guided by one of these paradigms, in practice, the research they undertake may be guided by hybrids of paradigmatic assumptions.

This paper is most closely aligned with the interpretive view in that its aim is to understand the impact of the WLS from participants' point of view. Consequently, I sought to create a conversational process in which the interviewee felt engaged and safe enough to describe her experiences and meanings in as much detail as possible. This enabled me to gain an understanding of how and why she saw something as she did. While I am aware that my analysis and interpretation of this information will be shaped by my own frame of reference, I was concerned about "getting it right". However, this did not mean correcting for the interviewee's or my own biases, as is common in quantitative research, but making sure that interviewees agreed that I had captured the details of their story and their intended meanings correctly and that other experts agreed that the description is rich and the interpretation in sync with and contributing to current knowledge in the field. After describing the research setting, interviewees, data collection, and data analysis procedures, this section will conclude with the steps taken to establish the trustworthiness of the research findings based on the paradigmatic assumptions outlined.

### **3.2. Research setting**

The setting of this research is the WLS of the CGIAR. The CGIAR is a strategic alliance that seeks to use scientific knowledge to achieve sustainable food security in developing countries. The alliance is composed of private foundations that support 15 scientific research Centers. Launched in 1995, the WLS is one of several system-wide programs of the CGIAR Gender and Diversity (G&D) program. Established in 1999, G&D's mission is to help the research Centers leverage their staff diversity to achieve research and management excellence. The G&D program also provides thought leadership and strategic advice on gender and diversity, maintains a global database of women scientists, creates and disseminates research findings, and provides consultation to CGIAR Centers and National Agricultural Research Systems (Wilde, 2012).

The WLS courses included Women's Leadership and Management, Negotiation Skills for Women, and Advanced Leadership. While these courses were similar in content to their standard equivalents, each was designed with the unique needs of women in mind. Although the initial focus of the WLS was on international women scientists, the courses grew to include women in a variety of managerial jobs at all hierarchical levels and across all recruitment categories (international, national, and regional staff). Since its inception, the WLS has involved over 716 women (Wilde, 2012).<sup>5</sup>

### **3.3. Recruiting interviewees via web-survey and characteristics of web-survey respondents**

The Web-survey was administered to alumnae who participated in the WLS between 1995 and 2005. In this time period, approximately 300 women had participated in the WLS courses. Given the global dispersion of WLS alumnae, potential interviewees were identified by means of a web-based survey.

Approximately one quarter of all WLS alumnae, 76 women, responded to the Web Survey. Of the 50 who agreed to be interviewed, 24 followed through with signed consent forms and were interviewed. Thus, approximately 8% of WLS alumnae were interviewed regarding their leadership experiences prior to and after the WLS, as well as their critical learning moments during the WLS courses. Of the 76 web-survey respondents, 65, or 85.5%, were still employed in a CGIAR Center.<sup>6</sup> As for those who agreed to be interviewed, all but one was employed by the CGIAR at the time of the study.

Web-survey respondents were asked to indicate the relevance and impact of the WLS training on their current leadership effectiveness. In terms of relevance, 85.5% of respondents indicated that the WLS course was “very relevant” to the leadership issues they encountered in their work, and 14.5% felt it was “somewhat relevant.” Assessments of course impact among web-survey respondents were more varied than with interviewees, with 56% indicating the course had “very positive” impact, 39.5% indicating “somewhat positive” impact, and the remaining 3.9% indicating “neither positive nor negative” impact. This breakdown compares to 96% of interviewees indicating that the WLS course had a “very positive” impact on their leadership effectiveness. Not surprisingly, interviewees’ experience does not reflect all the possible learning experiences of WLS alumnae, but none of the web respondents reported a negative impact of the WLS.

### **3.4. Characteristics of interviewees**

Interviewees represented many nationalities from six regions of the world: East Asia and Pacific (25%), North America (20.8%), Europe and Central Asia (25%), Sub-Saharan Africa (12.5%), South Asia (4.2%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (12.5%). Research Centers in the Middle East and North Africa were not represented due to non-response from those regions of the world.

On average, interviewees worked for nine years within their research Centers, with a range from two to 29 years. The interviewees came to their current roles having had a variety of experiences, including working in other CGIAR Centers, war zones, villages, and community organizing. Interviewees’ job titles were: program leader/theme leader, scientist/researcher, and manager/administrator. Program and theme leaders have a PhD and a minimum of 20 years experience, including significant management and leadership experience. Their roles include: developing institutional strategy and policy, identifying and pursuing funding opportunities, preparing and managing large budgets, negotiating on behalf of the Center, and participating in major decisions of the management team. Program Leaders manage a major scientific unit of the organization, including leading the unit’s research and training programs, staffing, fundraising, financial management, and negotiating on behalf of the organization on sensitive and contentious issues. Scientist/researchers are individuals trained in either a physical or social science discipline. Their role is to develop, lead, and carry out science projects as well as initiate and sustain partnerships with the Center’s partners. At senior levels, scientists are also responsible for negotiating with partners and provide expert scientific leadership on key research themes across the Center. Finally, manager/administrators may carry a range of titles including finance manager, personnel officer, and quality manager. Administrators have a university degree or equivalent professional status awarded by a professional institute and at least eight years relevant experience. They perform a wide range of roles including: offering expert advice within their discipline, having a leading role in reviewing, developing, refining, and implementing significant administrative policies and practices and leading and supervising a subset of corporate administrative services (CGIAR internal document).

### **3.5. Data collection**

All interviews were conducted by the author. A semi-structured interview protocol exploring three broad areas was used. These areas were, participants’ pre-WLS leadership experiences, post-WLS leadership experiences, and critical learning within the WLS. The protocol contained a set of questions to start the conversation on topics related to each of these areas. But, as is common in qualitative interviewing, follow-up questions picked up on issues and themes arising in each interview to deeply explore the respondent’s point of view. For instance, to start the conversation about pre-WLS experiences, I asked participants to think of one or more problems/issues they were facing in their



positions prior to the WLS training. Then I asked them to explain each of the problems/issues one at a time. As they talked about each of these, I followed up with questions about what their goals were in the situation, what they did to achieve their goals, what happened in the course of these efforts, what, if any, obstacles they encountered and how they managed them, what, if any, types of assistance they received, whether they felt they were successful in achieving their goal, and why. As they addressed these initial questions, I followed up with spontaneous questions to gain clarity on topics of interest as well as pursue lines of inquiry the interviewee opened up. I went through a similar set of questions with respect to their post-WLS leadership experiences. I also posed initial questions about the types of learning activities they engaged in during the WLS, the most memorable of these, and what if any learnings they felt they gained. Again I followed-up on these questions with more specific ones to get detail on what their most memorable learning experiences were and their reactions to the learning.

One alumnae interview took place in-person and lasted for five and a half hours. The remainder of the interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted between one hour and three-and-a-half hours with an average length of two hours. All interviews were taped and transcribed. In order to maintain the anonymity of information sources: all names used in describing stories are fictitious, names of projects, system-wide initiatives or programs are not identified, Centers of alumnae are not named in any of the stories, years in which the participants took the WLS courses are not indicated, some pieces of information from the stories have been altered although the events and meaning of the story has remained unchanged, nationalities are either not included or disguised, position titles have been omitted or changed, and years of employment in a Center are not included.

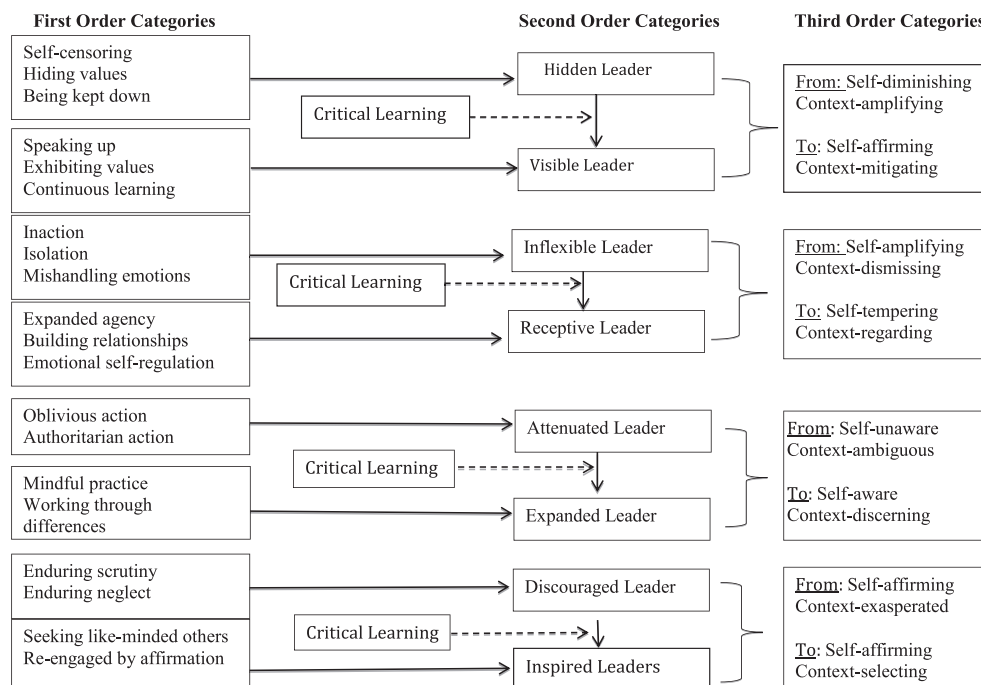
Data collection and in-process analysis were concurrent processes. Although each interview was taped, I also kept notes during the interview to identify issues that needed further development or clarification, as well as identify emergent issues that needed to be explored. I also developed an interview summary sheet that pertained to key issues from the interview and this was filled out immediately after each interview. Information contained in this document included participants' overall assessment of the usefulness of the WLS, reasons given for their assessment, critical learning during the WLS, and a very brief summary of the leadership stories told by participants. These summaries were continually consulted to write on-going memos and identify themes emerging during the interview process (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Written after each interview, memos also identified questions that needed to be explored in subsequent interviews (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Emerson et al., 1995). No new issues and themes emerged after 17 interviews, but interviews continued through 24 alumnae interviews to ensure data saturation (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). At this point, data collection came to a close, and a second phase of post-data analysis began.

