



CAPLOR HORIZONS RIPPLE PAPERS

...creating ripples of change

‘Feminist Leadership’ – a post patriarchal paradigm

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Learning differently

Thinking differently

Acting differently

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Summary

"We cannot succeed when half of us are held back" Malala Yousufzai

"Feminism is an organised movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" Bell Hooks

"Feminist leaders are motivated by fairness, justice, and equity and strive to keep issues of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and ability at the forefront." Tracy Barton

Why have we created this paper? At Caplor Horizons we have engaged in different ways to deepen our understanding about the context of Feminism, the four waves, and Feminist Leadership. In doing this, we are continually inspired and humbled by the remarkable feminist leaders that we have read about and the ones we are privileged to work with.

We have looked at how other organisations are being explicitly feminist in their leadership along with wider insights about feminism and feminist leadership. We also share our Culture for Justice which highlights how we have embedded our intersectional feminist journey into our organisational culture, as we believe that there is no change without cultural change. Our hope and intention is to encourage others and contribute towards a significant movement for change.

We want to step up our efforts to tackle gender inequality and encourage others to do the same. We believe we need organisations and societies where women from all identities and backgrounds feel welcomed, engaged, included and valued – their fullest potential supported and nurtured. This is essential! If we do not do this, we will not meaningfully address the injustices ingrained in patriarchal societies around the world.

In this paper, we consider what relevant studies are showing us and put our findings into the context of a growing body of international research. We consider the contribution and limitations of approaches which foster the integration of feminine and masculine leadership qualities. We explore the importance of Feminism and Feminist Leadership and describe a practical example of this through what we are doing in Caplor Horizons; however, we recognise that we're on a journey and have a long way to go. Maya Angelou once said: *"do the best you can until you know better; when you know better, do better."* In this respect, we will keep learning and striving to do better.

Why turn to Feminist leadership? Because the gender issue is systemic. Despite a growing movement, international commitments, and the initiatives that many individuals, groups and organisations have taken to create a healthier gender balance the changes have not been enough. Likewise, notwithstanding the targeted advocacy of many people, the voices of women are still not heard when they should be heard; their contribution is not valued sufficiently. This continues to be a disappointing indictment on humanity, and a waste of talent in a world where talent and leadership are so critically needed

We believe Feminist Leadership can make an important contribution as it encompasses and includes the integration of feminine qualities into leadership, yet also pays attention to and addresses the historical

and contemporary social, economic and political circumstances that have created power inequalities and oppression for women and other groups.

In doing so we want to transcend the view that bringing feminine qualities into male centred leadership is the solution as this perspective is based on the binary view that women and men are very different. It fosters the continuation of binary thinking and solutions that don't challenge or work to remove patriarchy and institutionalised sexism. People of all genders possess characteristics of both the 'masculine' and the 'feminine', so we don't need any separation or codification of two types of characteristics in this way.

If we could only use three descriptions to describe feminist leadership it would be social justice, skilful use of power and co-creating freedom from sexism. Feminist leaders work to overtly and consciously ensure that no one, regardless of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion or physical and mental ability is treated unfairly. Feminist leadership is also about community development and collaboration in which everyone's presence and participation is valued.

Why has Caplor Horizons turned to Feminist Leadership? We envisage a world where leaders deliver a sustainable future for all. We're committed to being courageous, compassionate and creative in facilitating transformational change. Transformational change that brings about the boldest, most important ambitions, such as the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. We're committed to our Culture for Justice and to the ending of a patriarchal world.

Our feminist journey was initially based on the feminist principles articulated by ActionAid and by the vital work of others, such as the UK's 'Women's International Leadership Development' (WILD) group. We have been deeply moved and informed through the opportunity of directly working with many extraordinary individuals – such as transgender activist Abhina Aher – along with our engagement with a range of remarkable organisations and groups. Finally, our feminist journey has been shaped by our own experience and reflections, including other Ripple articles, particularly ['The Leaderful Way'](#) by Dr Lynne Sedgmore.

