



The IOL National Conference includes a workshop led by Cress Allwood which will further explore this research, its findings and planned further activity in this important area.

BETTER TOGETHER: Gender Parity & Leadership in the Outdoor Sector – New perspectives on an age-old issue

by Cressida Allwood

INTRODUCTION:

In recent years, much has been written about a lack of women in positions of power in the business world: how has this been reflected in the outdoor learning sector? In 2016 do we still need to raise the subject? Surely, we've moved on and gender is no longer an issue? Or is it? This article presents a few highlights from a recent piece of work commissioned to provide a current snapshot of what's happening in the outdoor world.

Let's create new conversations and different ways of thinking. Together, we can work smarter to benefit companies, employees and customers... and that has to be good for the sector.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE:

A quick and easy online questionnaire was sent out with 12 questions, which varied in style and type. I would like to express sincere thanks to all those who completed the online questionnaire and who have been in touch. Your openness and honesty about the topic has been extremely helpful and valuable.

For a full version of the questionnaire and report, please contact the IOL office directly.



Findings and Key Insights: What we found:

i. Today leadership in our sector is predominantly a man's world, with more males being employed (full time) and as Associates.

There are no major surprises here, given the traditional routes to the top (with an emphasis of technical expertise) and the relative numbers of men and women who acquire higher level NGB qualifications.

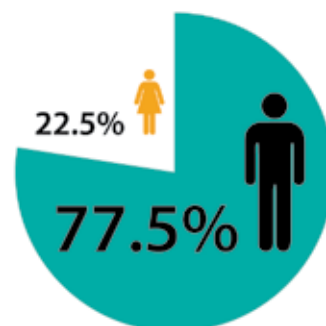
Before reading further, here are a few suggestions, if you're still wondering why we might be concerned about such figures:

i. More female customers: so a need for more female voices at the decision making table around how best to serve them.

ii. The gender dividend: companies are recognising the positive correlation between women in leadership & business performance on key indicators, such as return on investment, and increasing the collective intellect.

iii. The competition for talent: with more women entering the sector, we need to know how to attract and retain the best at differing career stages, eg. if they have children and wish to return to work, or if they're uncertain about higher level NGB qualifications, what roles they can expect to fulfil in leadership or management.

Leadership in 2016: The Reality



FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT 7:1



ASSOCIATES 4:1





As we know, leaders can make a significant difference during their time in post: but how engaged and committed these leaders are, to the subject of gender parity, we still don't know. Are we ALL aware of the business case for more female leaders within the sector? What is the legacy that leaders wish to leave for both sexes in their companies?

Research suggests that CEOs have time to put their weight behind a few key strategic initiatives, each year. Is gender parity likely to be one of these? If it isn't a top 10 strategic priority, it's likely that although it may be deemed important, it will remain one of those agenda items that continue to slip off the table, year on year.

If we want to close the gender gap, two factors seem evident:

1. Genuine commitment to the business case is required, and
2. Gender inclusive leadership practices are needed.

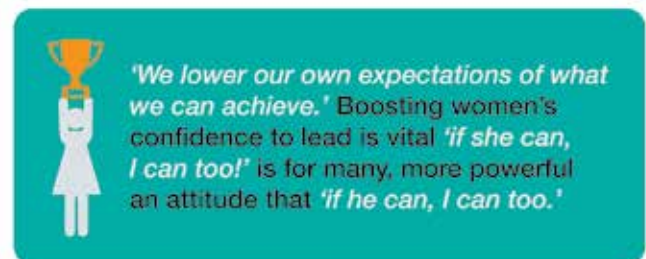
ii. The survey confirms that women are significantly under-represented in leadership positions.



Does this really matter to the outdoor sector?! We recognise that for many, such a role may lack appeal. For those who do hold such aspirations, it may be hugely important.