### 3.6. Data analysis

Figure 1 depicts the data structure that evolved during the post-data collection analysis process. At this point, the goal was to reduce the data and achieve inclusive and local integration (Weiss, 1994). Inclusive integration pertains to the identification of a core or overarching theme that captures all or significant portions of the data corpus (Weiss, 1994). Local integration pertains to the identification of components or sub-themes into which the overarching theme can be categorized (Weiss, 1994).

In the first cycle of analysis, I read through all the transcripts and memos written during the data collection process a few times (Weiss, 1994; Emerson et al., 1995). I began with a process of open coding and concurrently wrote memos about the emergent codes. Through these activities, I generated the preliminary list of first-order categories. I also continued writing analytic memos until I had three competing, data-driven ideas for a possible second-order thematic category. The first idea concerned confidence gained from training, the second was women-only training environment, and the third was leadership transformation. At this point, I assessed the fit of the codes identified during open coding to the three thematic categories, writing short comparative memos in an effort to

**Figure 1. Data structure.**



answer the question of which thematic category best captured the first-order codes. Eventually I dropped the idea of confidence, and determined that the remaining two themes addressed two related but different questions. The theme of leadership transformations addressed the question of the impact of the WLS, while the theme of women-only training addressed the question of how the transformations were cultivated in the training environment. Since this paper focuses on the former question, here I describe the remaining analytic procedures pertaining to the core thematic category of leadership transformation.

The process of relating the first-order categories to the leadership transformation theme led me to identify six leadership transformation sub-categories. These sub-categories were used to code the transcripts, and in this process two additional sub-categories were added, resulting in the final eight contrasting leadership transformation pairs. These pairs are depicted in the second-order categories of Figure 1. While the categories of hidden, inflexible, attenuated and discouraged leadership pertain to pre-WLS leadership stories, the categories of visible, receptive, expanded and inspired leadership pertain to post-WLS leadership stories.<sup>7</sup>

Next, excerpt files were created for each of the contrasting leadership transformation pairs. Excerpt files are collections of data from many interviews that relate to the idea captured in a category code (Weiss, 1994). Creating excerpt files required grouping stories with the same code labels together. The result of this process was eight excerpt files, one for each leadership type: hidden, visible, inflexible, receptive, attenuated, expanded, discouraged, and inspired. Data in these files were then subjected to line-by-line coding. Here the first-order code labels identified in earlier analysis were used to develop a coding scheme within each file.

In addition to the paired leader types, another sub-category of leadership transformation was critical learning. Data in this category pertained to stories of memorable learning moments in the WLS. The data in the excerpt file for the critical learning sub-category were categorized by leader type and subjected to further coding using labels corresponding to the transformational learning process: articulating a leadership dilemma, meaning making, achieving a transformative insight, and connecting this insight to real world practice.<sup>8</sup>

My analysis of pre-WLS and post-WLS leadership types showed that critical learning during the WLS contributed to the four leadership transformations. A key question was whether these transformations facilitated improvements in leadership practice. To answer this question, I revisited the leadership effectiveness literature, identifying dimensions of leadership effectiveness: behavior, authenticity, context, and trait. The leadership stories of the WLS contained the first three of these elements. Thus, in my next round of analysis, I coded the pre-WLS and post-WLS leadership stories using labels associated with these theoretical constructs. The context code was applied to segments of text that related to the situational factors an individual felt were important to take into account in the leadership situation and how they thought about these factors. The authenticity code was applied to text in which the individual identified her personal considerations such as values and interests that shaped her preferences in a situation. The behavior code was applied to text where a person describes their actions in light of their thoughts about contextual factors and authenticity considerations. The third order codes in Figure 1, pertaining to the thought patterns associated with the four paired leadership transformations, were derived from this analytic process, and help frame the findings in relation to the leadership effectiveness literature. The grounded theory, dual contingency model of women's leadership effectiveness was the result of my data analysis.

### **3.7. Establishing trustworthiness of the research**

In establishing the validity or trustworthiness of their research, qualitative and quantitative researchers utilize criteria and strategies consistent with their paradigmatic assumptions. Quantitative researchers are additionally concerned with reliability but, because interpretive qualitative researchers do not assume that there is a stable and measurable reality, the notion of reliability which assumes this does not play a role in establishing trustworthiness. Post-positivists establish the validity of their research by taking measures to reduce and account for biases that can distort results. In contrast, because interpretivist-constructivists believe that reality is fluid and emergent, shaped by interactions and context, the researcher's task is not to render an objective account of a fixed reality but to understand the meanings created in interactions in particular contexts. To establish trustworthiness, the interpretive researcher seeks to ensure that he or she has interpreted the data correctly from the point of view of respondents.

This paper is primarily based on interpretive assumptions where the goal is discovering the multiplicity of interviewee meanings perspectives and accurately portraying them. To assess my findings relative to these aims, I draw on Guba's (1981) three criteria for assessing qualitative research: credibility, dependability, and confirmability.<sup>9</sup> Credibility, the most important criterion for assessing a qualitative study, has to do with the truth-value of the findings, determining whether the qualitative study got it right. Establishing credibility implicates not only the final product of the research findings but also the data collection process.<sup>10</sup> The second criterion of dependability requires that the researcher explains variation in findings. Explanations may focus on changes in the interviewee's circumstances, the researcher's deepening understanding, or that findings capture the range (and not just the average) experience. The final criterion, confirmability, refers to the management of researcher and researchers may attempt to manage their subjectivity by means such as semi-structured interviews, expert review, member checks, or reflective journals.

In this study, credibility was sought by activities that occurred during the data collection and writing process. Most of the interviewees indicated that the process of the interview had been thorough and they were satisfied that they had fully "told their stories." Several indicated that the process of telling and reflecting had helped them gain insight into how they had grown as leaders as a consequence of the WLS and how they had built on these learning subsequently. My analysis of findings provides rich descriptions that capture interviewees' points of view, meanings, processes, and the nuances of context. In addition, five individuals from the CGIAR, some of whom were interviewees and other external stakeholders, read the report and performed member checks. Gender experts, also colleagues, provided feedback. Feedback from members and experts contributed to confirmability, as did collecting data by means of semi-structured interview. Detailed description of findings contributed to credibility but also dependability. Finally, dependability was also assured by providing

an explanation for the variation of meanings between the interviewees in terms of habitual patterns of thinking, and the variation of meaning within interviewees' stories by change in habitual patterns of thinking.

#### **4. From hidden to visible leadership**

Twenty-two percent of the WLS interviewees told stories pertaining to the transformation from hidden to visible leadership. Hidden leadership stories pertained to leadership behaviors prior to the WLS, while visible leadership stories pertained to leadership behaviors after the WLS.<sup>11</sup>

##### **4.1. Hidden leadership behaviors**

Hiding is associated with a range of behaviors that serve to make something undetectable, including in subtle ways. Hidden leadership stories were about individuals suppressing key aspects of self (ideas, values, identities) that could be important to task performance. In many cases, individuals sought to hide something about themselves, but in other situations external barriers hid their ideas or competencies. Self-censorship is a quintessential example of self-induced hiding behavior. For example, Claudia said:

If I had a good idea, I would not suggest it. I would ask somebody else: "What do you think? Should we do this?" I wouldn't want the idea to come from me.

Hiding behavior can be complex and convoluted. Angela's story involves hiding but not in the way we might normally think about hiding. Angela was an American who had grown up in an Asian country who had cultivated and displayed self-aspects that she perceived to be valued in the organization, while hiding self-aspects perceived to be a liability. Angela worked in a research Center based in a Western country that operated on the basis of individualistic norms. Her hiding was in response to a conflict between the norm of modesty with which she had been raised and the Center norm of self-promotion. She saw that people who did not conform to the dominant organizational norm were not taken seriously and eventually their contracts were not renewed. So she made a decision to suppress modesty and learn to be assertive:

I decided that if I was going out, I was going out on my own terms, not because I had been fired or let go. I couldn't just wait for my boss to discover that I was brilliant. I had to periodically tell him that I was a respected authority in my area. I needed to speak up in meetings and things like that. Now I enjoy it when I get a good question. I feel more confident, so I don't get threatened by it as much.

While becoming assertive helped Angela feel empowered, her relationship with modest colleagues demonstrated how suppressing a valued aspect can produce internal conflict. She told one story in which she coached a young Asian female scientist to become assertive. But she told another story where she advocated on behalf of a modest senior Asian researcher. Not only were these actions unsuccessful by her own account, but they reflected her ambivalence and internal conflict regarding what needs to change: the individual (first story) or the organization (second story). These contradictory actions suggest that, when valued aspects of the self are hidden, individuals experience discomfort, confusion and dissonance toward the culture of the organization.

Organizational hierarchy and norms exert powerful influence over the visibility of competence, especially for women. In these circumstances, hidden leaders were unable to formulate behaviors that allowed them to overcome external barriers that made their competencies invisible and kept them down. For example, while Eva headed a unit and her job required formal leadership, she felt that her role (and she herself) was constrained to engaging in routine administrative work that did not require creativity, strategy formulation or decision-making. Eva felt that structural barriers impeded her efforts to demonstrate that she possessed the latter denied capabilities:

I think the trouble I had was gaining support from the top, from the Director General's office. The main obstacle was the structure. I couldn't go around my boss, so any idea, any proposal, couldn't go further than my boss.