What's next? We welcome any feedback on this paper and we are committed to following up with anyone that is interested to be involved. More specifically, we want to continue exploring our relationship with power as leaders, individually and collectively. Furthermore – linked to the acute issues of climate change and biodiversity loss, that threaten the planet and humanity, informed by the eco-feminist movement – we want to explore how a fifth wave of Feminism might express itself and how we can contribute to it. In the face of the immense challenges of patriarchal society, we remain optimistic and encouraged by the words of Arundhati Roy who said: *"another world is not only possible, it is on its way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing."*

Introduction

“Patriarchy is like the elephant in the room that we don’t talk about, but how could it not affect the planet radically when it’s the super-structure of human society.” Ani DiFranco

“Gender diversity is not just good for women; it’s good for anyone who wants results.” Melinda Gates

Patriarchal societies have created a difficult context within which to ensure gender diversity and equality is implemented. Patriarchy is a political, social, and mental system that perpetuates the myth that men should be dominant purely because they are born male. It reinforces dualities of gender stereotypes of male and female – based on male superiority and power and women’s inferiority and weakness. Patriarchy also limits and censors men’s emotional expression by not allowing them to express all aspects of themselves and fostering male identity based on a toxic, patriarchal masculinity. At worst patriarchy deliberately oppresses and excludes many groups who become “other”. At best it offers unthreatening favours from those who hold most power and privilege. Every “win” made such as votes, equal rights or equal pay has had to be fought for. Very few privileged groups are evolved enough to give away power willingly.

Patriarchy, today, is seen as not just a women’s issue and ‘intersectionality’ has become a lived reality for younger women. Intersectionality is the articulation and consideration of everything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability. It involves understanding that no axis of identity and experience of different forms of oppression can be understood as separable from others. Understanding of how they intersect and interconnect and relate is essential to radically challenge and transform patriarchy.

A new wave of women are protesting all around the world, young women are stepping up in all forms of successful activism. There are many awe-inspiring stories of women such as Malala Yousafzai, Amiga George, Stella Nyanzi, Autumn Peltier and many others – not to mention the Millions marches, MeToo, Everyday Sexism and TIME’S UP movements. These are unprecedented times and we want to play our part. We are witnessing a mass call for change in gender inequality and a new rise in feminism in women of all ages in most countries.

In mid-2020, we ran a webinar with people from our Caplor Community internationally. It was titled: ‘*Are we in danger of alienating our female talent: is the current crisis impacting women more than men in our organisations?*’ We found that climate change and biodiversity loss, Covid-19, the Black Lives Matter movement, economic vulnerability, and other factors are all playing big roles in efforts to attain a more gender balanced mindset in organisations and societies. To watch the webinar click [here](#). The webinar highlighted many challenges, but identified many opportunities too, encouraging us and our partners to keep a sense of hope and positivity about the possibilities of bringing about positive change.

We are inspired by organisations that we are working with – such as Action Aid Ireland, the Lasallian network, An Cosán or Hope for the Future – each are finding exciting ways to make progress.

Current challenges

We live in a complex and highly challenging world. Issues such as climate change, financial crises, the rise of nationalism, the expansion of social media and the ever increasing pace and demands of daily life are all changing the way we live, feel and behave. For many, levels of stress, behavioural and mental health problems are rising significantly. Several polls and research findings indicate that many people today are experiencing some kind of crisis and are looking for meaning and purpose. This is manifesting as anxiety, depression, wanting to change lifestyles or downsizing. Many young people have limited opportunities to find work, unemployment is high and many are unhoused, homeless, living on the streets or in camped or unaffordable spaces.

The demands facing humanity, especially women, can seem overwhelming. The acute need to deal with climate change, biodiversity extinction and horrific abuses of human rights is obvious. Within the current patriarchal system the oppression of women and the limitations placed on them continues. The incompetence of patriarchy and capitalism to solve critical issues is being highlighted by new generations yearning for a better world. The rise in nationalism and extremisms are turning back much of the progress toward social justice made in previous decades.

Women and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating some of the most insidious and pervasive inequities women have ever faced worldwide. The economic and physical disruptions caused by the disease have negative consequences for the rights and health of women and girls in every country. The gains for women made in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems. The impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their gender across every sphere, including health, the economy, security and social protection. Throughout the pandemic, women have consistently raised concerns that they are more likely to be doing home-schooling, low-wage work, raise a child on their own or to do unpaid work as caregivers. Women have lost their jobs at a higher rate than men since the onset of the virus. Women will be less likely to return to paid employment than men, threatening what progress has been made toward equality in the workforce.

According to the [UN Population Fund](#) report months of sustained global lockdown will leave 47 million women in low and middle-income countries unable to use modern contraceptives, leading to a projected seven million additional unintended pregnancies. There are millions of additional cases of gender-based violence in domestic and public spaces and significant delays in programmes to end female genital mutilation and child marriage. Medical experts regularly warn that the pandemic will set women back decades and increase the gender pay gap due to balancing work and childcare.