A lack of female role models at the top, inspiring other women has long been cited as a significant reason why women don't picture themselves in leadership roles. Sheryl Sandberg describes how women sometimes keep themselves from advancing:

'We lower our own expectations of what we can achieve.'¹ Boosting women's confidence to lead is vital.



So, what do we want and what can we do? This is where the men come in!

Helena Morrissey, CEO of Newton Investment Management observed:

*"You need to have people (men) on the inside supporting the ambition – this is the only way. Hence you need men in positions of power welcoming women as well as women welcome themselves."*²

Research from Women in Sport noted that some women 'feel safer' having male peers encouraging them to push for change.

What can we do? **Utilise the skills of the men in our world more effectively for the benefit of all.**

How? By actively encouraging and endorsing more gender neutral mentors. With fewer women around, we need men to actively support, encourage and endorse both sexes on their journeys to the top.

Can your organisation identify 'male champions' who are genuinely committed to the benefits of promoting gender parity - who do so without fear of reprisal from male peers? (as suggested by Kelan, 2015.³.) How many guys you know would happily take up such a role? How many are senior advocates? Is it time to make this a strategic imperative?

The most successful efforts to mobilise people to take action happen when we speak from the heart, about our personal motivation for change, underpinned by sound commercial sense.

NB. Research has suggested that many women approach aspects such as self-promotion and communication of their skills/ talents in quite different ways to men. Do we need pockets of training on some of these aspects? Or can we simply open up discussions (whilst observing our biases) around the areas in which women classically hold themselves back, compared with male peers?! (I'm wary of stereotypes, but clearly, there are some differences between the ways men and women operate.) Which behaviours and beliefs help us? What else can we learn from and about each other? What can both sexes do better and differently?

Having said all this,

iii. A startling result emerged which showed an **INEQUALITY AROUND RESPONSIBILITY FOR GENDER EQUITY**: male respondents perceiving that women have a greater responsibility for this issue. This reflects a bias that cannot be ignored.



This **DISPARITY** may give us clues to understand the persistent gender gaps. What are the underlying assumptions and beliefs that cause such differences of opinion? If, in 2016, this is deemed to be a women's concern, for women to address rather than the men perhaps we need to turn it on its head and consider the opposing propositions:

If gender equity in organisations was solely the responsibility of the men, what would it look like?

If it was solely the responsibility of women, how different would it look?

Although a 'fixing the women' approach may boost aspects such as self-confidence, it leaves structures and systems in organisations unchallenged and is therefore, one could argue, problematic. Are women expected to 'fit' into a male dominated culture? Might this be the case in some outdoor organisations? It seems like an outdated concept, although it's possible that unconscious bias may be operating.

Empowering and encouraging women to be change agents will certainly help develop capacity, but surely **both sexes have equal responsibility for generating gender parity**. What do readers think?

iv.



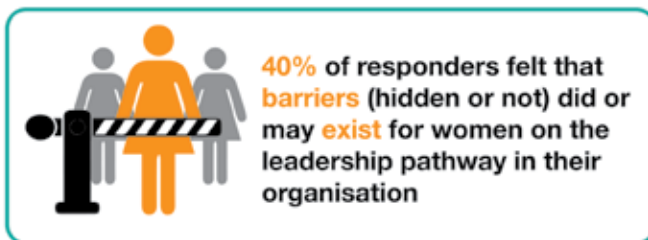
Another unexpected result was that of the female CEOs, almost half lead micro organisations. However, this figure reflects a growing number of women in the UK choosing to run smaller businesses where they have more control and flexibility.

What can we learn from this group of leaders? How long these women have been at the helm is not known, but it would be interesting to note if the female leaders run their businesses differently. More research is required to uncover any structural, cultural and/or behavioural differences in these organisations, and if they impact more positively on women and men?

For any larger organisations, other questions may rise – such as what might be the challenges they face if they wish to attract or retain such talent?

Clearly, these women are selecting leadership positions that suit.

v. Surely this number is too large to ignore?!