Eva finally opened up a line of communication to the Director General (DG). She decided to take up the matter of her boss' salary increase with the DG because she wanted to avoid any perception of conflict of interest. Her boss responded very angrily, accusing her of going above his head, but the DG determined that her decision was appropriate in this specific case. As she explained, this move allowed her to gain some visibility:

Once I had clearance that there were some aspects that I could go directly to the DG, the DG knew that I had some ideas that I could do things in favor of the Center, that I could develop proposals, that I had independent thinking, that I was not only the person to take minutes, then that helped me a lot. So I think the obstacle was not having direct access. It took many years to gain some independence and consideration for my ideas.

#### **4.2. Transformation of the habitual thoughts of hidden leaders in the WLS**

A habitual pattern of self-diminishing and context-amplifying thinking, in which individuals construct the self as weak relative to a robust external context, shaped hidden leadership behavior. The quotes in Table 1 illustrate these thought processes. Reasons given for constructing the self as small include age-related insecurity, fear of rejection and social isolation, and the belief that others had better ideas. Transformation to visible leadership, catalyzed by critical learning experiences in the WLS, was accompanied by shifts in these habitual patterns. I will illustrate this critical learning process in the context of Asha's story.

Asha's leadership dilemma was surfaced when she received contrasting feedback from WLS teammates and work colleagues. In the next quote, she describes receiving feedback from WLS teammates:

Toward the end of the course, we had to give feedback to every member of our team on general behavior and performance during the training. I really spent time the night before writing feedback to every one of the team members. Trying hard to recall their faces, their actions which struck me most, and then the words that they told me that struck me most. They found my feedback to be the most insightful. It was a surprise to me because I had been concerned: "Would they appreciate it?" But I also felt I deserved appreciation. I spent time thinking about this feedback. It turned out that a number of them, found me quiet, and they had a hard time writing feedback for me. They couldn't find anything to say about me. One of them told me: "Actually, your being quiet is your strength"—I was struck by that phrase—"because your quietness actually gives you the time to really think through things, in making insightful comments." They said, "You have all those thoughts inside you. You just have to bring them forward."

Feedback from work colleagues stood in contrast to this. A comment from a work colleague that Asha was "unimaginative," made her feel misunderstood but in retrospect she understood their perception:

I consider myself imaginative, but apparently, it doesn't show to others. The reason, I think, is because when I have an idea, I keep it to myself. I don't spread it; I don't articulate it. I keep quiet. I'm too careful, I think about it, plan about it. I'm afraid it might not be a popular idea.

Feedback from WLS teammates and work colleagues shifted how Asha perceived her environment as well as herself. With respect to herself, the appreciative feedback from WLS teammates affirmed the value of her ideas. While feedback from coworkers was less positive, it too indicated that people at work similarly wanted to hear her ideas and that her silence was misunderstood. With respect to context, feedback helped Asha understand that her environment was not as judgmental



**Table 1. Transformation of habitual thought processes**

Leader type	Habitual thought process	Characteristics of habitual thought process	Examples
Hidden leadership	Self-diminishing Context-amplifying	Constructing the self as weak relative to a robust external context	I just didn't view myself as anybody. I was just a person working. I was afraid: 'What if it doesn't turn out as good as I would like it to turn out? What if I'm not able to influence people or communicate effectively to these people?' So it was just the negative things that I worried about.
Visible leadership	Self-affirming Context-mitigating	Acknowledging one's strengths and realistically assessing the situation relative to obstacles and opportunities for taking action	I realized that there was so much I could contribute at work. I should just get out and do it. I said, if so many people are saying this about me, I should just step out.
Inflexible leadership	Self-amplifying Context-dismissing	Justifying one's actions while expressing indignation and negative judgment about the behavior of others	In American society you are generally more assertive than where I come from. If you want something from somebody, it would be expected that you would ask. For us, assertiveness is looked at negatively unless your goal is to also benefit others. So that was my problem.
Receptive leadership	Self-tempering Context-regarding	Acknowledging the validity of and need to account for both one's own views as well as those of others	Putting yourself in other people's shoes helps you deal with challenges and situations, to really see through their eyes. To assume good intent on their part, but you sure deal with people differently when you do.  I recognized that if I won out of sheer force of will it's not going to be a happy alliance. I believe, as a result of that course, I'm a lot less stubborn. And I'm a lot less determined to make it my way or the highway.
Attenuated leadership	Self-unaware Context-constrained	Acknowledging that limitations of one's knowledge and experience inhibits one from having a desired effect on outcomes or effecting outcomes in a desired manner	I had this situation where I got input from users to implement a new financial system. I tried very hard to adhere to their requirements and requests. But when we presented what we had developed there was conflict. I was very upset because I thought of all I had done to incorporate their requests, and they did not appreciate me.
Expanded leadership	Self-aware Context-discerning	Mindfully tempering one's preferred way of relating in favor of choosing behavioral options that are attentive to others' differing needs and expectations	I now see where I need to improve, and having a name helps me see how to improve. For example, self-regulation, means to me that this is the process I'm going through in the situation. And I know that I need to regulate that emotion and not let it out.  I could be quite authoritarian. I still do the same but with understanding of others.
Discouraged leadership	Self-affirming Context-amplifying	Recognize one's capacity to effect change but express reluctance to persist given unrelenting external barriers	I fundamentally knew that process and people matter and I was concerned about keeping my team happy. But I've learned that it's not always up to me to keep everyone happy.  I got some feedback that I'm not putting enough energy into promoting myself. I thought, your work speaks for itself and your accomplishment will be known later, which was a mistake. People usually talk about their own successes and not of others' successes of others. But still this was not akin to me, and I have a hard time doing it.
Inspired leadership	Self-affirming Context-selecting	Recognizing the value of one's contributions and being committed to honor them by selecting the contexts and/or the manner in which one makes contributions	Self-confidence matters. In any diverse team you'll face challenges. You're not always going to get everything right, but you need this sort of self-confidence and the knowledge that you are taking the right approach. What's been huge in the leadership courses and the training I've gotten is to gain more of that confidence.  If you have people who are insecure you try to find another way to get what you want. For example, with my previous supervisor I often came with an idea but to get his support I tried to do everything that he feels was his idea. It doesn't make me unhappy if he promotes it as his own idea. The important thing is that things get done. Some of the things have been achieved, even being confronted with a very insecure person.

and unforgiving as she had assumed. In this way, the feedback exercise in the WLS had the dramatic, if subtle, effect of helping Asha recognize how her habitual self-diminishing and context-amplifying thought processes inhibited her leadership effectiveness. This helped her envision what she needed to do differently:

It was a good feeling, because it gave me the confidence that what I'm thinking is right. I just need to express it. I just need to articulate it.

#### **4.3. Visible leadership behaviors**

Being visible is the opposite of hiding in that it involves trying to make something evident, clear or detectable to others. Visible leadership behaviors occur when hidden leaders express and publically take ownership of ideas, insights, knowledge and skills. In stories of visible leadership, WLS alumnae described themselves engaging in self-affirming and context-mitigating thought processes. These thought processes are characterized by acknowledging one's strengths and realistically assessing the situation relative to obstacles and opportunities for taking action. Reversing habitual thought processes, however, required effort. Visible leaders described "catching themselves" having self-diminishing and context-amplifying thoughts and consciously "interrupting" these and cultivating a new pattern of thinking and acting.

For example, Claudia was an individual who self-censored prior to the WLS but described how she coaxed herself to speak up after the WLS. Faced with a moment of doubt, Claudia would think back to the course and tell herself: "If everyone in the course saw something of value in me, then there must be something in me that I'm not seeing, and I need to be more aware of it." She also thought objectively about her contributions to the organization: "I was able to see how well things work out. I saw that I am the one who is doing this and that I have some skills, some leadership skills, but I need to appreciate it." When she caught herself self-censoring, she told herself: "I have to stop being afraid of whatever it is that I am afraid of. The worst is that they won't like it or they'll say 'no', but I won't die from having said it." This gave her courage to speak up.

Anita, on the other hand, described not only speaking up in meetings but also in other situations where her insights might be best offered discretely:

I now feel I'm more articulate and expressive. I speak up in meetings, whether it may be right or wrong. I can open a subject for discussion. I am effective giving constructive feedback to colleagues. Whenever I observe something that would be of benefit to my colleagues, the course gave me the confidence to share it.

Eva's story above was about overcoming structural and cultural barriers to making her strategic thinking abilities visible. She was able to take many lessons from the WLS into her evolving development as a leader. Specifically, she cited receiving 360 degree feedback as well as being inspired by witnessing others' journey to leadership growth. She described how skills acquired from the course had enabled her to struggle and overcome structural barriers, become more visible and enjoy career advancement. Nevertheless, as she explains below, she discovered that new structural and cultural barriers accompanied greater challenge, necessitating continual growth and development to meet these challenges and remain visible:

Gender issues are not changing from one day to the other. While I think that I have gained space and respect, and advanced in the hierarchy, there are still attitudes and behaviors that limit my effectiveness. So, I think I haven't reached the top. I am not completely satisfied of what my effectiveness could be.