Research from the Fawcett Society reveals 43% of working women, and 50% of black and minority ethnic working women, compared with 35% of white working men, in the UK are worried about their job and promotion prospects because of coronavirus. One of the clearest ways systematic oppressions have been revealed is through the treatment and reality of working life for frontline workers, especially nurses, who

are mostly women who are undervalued and underpaid. Domestic violence has escalated, and shelters have closed due to lack of funds resulting in far less places people can go to for support.

The ActionAid report which undertook a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on young women in India, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa illustrates how the global pandemic exposes and exacerbates pre-existing crises, with young people being hit especially hard. They urge governments to reject failed policy templates and development models and urgently replace them with policies and actions specifically aimed at permanently removing pervasive inequalities for young women in low-income households who continue to be excluded in multiple ways.

According to the ROSA Preliminary Report, women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to the pandemic than men's. The National Domestic Abuse line has seen a 25% increase in demand. Lockdown measures have contributed to isolation and mental health distress. Black and minority women have been particularly exposed to the impacts of the pandemic, which continues to run along racial lines.

In some countries leaders have failed their people. Sometimes due to slow or outdated leadership thinking and acting or because of the prioritisation of corporate profits over the public good, the EU is beginning to make vaccine decisions based on assumptions of competition rather than on collaboration and collective action and it's good to see some countries beginning to send supplies to countries who are struggling with supplies of oxygen and medical equipment.

The solutions

On a more positive note, globally women are rising, resisting and voicing their numerous concerns in an ever growing tsunami of feminist protests, campaigns and online activism. New eco-movements and black led movements for racial justice are bringing renewed attention to the threats and realities of violence, extinction, continuing oppressions, injustices and greed. We are at a major transformative moment on several fronts – especially on race, women's issues, climate and extinction as well as facing the urgent impact of COVID. New forms of protest movements are gaining traction and grass roots initiatives are making a difference. Leadership in modern social movements and feminist organisations focus on empowering the front line. Powerful multiracial, intergenerational coalitions are bringing antiracist and feminist principles to mobilise transformative change and address the climate crisis and to co-create a better society. Young and older activists, communities most at risk and those with the fewest resources as well as progressive politicians and some public sector leaders are generating more radical demands and are calling for transformative change.

Women are increasingly assuming leadership roles in feminist social justice movements to bring public attention to the continued injustices faced by many women and marginalised groups of people. These movements are bringing new forms of leadership aimed to empower individuals and communities and to protect those who are most vulnerable. We recommend exploring two interesting women – both co-founders of high-profile protest movements. Gail Bradbrook of Extinction Rebellion and Alicia Garza of Black Lives Matter.

Challenging the conventional Feminine and Masculine Perspective on Leadership

“You can’t easily fit women into a structure that is already coded as male; you have to change the structure” Mary Beard

We feel that conventional male centred patriarchal leadership paradigms have failed women and continue to do so. We all have an image in our head of what a leader looks like, and for too long that image has been white and male. Changing our internalised images takes deliberate effort and support.

Bringing feminine qualities into male centred leadership does have value but involves a perspective based on the binary view that women and men are very different. It fosters the continuation of binary thinking and solutions that don’t challenge or work to remove patriarchy and institutionalised sexism. Patriarchy thrives on duality and opposites. We are born into a polarised society in which gender is twisted or interpreted to favour “masculine”, to diminish “female”. Masculinity has been intertwined with dominance, power and control. Femininity has been aligned with characteristics such as frailty, caring, gentleness etc. Society has created a destructive and distorted definition of gender encouraging the belief that masculine and feminine are different, and at best complementary.

We understand the trajectory and importance of bringing the feminine into leadership as a counterpoint to charismatic, heroic, male, individualistic and dominator leadership. We welcome cultivating an integrated balance of stereotypical feminine and masculine qualities according to need and context. This approach has been richly explored and practiced for a long time, with some value.

There is truth in the view that some male leaders tend to behave assertively, decisively, logically and feel comfortable within dominator hierarchies of control and command. Some women leaders may prefer more collective, less hierarchical forms of leadership, and behave in egalitarian, intuitive and team spirited ways. But not all can or do. Often, when examined more closely, both women and men draw on a mix of both, so called, masculine and feminine characteristics. Inevitably feminine leadership strengths have been less valued in organisations than the masculine strengths. Women leaders in organisations historically shaped by the model of the “heroic” leader often have a deeply uncomfortable journey through the leadership pipeline.