Common barriers cited by respondents include: lack of flexibility in working practices; lack of role models; low pay; unconscious bias; social and cultural perceptions of leadership; a focus on technical expertise which are not called upon to run an (outdoor) centre.

As mentioned earlier, this paper is more interested in focusing on solutions than addressing the problems, but maybe a fresh, more collaborative approach is needed? It was interesting that both sexes felt there were barriers – not just the women. Certainly, there's still a way to go. At least now we have some data and in years to come can compare results. Let's ensure that in time, legacies are left that reduce such barriers and embrace male and female leadership.

Identifying pockets of great practice will help us move forwards and positively leverage the possible. New opportunities for both sexes to flourish through conscious collaboration, are at our disposal, if we wish to take them up. Networks can be set up, for both male 'champions' of gender parity and for women, to ensure ongoing support.

Other good news is that in the worlds of traditional sport and business much work has already been done: there's no need to re-invent the wheel. Women in Sport, funded by Sport England have worked with NGBs to identify a system for sustainable progress – 'Trophy Women'⁴ research, which encourages NGBs to have a 30% female representation on their Boards, can found online at:

<https://www.womeninsport.org/resources/trophy-women-2015-no-more-board-games/> &

<https://www.womeninsport.org/resources/trophy-women-2015-checklist-for-change/>

At the end of the day, being true to ourselves in the working environment, we'll more readily realise potential and be the best asset to our businesses...What we say or do can contribute to real and lasting change on gender diversity.

So what next?

The main conclusion is that Men in particular are central to changing gender relations at work by altering their workplace practices. As Kelan (2015)⁵ noted,



It is a neglected area of research in the sector, although many are no doubt very mindful and aware of gender parity as an issue. Too often, women raise the topic amongst themselves, in female dominated conferences/ networks or in academic papers. Too often male leaders are largely absent from such discussions. The time has come for both sexes to engage effectively, to move things forward together: drawing on each other's complimentary and (sometimes) contrasting strengths.

Knowing where we are, we can now address the next two 'big picture' questions:

'Where do we want to go?' and 'How do we get there?'



Having a snapshot of the current reality, we can now decide:



What is our desired future state/ vision of success, regarding the subject?

As the majority of strategic decision makers are male, heartfelt commitment is required. How many authentic 'champions' are there, in various leadership roles, in your organisation? How do they 'walk the talk and model the way'? We are sure there are loads of incredibly supportive individuals out there – we want to know who they are and why they're so great at what they do!

What can you and your colleagues do differently, to ensure talent is harnessed today for the benefit of all tomorrow? What new questions emerge and how can you generate excitement, mobilise action and foster genuine commitment to gender parity?

We know it's a potentially charged and complex topic – let's face it, few of us like conflict and it's often easier to keep quiet and shy away from discussions, rather than be misunderstood or blamed. But we're in this together so let's start talking and listening afresh, with positive intent.

We also know there are few quick wins; a working group is being set up and the second phase of action research undertaken. Statements of good practice will emerge as a result. Let us know your views: we're in for the long term! We welcome your suggestions and contributions...

Second article follow up: Championing Gender parity: Micro actions for male managers to take every day...

Practical steps men can take to positively address the issue (without feeling threatened or fearful of saying 'the wrong thing'!) ■

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cressida Allwood..... Cress has a Master's degree in Professional Development (Outdoor Learning) and is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. A passionate advocate of ongoing personal and professional development, Cress set up her coaching business after a unique two year adventure, cycling around the world (starting in Pakistan and ending in Ecuador, having ridden the spine of the Andes, solo.) She brings drive, a curious mind and significant expertise to her roles; coaching, tutoring nationally accredited ILM courses and leading overseas expeditions. She is an Ambassador for Bramwell International, author of expedition specific coaching cards and holds an array of academic and technical qualifications. www.cressidaallwood.co.uk
Photographs: by Mark Garland.