Angela previously hid a valued attribute of modesty but during the WLS, colleagues affirmed the value of this quality. As she reflected on this during the course, she came to realize that her boss had recognized her modesty and her ability to relate to a wide variety of people and had rewarded this by asking her to lead a research team. In the next quote, Angela describes how she was able to not

only utilize her capacity for modesty but to display a host of interrelated relational skills to build a team. These relational skills are less about individual self-promotion and more about collaboration, encouragement, and support:

A lot of programs had fallen down over the issue that the lead Center took most of the money. Instead of giving out a couple of big research grants, we focused on providing public goods that everybody could get. Once we built up a track record and brought in more money, we developed clear processes and governance for allocation in which all Centers have a say in the way the program was operated. It was the willingness to listen and play fair. These were the overriding values.

Angela's story is a quintessential example of how women feel compelled to suppress feminine attributes in organizations with strong cultures that associate masculinity with competence and femininity with a lack of competence. But, ironically, as Fletcher (1999) argued, and as demonstrated in Angela's story, suppressed feminine attributes are essential in fostering cooperation and enhancing task performance.

## **5. From inflexible to receptive leadership**

Fifty-two percent of WLS interviewees told stories pertaining to the transformation, from inflexible to receptive leadership. While inflexible leadership stories pertained to leadership behaviors prior to the WLS, receptive leadership stories pertained to leadership behaviors after the WLS.<sup>12</sup>

### **5.1. Inflexible leadership behaviors**

Inflexible behaviors are characterized by bewilderment and rigidity in the face of uncertain and ambiguous situations. These situations often caused anxiety and trepidation and inflexible leaders responded by clinging to what they knew, believed, or what had worked in the past. Inflexible leadership stories were not about dramatic and short-lived situations but of chronic on-going difficulties in which they persisted with practiced behaviors despite disappointing results. These failures further exacerbated their anxiety and solidified their inflexible posture.

Kanya, for example, was baffled when she learned that she had been undercut in a salary negotiation that she had assumed to be fair. The problematic negotiation occurred when her position changed from a part-time consultant to a full-time employee. As she explained:

My supervisor liked what I had to offer and said "we can draw up a contract for you." He left the salary negotiation to someone else. I was totally unprepared for a tough negotiation. And he just casually asked me a few questions about what I was getting where, and so on, and based on that he made an offer. After this negotiation, I went to talk to the other biometrician who nearly knocked my head off. He said, "You spoiled it for everybody. You could have asked for three times as much as this, and the DG would have approved it." But I wasn't capable of negotiating out of that.

Kanya was not only uncertain about what she could have done differently but had no clue about what to do and not do in future negotiations.

Feeling alienated from peers, supervisors and supervisees, some inflexible leaders isolated themselves and mishandled their emotions. Like Kanya, Harriet was bewildered when things did not go as expected in her new job. She cited two problematic areas: the informal culture of the organization and feeling different from her peers. Below she describes mismanaging her emotions when the organization did not function the way she expected:

I believed too much that I knew what was right. I had been accustomed to working in a very hierarchical organization and program. But it was a brand new organization and there were no models to follow. We were discussing everything from what kind of microwave to order to what the staff vacation policy should be to what color the carpet should be. And, on top of that, you're supposed to design a totally new program and get your work done and hire staff.

It was wonderful and exciting, but that created more stress. My boss and I would get into fierce fights, and he didn't think I was doing my work properly.

In addition, Harriett felt disconnected from her colleagues as the only woman, unmarried, without children, and the youngest person. She explained:

They were all men. They sat in the meeting room at lunch and ate. I felt self-conscious and didn't like to do that. I isolated myself and did not try to build networks laterally and vertically. We were struggling to get a model for the organization, and I pulled into my shell and tried to do my work. I thought that was the way I was going to get things done. But I was out of the information loop for funding, got the worst interns and didn't build a team. I thought I was to work on my own, and didn't understand the value of attracting more people.

In contrast to Harriett, others isolated Sally. Implementing a system-wide initiative, Sally needed the cooperation of senior management of the CGIAR's Centers. She observed that: "I was being effective with some and not with others. I had fifteen fiercely independent organizations to work with, all at different starting points, and it was hard to find common ground." Although few research Centers were initially ready to work with her, one Center immediately indicated an interest. Numerous specific initiatives and policies resulted from this collaboration. Although these innovations were widely announced within the CGIAR, most Centers remained unengaged and Sally's outreach remained unreciprocated: "No matter how many announcements we sent out, no matter how many times we made our services available, we never got an answer. We just got silence at the other end. That's what failure feels like."

### **5.2. Transformation of the habitual thoughts of inflexible leaders in the WLS**

A habitual pattern of self-amplifying and context-dismissing thinking shaped inflexible behaviors. This thought process involved providing justification for one's actions while expressing indignation and negative judgment about the behavior of others. When confounded by the happenings in their environments, inflexible leaders relied on their beliefs and/or what had worked for them in the past. The critical learning experiences of inflexible leaders were facilitated by a combination of theory, feedback and coaching. Here I illustrate the transformation of Kanya's habitual thought patterns through critical learning in the WLS. Table 1 provides additional examples of transformed thinking.

Kanya's story, described above, related to a problematic salary negotiation. In this next quote, she describes how she thought about negotiation prior to the WLS, revealing one of the ways in which inflexible leaders justified their actions based on their beliefs. In doing this, they failed to raise questions about their environment, implicitly (but not condescendingly) dismissing other considerations.

Before the course, I had no problem negotiating for others, like the childcare facilities, and organizing paper recycling. But for myself it was very difficult. I used to feel that if you're asking for yourself, it's selfish. There's nothing selfish about it, but it took a leadership course for me to understand that. I hated the whole idea of negotiating. To me, it is like begging. If this person saw enough of me to want to hire me, then they should also see what I'm worth. It was a certain kind of inhibition of asking, of saying what I'm worth. I just couldn't do that. I couldn't tell somebody that I'm worth this much because of these reasons. I've never had to negotiate this way before—I've always been head-hunted. I've been spoiled in that my past employer has made sure that I was put in a slot which was appropriate for me. I never had to discuss these things before. I viewed job offers as take it or leave it. That is what I thought my options were. Also I had this idea of negotiation as confrontation. All these things were psychological barriers.

Kanya's distaste for negotiation is consistent with research on gender socialization in negotiation, where women learn that while it is acceptable to negotiate on behalf of others, negotiating for one-self is distasteful.<sup>13</sup> Below Kanya describes how theoretical input and feedback in the Negotiation

course “turned on lots of switches,” helping her understand why things had gone awry in her earlier negotiation and shifting how she thought about negotiating on her own behalf:

We had a lot of little groups talking about our experiences, and participants in the course are telling you what they would have done in that situation and then telling you examples of how you could have dealt with it. And the course material, and then, my god, you acquire a whole new language. You develop a whole new psychological state for approaching these things. Let me give you an example of positive feedback, which played a huge role for me. In one role play, I was supposed to be the supervisor and a subordinate wanted to go off and work on another project while she’s having a full load in her current job. After the role play, one of the participants said, “My god, you’re so analytical.” Other comments were: “You communicate so well, you’re so empathic.” You see, people make comments about your positive attributes. All this positive feedback you get from these very senior women. I don’t think they themselves realize what a huge impact it can have on people. You realize what is special about you, what you offer. You haven’t gotten that assessment ever from where you’re working, and you know you have it now. That gives you huge confidence. And you convince yourself that your request is justified. Before the course I couldn’t tell somebody “I’m worth this much for this reason.” I wanted to say, “Look, I’m not getting what I’m worth.” But I didn’t have the language or how to say, “I’m worth this much so what do you have to offer?” I didn’t think of putting the question that way. Now I’m much more objective about these things.

### **5.3. Receptive leadership behaviors**

Whereas inflexible leaders anxiously relied on their ideas, values and beliefs when faced with uncertainty, the transformation to receptive leadership involved a willingness to relax priors, so as to learn about and be influenced by others while having a clear sense of one’s views and preferences. In stories of receptive leadership, alumnae described a process in which self-amplifying and context-dismissing thought processes were replaced by self-tempering and context-regarding thought processes. This new thought process was characterized by acknowledgment of the validity of and need to account for both one’s own views as well as those of others. Some receptive leaders had thought through and formulated strategies for handling their pre-WLS challenges during the training itself. Others recalled the lessons of the WLS after a relapse of old patterns. Kanya described the latter process, saying: “It didn’t happen overnight. You go to the course, you remember these episodes of learning, but then you’re much more confident. So you take a small step, and then it grows exponentially. The more confidence you get, the bigger things you can go for.”

Kanya’s failed salary negotiation prior to the WLS resulted from lack of understanding of the negotiation norms of her Center as well as adherence to past learning that negotiating for oneself is distasteful. The negotiation concepts and skills she learned during the WLS positively impacted her post-WLS negotiation effectiveness:

Of late, I’ve negotiated and led myself into this new initiative. Confidence is a big part of it, and also having the language of negotiation—detachment and not to get your emotions embroiled in the whole thing. It shouldn’t be any different if you’re negotiating for yourself or for someone else. Your emotions should be the same.

Harriett, who previously self-isolated, built relationships, reversing her tendency to dig in her heels. Here she describes how insights gained in the WLS informed her thoughts and actions:

I don’t think I consciously thought, “I need to remember what I learned in the training.” I went out of that first bad meeting thinking, “That was stupid. What I need to be thinking about is making everybody feel that their needs are going to be met and we’re all going to be pulling towards the greater good—it’s not just about what Harriett wants, but what benefits all.” I internalized lessons from the course that led me to that way of thinking.



Unlike Harriett, Sally's strategy to overcome her isolation was explicitly informed by theories she had learned during the WLS. In particular, she said that, when a theoretical model of "allies, opponents, and fence-sitters, was presented, I had this light bulb go off in my head: 'That's what I'm facing!' I immediately pictured all of my constituents in those three categories." This, along with coaching helped her figure out how to proceed differently to reach each of these constituents after returning to work.