We find it overly simplistic to believe that if we introduce the softer feminine qualities into leadership then everything can be transformed. Leadership development programmes encouraging feminine leadership fail to recognise the variety and complexity of both women and men, and are relying on essentialism and stereotyping. Often they lack any analysis or understanding of the inherent power differentials based on societal and institutional sexism that disproportionately affect women in adverse ways.

Although sexism and structural barriers are no longer legal, they’re still very much with us. A range of factors, such as unconscious bias and continuing adherence to male informed models of leadership in organisations, are severely limiting attempts for change and equality. Biases and cultural norms that subordinate women are everywhere. Continuing to advance the rights and opportunities of women

continues to be a crucial, moral and high priority action. The focus on changing laws remains important but it is also essential to transform centuries old cultural norms, values and behaviours around women's roles, contribution, capabilities and value. People who might be explicitly committed to egalitarianism still have gender biases in certain contexts and unconsciously concoct post hoc rationalisations for sexist behaviour.

We want to both include and transcend patriarchal definitions of masculinity and femininity, not to simply accommodate it. People of all genders possess characteristics of both the masculine and the feminine, so we don't need any separation or codification of two types of characteristics in this way. There is significant research and evidence for a spectrum in which men and women are in different places depending as much on their unique combination of personality, talents, brains and societal context rather than their genitals per se.

Feminisms

“Gender is still the most significant predictor of poverty and powerlessness and Gender inequality remains a pervasive and fundamental obstacle to human development and the guarantee of universal human rights.” Shawna Wakefield

The dictionary definition of feminism is “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality and liberation of women”. We believe that Feminism is for everyone – women, men and people of all gender identities. It is not about exclusion, aggression or one gender coming out on top.

Women are not a homogeneous group so there are numerous forms of feminisms with many faces and many forms, so it's more accurate to talk about feminisms.

To understand feminisms we need to understand two central terms, patriarchy and intersectionality.

Feminism holds the view and central position that patriarchy is a political, social, and mental system that perpetuates the myth that men should be dominant purely because they are born male. Patriarchy is gender-based systematic oppression through which bias, discrimination and power collude to create systems that exclude women and express misogyny as a strategy to accumulate and maintain power. It reinforces the gender stereotypes of male and female; based on male superiority and power and women's inferiority and weakness. Patriarchy also limits and censors men's emotional expression by not allowing them to express all aspects of themselves and fostering male identity based on a toxic, patriarchal masculinity. At worst patriarchy deliberately oppresses and excludes many groups who become “other”. Patriarchy is not just a women's issue. With this renewed interest and participation in feminism new books are being published (Hooks, de oak, difficult women, Ahmed etc).

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989. She encouraged the understanding that no axis of identity can be understood as separable from others to fight patriarchy. Each individual, and every social institution, is considered the site of multiple intersecting identities which afford privilege or oppression, or a mix of both. Individuals who share one identity (women share gender) may also

experience life very differently depending on race (white women and black women share some experiences as women, but have very different experiences with racism). Intersectionality asks where our 'intersections' meet in terms of our lived experience of discrimination. Everything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability etc – needs to be considered.

Patriarchy impacts and oppresses every minority group separately so many social movements raise awareness, fight injustice, and make change for a specific minority group. Intersectionality calls us to embrace the unifying aims of different groups to ensure every type of discrimination anyone faces is named, seen and fought for. Living at the intersection and being a member of multiple minority groups, societal bias and discrimination impacts every aspect of your life. Intersectional feminism places women who are the most marginalised by racism, classism, and gender discrimination and other oppressive forces at the forefront. Women in the Global South cannot achieve collective empowerment unless and until all aspects of colonialism and neo-colonialism are eradicated.

Feminism has existed ever since protests over the oppression of women have been made, initially by individual women from all over the world. Many amazing women, not recorded for Herstory have done magnificent things on behalf of other women. There were many individual women who campaigned and spoke out against the oppression of women in every country from very early times. Feminism is not an invention of women in the west, it has existed in all cultures all over the world. Some locate the roots of feminism as far back as ancient Greece with Sappho (d. c. 570 BCE), or the medieval world with Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), Ida B Wells or Mary Seacole. These powerful women advocated for the dignity, intelligence, and basic human potential of the female sex and/or black suffrage. The earliest feminist thought in Britain is often attributed to Mary Wollstonecraft (d. 1797) known as the grandmother of British feminism, who wrote *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. Every country has their equivalent feminist foremothers. You may wish to discover foremothers from your own cultural history.

That women are treated unjustly and are oppressed by sexism is the reason feminism began to form as an organised movement, as a protest and campaigning movement to fight for the political, economic, and social equality and liberation of all women. From the late nineteenth century the efforts for women's equal rights coalesced into a clearly identifiable and self-conscious movement, then into a series of movements or waves over the years. Feminism campaigns for all women to have control over their own bodies and all decisions affecting their reproductive capabilities, including choice on contraception, abortion, childbirth, and pre- and postnatal care. Other threads include issues of control of their own sexuality and being free from all forms of violence and sexual coercion, including rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence. Equal pay in the workplace and equality of representation have been fought for for decades.

One way of looking at feminist history is through the four waves of feminisms and how feminism became an organised national and global movement worldwide. A key question for every wave, for every individual woman, and anyone who wishes to identify as feminist including men, is “what is each feminist or wave of feminism fighting for or against? – What am I fighting for or against?”

Feminism became an organised movement through the early first wave suffrage and vote campaigns, the second wave liberation movement of the 60s/70s/ 80s, then the third and fourth waves from the 1990s. All these waves have involved specific organised protests and campaigns on behalf of women and other oppressed groups.

The first wave operated primarily within the lens of patriarchy. The second wave feminist understanding of patriarchy focussed primarily on the perspectives and needs of white middle class women. Class, race and sexuality was significant for many women but at times was ignored or had to be suppressed to meet the greater need of the universal Sisterhood. We need now to both include and go beyond the narrative of universal Sisterhood to include all genders. Third and fourth wave feminist understandings of patriarchy are less blunt and monolithic in an attempt to capture the nuances of all oppressions as patriarchy doesn't express itself uniformly and cannot be understood independently of other systems of oppression. Today's feminism includes lived experience of and support for intersectionality and fights for the liberation of all oppressed groups.

We want to highlight two aspects of feminism we think are particularly important.

In second wave feminism some women were very aware and actively encouraged attention to all facets of oppression, others less so. None of the authors of this paper are black so we feel it's important to include the perspective of 'womanism', a term coined by Alice Walker in her book "Coming Apart" published in 1979. Womanism perspective includes race and class-based oppression as integral to gender. The experiences of black women, black culture, black myths, their oral tradition and spiritual life are the lenses through which their identity is shaped and experienced. It includes feminism while being much more comprehensive. A black woman's blackness is not a component of her feminism, her blackness is the lens through which she understands herself. We consider it vital that white people look at their own fragility, racism and white supremacy, as well as all their bias and prejudices to be fully intersectional and to use their white privilege skilfully. We welcome the examination by people of colour as to how the majority of second wave feminists were white and middle class. Mistakes and inappropriate responses were made – and hopefully this can be rectified without blame or diminishing of anyone. Each wave and generation of feminism has its strengths and its weaknesses, and we can always do better. As white people we genuinely want to be part of the solution not the problem and to be allies to people of colour as well as doing our own inner work and emotional labour.

Finally – linked to the acute issues of climate change and biodiversity loss, that threaten the planet and humanity, informed by the eco-feminist movement – we are exploring how a fifth wave of Feminism might express itself and how we can contribute to it. In the face of the immense challenges of patriarchal society, we remain optimistic and encouraged by the words of Arundhati Roy who said: *"another world is not only possible, it is on its way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing."*

Questions to consider...

- *What is your understanding and definition of feminism?*
- *What does it mean for you?*
- *Who do you believe feminism is for?*
- *How might you articulate your own feminist values? What will it involve for you to live by these values?*

Really feel into your responses. Write them down. There are no right or wrong answers, just finding your own truth and clarity.

Ecofeminism

This is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second-wave feminism and the green movement. It is both a movement and a philosophy. It exposes the oppression of women and the environment as interlinked and rooted in patriarchal structures. It makes the connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. (This term was coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974)). Some argue however, that the beginning of ecofeminism began not with feminists but with women of different races and class backgrounds who made connections among gender, race, class, and environmental issues. This ideal is upheld through the notion that in activist circles marginalised groups must be included in the discussion. In early environmental and women's movements, issues of varying races and classes were often separated.

Ecofeminist and activist Vandana Shiva supports the idea that women have a special connection to the environment through their daily interactions and that this connection has been underestimated. According to Shiva, women in subsistence economies who produce “wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes”. She makes the point that “these alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs are not recognised by the capitalist reductionist paradigm, because it fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women's lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth”. Shiva blames this failure on the Western patriarchal perceptions of development and progress.