I wasn't taking the easy way out—it was the right thing to do. I made a concerted effort to understand the information that the silent group needed. That was when I became data driven, recognizing the culture of the organization and doing lots of survey work and hitting them with data so it could not be denied. Although gender and organizational theory informs my work, I present our research—facts and figures and trends.

## **6. From attenuated to expanded leadership**

Seventeen percent of the WLS interviewees told stories that pertained to the transformation from attenuated to expanded leadership. While attenuated leadership stories related to leadership behaviors prior to the WLS, expanded leadership stories were about leadership behaviors after the WLS.<sup>14</sup>

### **6.1. Attenuated leadership behaviors**

The notion of attenuation suggests that someone is limited or constricted in their ability to do something. Attenuated leaders felt that, despite being effective overall, they were not exercising leadership to their fullest potential. For example, attenuated leaders told instances in which they were either at a loss for how to influence others or wanted to find more harmonious ways of achieving their goals. They differed from inflexible leaders in that, while they drew on what they knew to formulate their actions, they did so tentatively, trying to adjust on the basis of more information about their contexts.

Upon taking a new job in another country Marcelina felt confident in her ability to motivate and lead a research team. But once she started to interact with co-workers, she became acutely aware of cultural differences between herself and her team. She discovered that the motivational techniques she had used with success in her country were unreliable. In the two quotes that follow, she describes being oblivious about why her actions produced inconsistent results:

I sat down with (one of my team members) and gave her the list of the research projects that I wanted to have in the lab, asked her what portion of her time she would like to put into either service or research or a split, and which projects she'd like to have. She decided she would be fully research but, when we began, she decided she would be a little bit of service as well. Then I gave her the support. As the project developed and as her research results came out, I can see when someone's looking excited, she's in the lab in a flash. So I've always given her a lot of positive feedback.

Marcelina initially used the same strategy with a lab technician, but with a different outcome. She asked him what he wanted to do, and in response to his stated desire, put him in the lab conducting research. When he did not show any interest, she designed field experiments for him. That did not work, and out of exasperation, she gave him a low score on his annual evaluation and told him she would work with him over the year to help him reach a high level of performance. But this strategy backfired:

I couldn't reach him at all, and I still don't know how to, not even after the course. He pretends his English is terrible, but it's actually not bad. He's just not interested and does not make a good contribution to the lab. He just pretends that he doesn't understand anything. I see him, and he's just sitting there whiling away the day and disappears for long times. He wouldn't say he was interested. I can't imagine the projects I gave him wouldn't have been interesting, but I couldn't put him on anything—I couldn't trust him on any of the expensive equipment. He didn't seem to want to learn.

Attenuated leader behavior can also arise in the area of handling conflict. Despite being able to get things done Chipso felt she was only “somewhat effective” as a leader. Her story shows the limits of her authoritarian style. When a scientist asked her to circumvent normal purchasing channels and order items, she refused: “He wanted me to give the money in cash to people to go and buy things. And I said, ‘No, I will not do that. We still have to go by the rules.’ I didn’t want to jeopardize our funds and our name just because he wanted some people to buy things for him.” The scientist was furious, called her names and tried to have her fired but her boss supported her and she maintained her job.

Chipso’s job required adopting a tough stance to enforce rules: “If somebody came up with an opinion and I disagree with that opinion, I would tell the person ‘I am not in support of this.’ I cannot see it working.’ And that is it.” While she saw enforcing rules as part of her job, the activities of the WLS helped her understand how to do this with less discord.

### **6.2. Transformation of the habitual thoughts of attenuated leaders in the WLS**

A self-unaware and context-constrained thought process shaped attenuated leader behaviors. This thought process was characterized by the acknowledgment that limitations of one’s knowledge and experience inhibit one from having a desired effect on outcomes or effecting outcomes in a desired manner. Also, although attenuated leaders relied on existing knowledge to cope, they were not rigid or defensive. Instead they were very open to gaining insight and new ideas.

Here I illustrate the transformation in Marcelina’s habitual pattern of thinking and acting through critical learning. Table 1 provides additional examples of transformed thinking. Recall that Marcelina came to the WLS confused about the inconsistent outcomes of her efforts to motivate her team. During the training, Marcelina was introduced to a taxonomy of leadership styles and to the concept of emotional intelligence. She realized that “pace-setting” leaders, such as herself, set high standards and goals for themselves and others, but in their single-minded focus on task performance, they may lack emotional intelligence. She also learned about alternative, relationship-oriented, leadership styles. Skill-building exercises gave her practice with these, and she left with a desire to apply them. She stated:

So, pace-setting is my default, but now I know that I should try harder with other styles, such as “coaching” and “affiliated” styles, and the “authoritative” and “visionary” one. I think I’m not too bad at it, but I’ve got to be conscious of applying it, and recognize that I’ve got to “coach” a bit more. Also I think I practiced (emotional competencies) in some sort of jumbled way. But by defining all the components, I recognize which components need building on.

### **6.3. Expanded leadership behavior**

The notion of expansion suggests that something has been developed, broadened, or enlarged relative to a previous constricted state. During the WLS, attenuated leaders recognized how blind use of their preferred mode of relating with others limited the scope of their influence. The shift to expanded leadership involved a new, self-aware and context-discerning thought process. This is where one mindfully tempers preferred ways of relating in favor of choosing behavioral responses that are attentive to others’ differing needs and expectations. Above, Marcelina’s obliviousness to the impact of her pacesetting leadership style left her unsure about why she succeeded in motivating some staff but not others. During the WLS she became aware of this preferred pace setting leadership style and its limitations. Importantly, she also realized that her fixation on the resistant lab technician had diverted attention from other team members. In this quote, she describes mindfully altering her practice to utilize an affiliative leadership style to mentor a staff member she had previously ignored:

I tried to be more empathetic. I know that he’s not earning enough to support his family. He wants to do a Ph.D. A lot of people get to this Center because they’re from wealthier families. He got here on his own. I am trying to get him a scholarship and enrolled through a university from my country. I’m being far more affiliative and do more coaching than pace set. I’m sensing much more positive energy from him and more of a commitment to his job.

Surprising feedback from a 360 degree leadership assessment catalyzed Chipo's critical learning. Although Chipo saw herself as an authoritarian in her style and a tough enforcer, 360 degree feedback from work colleagues described her as considerate. This surprised her and, although she felt that her job was to be very clear about the rules and enforce boundaries, she felt that she should work on being more cooperative. After the WLS, she said she consciously worked on her listening to work through differences and find synergistic solutions, an approach she had not considered in her enforcer mode: "We see where we can come to a midpoint, where our opinions might meet. Then we can find ways of doing things properly, without going against organizational policy, and achieve the same end."

## **7. From discouraged to inspired leadership**

Nine percent of the WLS interviewees told stories that pertained to the transformation from discouraged to inspired leadership. While discouraged leadership stories pertained to leadership behaviors prior to the WLS, inspired leadership stories pertained to leadership behaviors after the WLS.<sup>15</sup>

### **7.1. Discouraged leadership behaviors**

The notion of discouragement suggests a lack of optimism and energy due to encountering seemingly persistent structural and cultural obstacles to goal achievement. Discouraged leaders told stories of overcoming such obstacles only to encounter them again in subsequent efforts. This, along with the lack of support, recognition and appreciation for their many innovations and contributions left them drained and disinclined to "play the game."

For example, May and her team endured scrutiny and pressure despite producing high quality research. One of May's contributions to her research Center was introducing an innovative collaborative research approach guided by an inclusive philosophy. Her supervisor was ambivalent about the approach she was advancing:

We came up with this model of not being hierarchical, but it was all new and strange, and they had to think if they really wanted to do that or not. Our approach involved some risks. You don't have perceived control, which you have in a very top-down approach. We didn't have a controlled experiment, and we had a lot of discussions around that. They didn't complain about the idea of being bottom-up, it's like motherhood and apple pie: you can't say that you shouldn't be bottom-up.

In response to uncertainty about the new methodology May formed an advisory committee of international experts to provide critique and feedback, but her supervisor was concerned. May's supervisor speculated that he thought the committee was there to just say "Oh yes, that's wonderful," which was not her intent. Still, she said:

My boss asked a friend of his to keep an eye on us, pressure us, and keep asking difficult questions. He was worried about our rigor. Because he had the power, he asked me to defend this approach over and over again. And I did. I had to justify it repeatedly with our leaders and with the board of trustees. We were using participatory action research which was very alien in the institute at that time. Now everybody is doing it, but when we started, we had to do a lot of convincing.

In light of this experience, May describes her lack of enthusiasm for taking on formal leadership roles due to the draining political work that is often required:

I was very happy to stop being a formal leader. I still do a lot of leadership things informally. I didn't apply for a program director position. I'm not applying for a DG position, although people keep saying, "You should apply for that." I don't want to spend my time in meetings with the stress that you have, and the demands from above and from below so that you have no life except work.

In contrast to May, Alexandra and her team endured neglect despite their many contributions. Alexandra described a deliberate, collaborative approach that her division used in working with researchers in her Center to develop websites showcasing the Center's projects. She was comfortable and committed to this collaborative approach:

I went to see each Project Manager and said: "This Center has 15 projects, and each project is doing a different kind of research. Our idea is to have a web site where each project would have its own space. I know you are the Project Leader, you are very busy, and will not have time to sit with me for hours. So, I suggest you decide who on your team would be most suitable to do this with me." I generally started to work with Secretaries, Project Assistants or Researchers who were IT-enthusiastic. I gave them the choice, they were happy not to be obliged to do it themselves, and it worked well. Some of them were surprised, thinking "My secretary will not be able to do it," but I told them, "I think she will." This way, I motivated people who wanted to learn something new.