Today, there are several forms of ecofeminism, with varying approaches and analyses, including liberal ecofeminism, spiritual/cultural ecofeminism, and social/socialist ecofeminism (or materialist ecofeminism). In terms of feminist leadership, the contribution of spiritual or cultural ecofeminism has had a profound impact.

Spiritual or Cultural Ecofeminism

Ecofeminist influencers include Starhawk, Riane Eisler, and Carol J. Adams. Starhawk calls this an earth-based spirituality, which recognises that the Earth is alive, and that we are an interconnected community. Spiritual ecofeminism is not linked to one specific religion, but is centred around values of caring, compassion, and non-violence. Often, ecofeminists refer to more ancient traditions, such as the worship of Gaia the Goddess of nature and spirituality (also known as Mother Earth). Wicca and Paganism are particularly influential to spiritual ecofeminism. Most Wicca covens demonstrate a deep respect for nature, a feminine outlook, and an aim to establish strong community values.

Carolyn Merchant refers to spiritual ecofeminism as “cultural ecofeminism”. According to Merchant, cultural ecofeminism, “celebrates the relationship between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals centred on goddess worship, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system.” In this sense, cultural ecofeminists tend to value intuition, an ethic of caring, and human-nature interrelationships.

In the 1980s and 1990s critics believed ecofeminism to be reinforcing patriarchal dominance and norms. Post structural and third wave feminists argued that ecofeminism equated women with nature and that this dichotomy grouped all women into one category enforcing the very societal norms that feminism is trying to break. As Ecofeminism developed into the 21st century it became aware of the criticisms, began renaming the topic, i.e. queer ecologies, global feminist environmental justice, and gender and the environment.

Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice is the intersection of both social justice and the environmentalism where the inequality in environmental degradation is also considered. *“Just like feminism should be intersectional, so should environmentalism”*.

Intersectional Environmentalism

More recently, Intersectional Environmentalism was born from colliding social and green movements such as the Black Live Matter movement and the youth climate strikes. Intersectional Environmentalism is a concept that transfers significantly into environmentalism and the impacts of the climate and ecological crisis. This theory stems from the term intersectionality (as described above).

“Intersectional Environmentalism is an inclusive version of environmentalism that advocates for both the protection of people and the planet. It identifies the ways in which injustices happening to marginalised communities and the earth are interconnected. It brings injustices done to the most vulnerable communities, and the earth, to the forefront and does not minimise or silence social inequality. Intersectional environmentalism advocates for justice for people and the planet” Leah Thomas, Climate

Activist

There are many different ways to be feminist, for some of you feminism will be a really important ingredient to create your own unique flavour of your leadership in the world. For others this may not be important or relevant.

Feminist Leadership

“Leadership from a feminist standpoint is informed by the power of the feminist lens, which enables the feminist leader to identify injustices and oppressions and inspires her to facilitate the development of more inclusive, holistic.... communities. Feminist leaders are motivated by fairness, justice, and equity and strive to keep issues of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and ability at the forefront...” Tracy Barton

We need both encouragement of feminine qualities into leadership AND a feminist leadership focus at this point in time in the world and it's important to be clear about the differences. A core purpose of feminist leadership is to achieve gender justice and to understand the nature of power, as well as the personal and psychological aspects of leadership. Feminist leaders pay attention to, are aware of, and address as best they can, the historical and contemporary circumstances, social, economic and political, that have created power inequalities and oppression for women and other underrepresented groups. They have a genuine desire to bring marginalised voices to the centre of the conversation. Feminist leaders work collectively to overtly and consciously ensure that no one, regardless of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion or physical and mental ability is treated unfairly. They value community development and collaboration in which everyone's presence and participation is valued. They are willing to undergo a process of personal self-awareness, transformation, consciousness-raising and study the context and history of feminism. At its heart, for us, feminist leadership is love in action which develops the fullest potential of everyone.

Writers on feminist leadership include (Batiwala, 2010; Freeman, 1984; Parker, 2018; Wakefield, 2017; Wiggins, 2018; Wiggins and Anderson, 2019). Srilatha Batiwala provide an excellent overview and synthesis of feminist leadership and offers her 4P model of power, principles, politics and practices. She presents feminism not just as a set of ideas about what is wrong with the world and what needs to change but importantly, as a lens or way of looking at leading based on shared beliefs and the reality of collective experiences based upon a woman's place in society. To see more definitions of Feminist Leadership, see Annex 1.

Feminist Leadership in Action

We are really keen to understand how any desired change is brought about in reality through principles, culture, strategy, structure and people-team working. Going beyond rhetoric to facing practical issues. We know that some organisations sadly face major safeguarding incidents or crises, notwithstanding their policies and systems. From our own experience and our learning from working with others we believe in the importance of embedding principles and values to co-create a culture centred strategy from which any structure flows.

ActionAid have been commended for putting their feminist principles into successful action through their governance and whole organisation. They were awarded the Charity Governance Award in 2021 for Board

Diversity and Inclusivity. The judges said that ActionAid won “because they are aiming for a radical reconfiguring of governance. They demonstrate they are living their (feminist) values by being the change that they want to see in the world.” Judges also praised ActionAid’s “bold innovation” and practical solutions to overcome inclusion challenges. They appoint trustees from diverse backgrounds, but also make sure those trustees actively influence policy. The board has pioneered an app that monitors the amount of time men and women speak during a meeting, to avoid male dominance.

They have adopted 10 feminist leadership principles: *Self-awareness, Self-care and caring for others, Dismantling bias, Inclusion, Sharing power, Transparent and empowering use of power, Accountable collaboration, Respectful feedback, Courage and Zero tolerance*. The description of how they live these principles can be found [here](#).

For decades, Oxfam has supported women’s leadership and participation, from the grassroots to policymaking. Senior members of Oxfam have acknowledged the difficulties they had over safeguarding and the importance of improving their systems, policies, procedures and truly living their principles and cultural aspirations following the scandals they faced. It has worked to transform unequal and oppressive uses and systems of power, and to strengthen the organisational capacity of women’s organisations with women’s leadership. They place importance on the how as well as what they do. Their 11 feminist principles are: *I share power, I challenge my behaviour, I support the feminist movement, Nothing about us without us, Feminism is for everyone, There is no justice without gender justice, I champion diversity, I value safety, I want a supportive environment, I believe in freedom of expression, and Eliminate gender-based violence*. The description of how they live these principles can be found [here](#).

Caplor Horizons Feminist Leadership in Action

“You can choose courage, or you can choose comfort, but you cannot choose both.” Brene Brown

At Caplor Horizons, we are going on a feminist leadership journey. We have been committed to doing things differently from the outset, including being proactive about addressing the injustices of a patriarchal society. We have taken steps to deepen our journey and challenge ourselves as individuals and as a core team. And we have engaged with others: notably many of the partners and clients that we work with closely have provided great imputes, challenge and inspiration over the years.

Furthermore, we have engaged with various collaborative initiatives such as the ‘*Women’s International Leadership and Development*’ (WILD) Research Group in the UK. We considered various frameworks and wrote earlier iterations of this Ripple paper.

In 2020 we articulated our own set of feminist principles (see page 16), drawing on inspiration from others, especially ActionAid. Some of the principles we set out were already lived and practiced in our culture. Others challenged us to explore feminism, systemic injustice and power issues further.

Our Feminist Principles



Whilst these principles have been relevant and helpful, it was felt that our approach could be developed further to reflect the way we work, putting an emphasis on our values and culture. We wanted to explore what made these principles specifically ‘feminist’ and how we could better live our feminist values and embed them into the organisation. Furthermore, we sought to articulate a more intersectional feminist approach which focuses on social justice more broadly, while continuing to strongly value gender equality.

As a result, in early 2021 we engaged in workshops, facilitated by Dr Lynne Sedgmore, focused on a ‘Journey to Feminisms’ and ‘Feminist Leadership’. This led to an even greater and shared understanding of the context and history of Feminism, including the four waves to date. Also, it has accelerated our connections and insights to other organisations that are also on a journey to be explicitly feminist in their leadership. We are also discussing how we believe a fifth wave might express itself and how we can contribute to it. Furthermore, we have continued to deepen our relationship with power as leaders, individually and collectively. Throughout the journey over past years – as well as past months – we have striven to be as challenging as we can about culture and power that are at the heart of issues that sustain patriarchy.

Arising from this, we have embedded feminist leadership within our culture, rather than having stand-alone feminist principles. We have called this our **Culture for Justice** (see below). For us, we believe our

culture is the best place to continue our intersectional feminist journey as we believe that there is no change without cultural change. This is where attitudes and behaviours are shaped, and it is also an integral part of our strategy. A phrase we often use, which reflects our approach, is *'culture eats strategy for breakfast'*.