Although she achieved positive results, Alexandra felt that projects and people who gained visibility and rewards were those where individuals claimed individual responsibility for success. The attribution of success is more diffuse in collaborative efforts but neither she nor her boss was motivated to promote individual achievements. She stated:

You know, my boss is a very collaborative guy. He's not interested in politics and problems and tensions. He's really completely transparent. The IT guy is the complete contrary. He wants to be the head of the unit. He's very hierarchical, and so it was ridiculous. We were in meetings and we were concerned with substance but they were only playing—strategically trying to figure out where they could fit in meetings without really being willing to do something for us. It was really a mess. Because the IT people have very high credit with the DG, we have never found a way to prove that our work is high quality, without promoting ourselves. So there's frustration that we are working so hard and doing something very effective and that it never gets the credit it deserves because the IT people are doing so much more public relations than we do.

## **7.2. Transformation of habitual thought processes of discouraged leaders**

As indicated in Table 1, a habitual pattern of self-affirming, context amplifying thinking shaped discouraged leadership behaviors. This thought process is characterized by an individual's sense that, while they have the capability to simultaneously stay true to themselves and effect change, they are reluctant to persist in unsupportive environments. The activities of the WLS affirmed discouraged leaders' strengths and inspired them to find ways of contributing to the organization while staying energized.

Alexandra's critical learning story related to the affirmation of her collaborative work style in the WLS. Before describing her critical learning experience, some information on Alexandra's life experience helps us understand the importance of this affirmation. Alexandra described personal experiences of deep significance that informed her commitment to working collaboratively. The first experience was leaving a successful career in her country and relocating to her husband's country for his work. Although she was overqualified for the job she took, she was pleased that it offered an opportunity to learn the language. Shortly after that, she became pregnant, and this was followed by the realization that her children had medical issues requiring concerted parental attention. She said this led her to lose "a lot of confidence" in herself. Despite this, by the time Alexandra accepted a job in her Center, she had re-evaluated her priorities and had a firm sense of what she wanted in her personal and work life. In the following quote, she describes her quest to construct an authentic identity where collaboration is a central value that allows her to enjoy her work while containing its intrusion into her ability to care for her family:

I'm sure that, in my situation, having two kids who have (medical issues)—everything is very relative. You have different perspective on things. My experience helped me to become clear on the energy you spend on things. Perhaps a lot of mothers with normal kids think they can combine work and life easily—I don't know—but I can't be very aggressive because I have three kids and I have to balance my work and my family. When you are aggressive, it takes all of your energy and I can't do it. I need to have energy when I come home. This knowledge-sharing field is pretty much related to my way of thinking about my job. I found a field, or an activity, which resolved my own dilemma. I am more at peace with myself.

While Alexandra came to the WLS liking her job and being clear on the need for balance, she was still in the process of regaining her confidence and the devaluation of her collaborative stance presented her with a dilemma. In the WLS, she received feedback affirming her collaborative choice:

I think my leadership before the course has not really changed. What was important for me was confirmation from the course that there were a lot of good things in what I did very intuitively before the course. What I did, others did it after having studied it and I did it very intuitively. So I tried to continue to trust my intuition. Before, I saw it as a weakness, and now I have it very clearly in my mind that it's a strength ... So, realizing this helped me a lot to strengthen this, rather than see it as a weakness ... something that is not compatible.

The above example and the others displayed in Table 1 show how critical learning moments in the WLS fostered transformation of habitual thought processes. The affirmation of their values by others during the WLS inspired and energized discouraged leaders.

### **7.3. Inspired leadership behaviors**

The notion of being inspired pertains to a sense of becoming energized, encouraged and excited to do something. While the context had not changed, inspired leaders had. Instead of thinking of themselves as marginal and unappreciated, they focused on how they could feel fully engaged in carrying out organizational goals. Post-WLS leadership stories reflected transformation to inspired leadership in which self-affirming and context-selecting thought processes replaced the earlier self-affirming and context-amplifying ones. This thought process is characterized by recognizing the value of one's contributions and the commitment to honor it by selecting conducive contexts and/or the manner in which one makes contribution.

Prior to the WLS, May had described herself as an effective leader because she was able to deal with difficult people. Although May was committed to her organization, she had come to the WLS with little interest in formal leadership because she was averse to the way in which political activities and battles sapped her energy. While this did not change, she felt re-engaged by affirmation of values:

The course reinforced the value of diversity. For years I've felt that there was a huge value in diversity, but in that course they did some team exercises that showed the value of actually incorporating input from a variety of points of view. So I think that reinforced my existing feelings about that and also maybe gave me some concrete evidence that I could present to other people when I was arguing for an inclusive approach.

In the previous example, Alexandra described being drained by the lack of support and appreciation for her collaborative posture. After the WLS, she described optimism and greater sense of agency to create the conditions under which she could sustain her excitement about work. Specifically, Alexandra resolved to maintain her collaborative style and sustained her optimism, by seeking out communities of like-minded people within and outside of the Center:

There are a lot of people with a collaborative perspective. Not necessarily in the CGIAR, but in the world of development. Not only research institutes, but also NGO and other organizations. We try to get in contact with these people so we will have more fun. This knowledge-sharing field is pretty much related to our ways of thinking about our jobs. By having this knowledge-sharing attitude, we are more at peace with ourselves.



## 8. Discussion

The four sections above implicitly introduced the grounded theory, dual contingency model of leadership effectiveness. This section formally presents the entire model and considers its theoretical and practical implications. The section concludes with the study's limitations and future research implications.

### 8.1. The dual contingencies model of leadership effectiveness

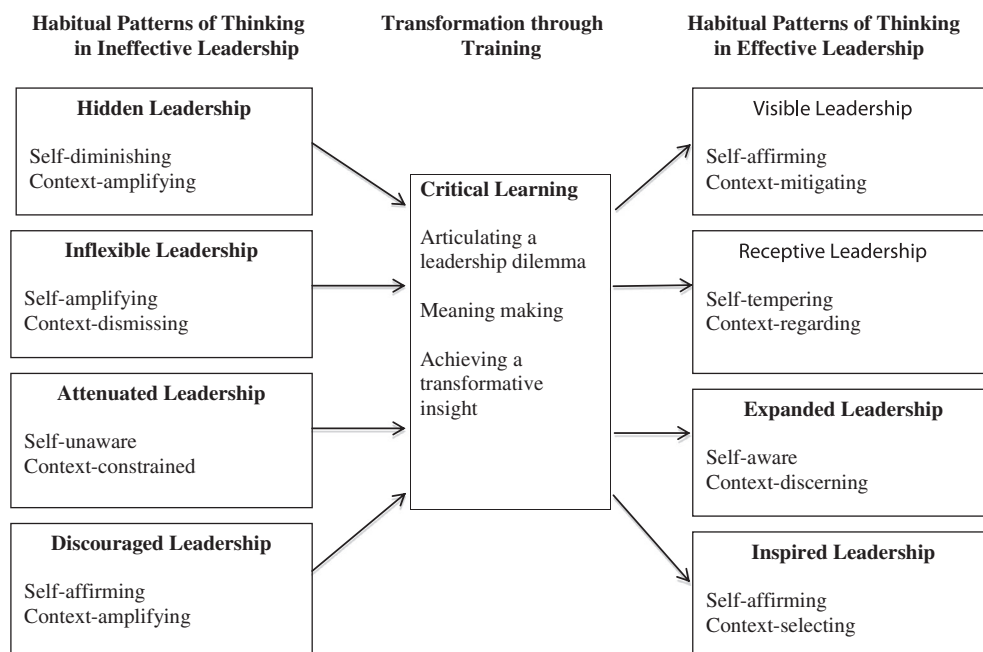
A grounded theory, dual contingencies model of leadership effectiveness, depicted in Figure 2, constitutes the central theoretical contribution of this paper. This model suggests that effective leaders craft behaviors that respond to the dual demands of context and authenticity. The model is composed of three aspects: habitual patterns of thinking that produce ineffective leadership behavior, critical learning that catalyzes transformation in habitual thought patterns, and new patterns of thinking and behaving that improve leadership effectiveness. The column of boxes on the left-hand side of Figure 2 pertains to the differing patterns of thinking of the four pre-WLS leadership types discussed in the previous sections. The analysis suggests that, prior to the WLS, ineffective leadership was shaped by patterns of thinking that involved inadequate attention to the demands of context and/or authenticity. As shown in the Findings sections above, this occurred in different ways for hidden, inflexible, attenuated and discouraged leaders.

The box in the middle pertains to transformational learning processes catalyzed by critical learning experiences in the WLS. Finally, the column of boxes on the right hand side of Figure 2 pertain to the changes in thinking patterns for the four leader types as a consequence of the critical learning experiences. As shown in the Findings sections above, the transformation to visible, receptive, expanded and inspired leadership involved shifts in thinking that addressed the previous inattention to authenticity and/or context.

### 8.2. Theoretical contributions to leadership effectiveness literature

The grounded theory, dual contingency model gives us an enriched perspective on leadership effectiveness. At a basic level, it addresses how the notion of authenticity can be incorporated into contingency models of leadership effectiveness. Beyond this, by applying these ideas to the four leadership transformations of the WLS, it provides four pathways of leadership development and change and this may serve as a framework for future research.

**Figure 2. A grounded theory, dual contingency model of women's leadership effectiveness.**



While contingency theories address leadership effectiveness, they leave ineffective leadership unexamined. The dual contingencies model fills this gap by identifying processes that result in inattention to context and/or authenticity, as well as how this inattention can be addressed. As shown in the boxes on the left hand columns of Figure 2, four habitual patterns of thinking associated with leadership ineffectiveness are identified. As shown in the findings section above, although the substance of these thought processes differ, they all involve inattention to the dual contingency. In contrast to this, the boxes on the right hand column of Figure 2 identify four patterns of thinking associated with leadership effectiveness. As shown in the findings section, these thought processes are qualitatively different, involving shifts in thinking that involve greater capacity to account for the dual contingencies of context and authenticity.

Another issue arises from the static way that contingency theories characterize how a leader reads context. In particular, contingency theories posit that individuals craft leadership behaviors on the basis of an objective assessment of relevant environmental factors. My findings suggest, however, that people interpret salient features of their environment through the filter of self-referential patterns of habitual thinking. What is salient to one person may not be to another. An individual's interpretation of the environment is quite personal, shaped by how she sees herself in that context. From this view, how we understand our context is not "objective," but shaped by the unique concerns, values and purposes we bring to the situation. Not only do the concerns and preoccupations of hidden, inflexible, attenuated and discouraged leaders differ, but these different preoccupations shape views of the environment.

Hidden leaders' authenticity-diminishing and context-amplifying thought processes stemmed from both internal (e.g. age-related insecurity, tendency to see others as smarter) and external factors (e.g. organizational hierarchy and gender stereotypes). The rigidity in inflexible leaders' self-amplifying and context-dismissing thought processes, especially the tendency to view their way of seeing as the correct way, stemmed from anxiety in a situation perceived to be ambiguous and hostile. Attenuated leaders' self-unaware and context-constrained thought processes stemmed from an assumption that their preferred mode was natural and appropriate under all circumstances. Finally discouraged leaders' self-affirming and context-amplifying thought processes stemmed from weariness due to entrenched structural and cultural barriers within their organization and a reluctance to make extraordinary personal sacrifices to get recognition. As these thought processes demonstrate, leaders' reading of context is shaped by different preoccupations.

These various perceptions also shape action, and a final contribution of the interpretive analysis is challenging the contingency theory idea that people pick the behaviors they think would be most suitable for the situation. As we saw in the findings above, WLS alumnae were constrained in their behavioral flexibility by habitual thought processes. Improved effectiveness was not a matter of effortlessly selecting appropriate behaviors as if these could be simply plucked out of toolbox. New behaviors were borne out of the recognition of unhelpful patterns of thinking and from a commitment and decision to think about things differently and engage in different behaviors. WLS alumnae had to work at changing habitual thought patterns by "catching themselves" reverting back to old habits "reminding themselves" of their decision to do things differently and "experimenting" with new behaviors that addressed earlier problems of inattention to either context or authenticity.

### **8.3. Contributions to the women's leadership literature**

As discussed in the introduction, the literature on women and leadership identifies a double bind that arises when women are faced with contradictory expectations—one rooted in societal gender norms, the other in the organizational role. Resistance and conformity strategies, used to cope with the double bind, involve attention to contextual demands, but excessive external focus may unwittingly reproduce the double bind. This paper suggests that women might be able to navigate the double bind by attending to the dual demands of context and authenticity. The four transformations show that this capacity was built in the WLS. In crafting their new behaviors, hidden leaders began to pay attention to authenticity and tempered their sensitivity to context. In contrast, inflexible

leaders began to pay attention to context and temper authenticity. Attenuated leaders' greater self-awareness allowed them to understand the limits of their behavioral preferences and stretch themselves to more effectively influence others.

It is the case of discouraged leaders, however, that aptly demonstrates the idea that navigating the double bind requires attention to both context and authenticity demands. Discouraged leaders were able to attend to both context and authenticity. Their behaviors were primarily informed by values and also talents and interests, and calibrated to the varying demands of context. Because of their attentiveness to context, their actions were less likely to be thwarted by external resistance. Similarly, their flexibility was unlikely to undermine their credibility because they were authentic—consistent and clear in conveying the values underlying their actions. Despite the effectiveness of their approach, discouraged leaders were fatigued by the lack of support, recognition, and in some cases even resistance to their efforts. While their sustained efforts were driven by their commitments, the energy and enthusiasm they were able to bring to the work was eroded by the prevailing culture of their organization. Thus, the dilemma they brought to the WLS was fatigue, at sustaining authentic action. The WLS affirmed their values and interests, inspiring them to find new ways of re-energizing themselves. Their stories are the clearest indication that leadership effectiveness for women (and perhaps also for men) requires attentiveness to the dual contingencies. This may be a useful way to think about navigating the double bind.

#### **8.4. Implications of model for training**

The results of this research have practical value for individuals involved in leadership development training or education. At a basic level, trainers and educators need to focus on transformation of learners' varied habitual patterns of thinking. Given that we readily accept the idea of individual differences, it is ironic that leadership training is often conducted as if all learners were alike. The findings described in this paper clearly show that leadership training should be designed to honor and accommodate the differing developmental needs of learners. Hidden leaders need not be regarded as followers who must be brought into a state of becoming leaders. Our attention can be directed to their latent leadership capabilities. Training would be a catalyst for making these capabilities visible to the learner and helping her overcome the thought processes that inhibit authentic self-expression. Inflexible leaders had shut themselves off from their environment because others' actions were incomprehensible and they felt they were correct. Training could provide theoretical models and coaching to call this stance into question, foster greater self-awareness, expand learner's perspective of context, and aid in formulating alternative strategies. Training can also help attenuated leaders become aware of blind spots about themselves and their context, the two being related. Finally, discouraged leaders remind us that leadership is not just about doing. It is principally something we do as a way of discovering and expressing our values and interests and using our talents to contribute to our environment. Leadership development therefore needs to include attention to both leaders' capacity to get things done and their capacity to achieve personal growth and satisfaction. The WLS training affirmed the commitment of discouraged leaders, allowing them to feel grounded in their values, interests, or talents and inspiring them to persist despite the lack of support in their external environments.

#### **8.5. Limitations**

What might we learn if we interviewed followers, observed ourselves through shadowing, interviewing on an on-going basis, attending meetings and the like, and even watching the change efforts closely as they are attempted in the workplace and not as reported in a retrospective interview? Addressing how this might be accomplished is beyond the scope of this paper. Relevant questions would include: what type of resources to include in a training program, what types of activities to include, and in what sequence these activities need to be performed to catalyze critical learning experiences.

### Acknowledgments

I thank WLS interviewees for giving generously of their time and for openly sharing their challenges and strategies with me. Thanks also to GCIAR Gender & Diversity Leader Vicki Wilde for initiating this study as well as for her openness and genuine curiosity in discovering what this research would reveal. In addition, I would like to thank several individuals who read through a draft of this manuscript and provided constructive and helpful feedback. They are: Fabiola Amariles, Patricia Deyton, Joyce Fletcher, Gayathri Jayasinghe, Deborah Kolb, Robert Moore, Kenneth Reinert, Amelia Goh, Stella Nkomo, and Vicki Wilde. I would also like to thank the Center for Gender in Organizations at the Simmons College School of Management for funding this project.

### Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

### Author details

Gelaye Debebe<sup>1</sup>

E-mail: [gdebebe@gwu.edu](mailto:gdebebe@gwu.edu)

<sup>1</sup> Department of Organizational Sciences and Communication, The George Washington University, 600 21st Street NW, Washington, DC 20052, USA.

### Citation information

Cite this article as: Navigating the double bind: Transformations to balance contextual responsiveness and authenticity in women's leadership development, Gelaye Debebe, *Cogent Business & Management* (2017), 4: 1313543.

### Notes

1. Although this paper focuses on individual change, the double bind is rooted in gendered organizational practice. Thus, systemic change is an essential component of women's capacity to thrive as leaders. While the distinction between individual and systemic change is important, we must be careful to not reinforce a false dichotomy. Changes women make to themselves can translate to greater awareness of gender and more capability to build alliances to advocate for systemic change.
2. Based on West and Zimmerman (1987)'s seminal article, the concept of doing gender suggests that gender is an accomplishment of everyday life in which an individual's behavior is governed by expectations of congruence with gender norms. This accomplishment is treated as natural and therefore reinforces the gendered system through which the appropriateness of individual behavior is judged.
3. Because these leadership stories did not contain any significant information on traits, the notion of traits was not utilized.
4. The perspective of alumnae co-workers and supervisors were not solicited because this proved to be unfeasible due to funding constraints and the complexity in alumnae's global work arrangements.
5. In 2012, the CGIAR underwent a reorganization in which system-wide programs such as G&D were consolidated in a Consortium Office in Montpellier, France. As part of this transition, all but one activity, the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development program, were transferred to the Consortium office. Located in the World Agroforestry Centre in Nairobi, Kenya, this program delivers the WLS to women in the CGIAR as well as to some organizations in its network (Wilde, 2012).
6. The 10 respondents (13%) no longer working in the CGIAR system offered a range of reasons for their departures, including: poor work environment (three);

contract ended (three); career ceiling for one person without a PhD (one); staff reduction (one); moved for unspecified personal reasons (one); and no reason given (one).

7. Although most interviewees told several leadership stories, their stories pertained to consistent themes such that each individual fell into one of the four categories of transformation. The absence of significant variability in individuals' stories makes sense given that the stories were about workplace leadership. One individual told a story about a leadership situation outside of work as a contrast to her typical workplace behavior.
8. See Mezirow (1991) and Debebe (2011) on transformational learning.
9. Guba's (1981) fourth criterion of transferability, which pertains to the generalizability of findings, is not seen as the qualitative researcher's responsibility, but rather that of the individual(s) seeking to transfer findings to other contexts.
10. Here, a number of issues can be addressed with respect to data collection. Did the researcher establish rapport with interviewees, and did this elicit rich, detailed and thorough exploration of issues? Did the researcher explore participants' experiences and meanings in detail so as to capture multiple experiences and realities? Did the researcher collect adequate information and achieve theoretical saturation? Do interviewees affirm the "rightness" of the researcher's account? Does the account offer participants' with insights into their own experiences when reading the account? Do experts in the research area view the research methods appropriate and the conclusions as advancing knowledge in the literature?
11. Twenty percent of the individuals categorized as hidden leaders were Program Leaders, 40% were Scientists/Researchers, and 40% were Managers/Administrator. Sixty percent were classified as International, 20% as National, and 20% as Regional.
12. Thirty-seven percent of individuals categorized as inflexible leaders were Theme Leaders/Program Leaders, 45% were Scientists/Researchers, and two percent were Managers. In addition, 46% were classified as International, 36% as National, and 18% as Regional.
13. See Amanatullah and Morris (2010), Babcock and Laschever (2003).
14. Twenty-five percent of individuals categorized as attenuated leaders were Theme Leaders/Program Leaders, 25% were Scientist/Researcher, and 50% were Managers. Seventy-five percent were classified as International staff, while 25% were National staff.
15. Fifty percent of individuals categorized as discouraged leader were classified as Scientist/Researcher and 50% were classified as Administrator. Furthermore, 50% of discouraged workers were classified as international staff, and the other 50% were national staff.

### Corrigendum

This article was originally published with errors. This version has been corrected. Please see Corrigendum (<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2017.1336330>).

### References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4, 139–158.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002>
- Acker, J. (2006). Gender in organizations. In J. Saltzman-Chafetz (Ed.), *Handbook of the sociology of gender* (pp. 177–194). New York, NY: Springer.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-36218-5>
- Amanatullah, E., & Morris, M. (2010). Negotiating gender roles: Gender differences in assertive negotiating are mediated by women's fear of backlash and attenuated when

- negotiating on behalf of others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98, 256–267.
- Avolio, B. (2007). Promoting more integrative strategies for leadership theory-building. *American Psychologist*, 62, 25–33.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.25>
- Babcock, L., & Lachever, S. (2003). *Women don't ask: Negotiation and the gender divide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bennis, W. (1989). *On becoming a leader*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bierema, L. (1999). A model of executive women's learning and development. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 49, 107–121.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/074171369904900203>
- Bogdan, R. C., & Bilken, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and method*. Boston, MA: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.
- Bowers, D., & Seashore, S. (1966). Predicting organizational effectiveness with a four-factor theory of leadership. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 11, 238–263.
- Burke, P., & Stets, J. (2009). *Identity theory*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Carli, L., & Eagly, A. H. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School.
- Carvalho, T., & Santiago, R. (2009). Gender as a “strategic action”. *Equal Opportunities International*, 28, 609–622.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02610150910996434>
- Debebe, G. (2011). Creating a safe environment for women's leadership transformation. *Journal of Management Education*, 35, 679–712.
- Debebe, G., & Reinert, K. A. (2014). Leading with our whole selves: A multiple identity approach to leadership development. In M. Miville & A. Ferguson (Eds.), *Handbook of race-ethnicity and gender in psychology* (pp. 271–293). New York, NY: Springer.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-8860-6>
- DeRue, S., Nahrang, J., Wellman, N., & Humphrey, S. (2011). Trait and behavioral theories of leadership: An integration and meta-analytic test of their relative validity. *Personnel Psychology*, 64, 7–52.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social role interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ely, R. J., & Meyerson, D. E. (2000). Theories of gender in organizations: A new approach to organizational analysis and change. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 22, 103–151. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-3085\(00\)22004-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-3085(00)22004-2)
- Ely, R., & Padavic, I. (2007). A feminist analysis of organizational research on sex differences. *Academy of Management Review*, 32, 1121–1143.  
<https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2007.26585842>
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226206851.001.0001>
- Evans, M. (1970). The effects of supervisory behavior on the path-goal relationship. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 5, 277–298.
- Eveline, J., & Booth, M. (2002). Gender and sexuality in discourses of managerial control: The case of women miners. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 9, 556–578.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.2002.9.issue-5>
- Feidler, F. (1972). The effects of leadership training and experience: A contingency model interpretation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17, 453–470.
- Fletcher, J. (1999). *Disappearing acts: Gender, power, and relational competence at work*. Boston, MA: MIT Press.
- Gardner, W., Avolio, B., Luthans, F., Douglas, M., & Walumbwa, F. (2005). Can you see the real me? A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development. *Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 343–372.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Resources Information Center Annual Review Paper*, 29, 75–91.
- Hackman, J., & Wageman, R. (2007). Asking the right questions about leadership: Discussion and conclusions. *American Psychologist*, 62, 43–47.
- Herman, C., Lewis, S., & Humbert, A. L. (2012). Women scientists and engineers in European companies: Putting motherhood under the microscope. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 20, 467–478.
- Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. (1982). *Management of organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources*. Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Holmes, M. (2007). *What is gender? Sociological approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hopkins, M. M., O'Neil, D. A., Passarelli, A., & Bilimoria, D. (2008). Women's leadership development strategic practices for women and organizations. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 60, 348–365.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014093>
- House, R. (1996). Path-goal theory of leadership: Lessons, legacy and a reformulated theory. *Leadership Quarterly*, 7, 323–352.
- Kennelly, I. (2002). “I would never be a secretary:” Reinforcing gender in segregated and integrated occupations. *Gender & Society*, 16, 603–624.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/089124302236988>
- Kirkpatrick, S., & Locke, E. (1991). Leadership do traits matter? *Academy of Management Executive*, 5, 48–60.
- Kram, K., & Gersick, C. (2002). High-achieving women at midlife: An exploratory study. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 11, 104–127.
- Lawler, J., & Ashman, I. (2012). Theorizing leadership authenticity: A Sartrean perspective. *Leadership*, 8, 327–344.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 191–216). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of gender*. New York, NY: Yale University Press.
- Lord, R. G., Brown, D. J., Harvey, J. L., & Hall, R. J. (2001). Contextual constraints on prototype generation and their multilevel consequences for leadership perceptions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 12, 311–338.  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(01\)00081-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(01)00081-9)
- March, J., & Weil, T. (2005). *On Leadership*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Marshall, J. (1995). *Women managers moving on: Exploring career and life choices*. London: Thomson Learning.
- Meyerson, D. E., & Fletcher, J. K. (2000). A modest manifesto for shattering the glass ceiling. *Harvard Business Review*, 78, 126–137.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Miller, J. B. (1986). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Miller, G. E. (2004). Frontier masculinity in the oil industry: The experiences of women engineers. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 11, 47–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.2004.11.issue-1>
- Nygren, K. G. (2010). Narratives of ICT and organizational change in public administration. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 19, 615–630.
- Pettinger, L. (2005). Gendered work meets gendered goods: Selling and service in clothing retail. *Gender, Work &*



- Organization*, 12, 460–478.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.2005.12.issue-5>
- Pilgeram, R. (2007). Ass-kicking women: Doing and undoing gender in a US livestock auction. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 14, 572–595.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.2007.14.issue-6>
- Powell, A., Bagilhole, B., & Dainty, A. (2009). How women engineers do and undo gender: Consequences for gender equality. *Gender Work & Organization*, 16, 411–428. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.2009.16.issue-4>
- Ridgeway, C. L., & Correll, S. J. (2000). Limiting inequality through interaction: The end(s) of gender. *Contemporary Sociology*, 29, 110–120.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2654936>
- Rudderman, M. N., & Ohlott, P. J. (2002). *Standing at the crossroads: Next steps for high achieving women*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Singh, R. (1983). Leadership style and reward allocation: Does least preferred co-worker scale measure task and relation orientation? *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 32, 178–197.
- Spender, D. (1982). *Invisible women: The schooling scandal*. London: Writers and Readers.
- Sternberg, R. J. (2007). A systems model of leadership: WICS. *American Psychologist*, 62, 34–42.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.34>
- Stogdill, R. (1948). Personal factors associated with leadership: A survey of the literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 25, 35–71.
- Stogdill, R. (1950). Leadership, membership and organization. *Psychological Bulletin*, 47, 1–4.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1996). *Basics of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tibbals, C. A. (2007). Doing gender as resistance: Waitresses and servers in contemporary table service. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36, 731–751.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241607303508>
- van den Brink, M., & Stobbe, L. (2009). Doing gender in academic education: The paradox of visibility. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 16, 451–470.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.2009.16.issue-4>
- Vosko, L. F. (2006). *Precarious employment: Understanding labour market insecurity in Canada*. Montreal: McGill University Press.
- Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1, 125–151.
- Wilde, V. (2012). *CGIAR gender & diversity program progress report: 2010–2012*. Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research.
- Wood, J. T. (1994). *Gendered lives: Communication, gender and culture*. Belmont, MA: Wadsworth.
- Yukl, G. (2012). Effective leadership behavior: What we know and what questions need more attention. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 26, 66–85.  
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2012.0088>
- Zaleznick, A. (1977). Managers and leaders: Are they different? *Harvard Business Review*, 55, 67–78.



© 2017 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format  
 Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.  
 The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.  
 You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.  
 No additional restrictions



You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

**Cogent Business & Management (ISSN: 2331-1975) is published by Cogent OA, part of Taylor & Francis Group.**

**Publishing with Cogent OA ensures:**

- Immediate, universal access to your article on publication
- High visibility and discoverability via the Cogent OA website as well as Taylor & Francis Online
- Download and citation statistics for your article
- Rapid online publication
- Input from, and dialog with, expert editors and editorial boards
- Retention of full copyright of your article
- Guaranteed legacy preservation of your article
- Discounts and waivers for authors in developing regions

**Submit your manuscript to a Cogent OA journal at [www.CogentOA.com](http://www.CogentOA.com)**