We use the metaphor of a flock of flying geese to depict our culture. We are not unique in using geese to represent culture – e.g., Emma Hayes, longstanding women's coach at Chelsea football club makes reference to the metaphor, as do many others in recent decades. However, we have included the geese metaphor to evoke and align with eco-feminism, and also for the many remarkable leadership qualities that geese represent. For our part, we want to strive to make feminist leadership distinctively at the heart of our culture and encourage others to do the same.

Our Culture for Justice

We believe that there is no change without cultural change.

We are committed to challenging abuses of power and calling out injustice in the many forms it manifests, and in particular: gender injustice, racial injustice and ecological injustice.



We like to describe our way of working using the metaphor of a flock of flying geese. These remarkable birds demonstrate extraordinary teamwork and leadership. They provide an ideal way to depict our culture for justice.

Some of the elements that characterise our way of working as a flock of flying geese are:

- **Committed to our purpose** – *'to be courageous, compassionate and creative in facilitating transformational change'*.

Geese travel long distances every year for a specific purpose. Like them, we are doing something remarkable for a purpose. We are driven, unwavering and committed to bringing about a sustainable future for all.

We believe there will be no justice without gender justice, without racial justice and without ecological justice. Such injustices have come about, and are being reinforced by, the dominant culture of patriarchy that we live in. We are committed to challenging this by having...

- **Courage** to challenge injustice.
We believe that gender, race, ecology and all intersectionalities are important to address. They are interconnected. They cannot be separated. We are therefore committed to challenging all forms of injustice.

- **Compassion** for those experiencing injustice.
- **Creativity** in finding solutions to injustice.
To bringing about positive change; for example, through being an ally.

We believe that our commitment to a culture for justice will help bring about a transformation in levels of environmental regeneration; a revolution in the number of anti-racist organisations and institutions; an end to the abuses faced by marginalised communities; the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

- **Shared leadership** – Geese fly in a V formation and take turns to fly at the front. At Caplor Horizons we promote shared decision making, shared leadership and shared responsibility. It is important that organisations and networks challenge how they are structured to enable leadership to flourish regardless of gender. This is something we actively encourage with our partners and strive to model in our leadership approach.
- **Everyone matters** – Like geese, we believe that we are all leaders in our own distinctive and collective ways. Diversity fosters not only a culture of livelier conversations and creativity, but also an atmosphere of dynamic innovation. We therefore strive to be inclusive and diverse in our way of working together with people. We work to ensure that people with different perspectives join the conversation. In addition, we have a zero tolerance for unacceptable behaviour or attitudes and believe it is important to consistently challenge our assumptions and inequalities including our privilege and power.
- **Collaboration** – As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. The whole flock achieves a much greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. Strategic partnerships and other forms of collaboration are at the heart of the way we work.
- **Taking a strengths-based approach** – Geese honk to recognise each other and encourage those up front to keep up their speed. We believe in doing the best at what we are best at for the benefit of others. Recognising and valuing our own strengths and those of others is the key to being an effective, authentic leader.
- **Offering support in challenging times** – Like geese, we stand by each other in difficult times and are willing to help whenever we can. We are compassionate and offer friendship and kindness to others. We challenge imbalances in power. Through facilitation, mentoring, coaching and allyship we develop meaningful, supportive relationships.
- **Adapting, adjusting and overcoming challenges in our environment** – Geese adjust to changing environments and adapt their journeys each year. Like them, we strive to be innovative, adaptable, and resilient in an ever-changing world. Reflection and learning are essential to this. We also strive to overcome the deep-rooted challenges and inequalities that our environment presents such as patriarchy, racism and climate change, through our advocacy and Ripple.

Conclusion

We recognise that we all need to constantly strive, as leaders, to experiment, embed and live authentically as feminist leaders; to role model our commitment to improving gender equality; to reduce all sexist practices needed for our organisations to achieve their purpose; to respect, develop and value everyone in organisations and society. We believe it is vital that all of us encourage a range of leadership capabilities that blend and support each other; that this makes sound 'business' sense and that it will also create the environments in which we can all thrive and enjoy our work.

Annex 1: Feminist Leadership definitions

These four definitions have been taken from the '[Feminist Leadership Project](#)', which is a series of videos that celebrates feminist leaders who share what feminist leadership does – and can – look like in the global development sector and beyond.

"I define feminist leadership as a process of transforming ourselves, our communities, and the larger world, to embrace a feminist vision of social justice. It's the process of working to make the feminist vision of a non-violent, non-discriminatory world, a reality (...) It's about mobilizing others around this vision of change".



Srilatha Batliwala

"I would say that it involves challenging the deep rooted notions of singular leadership we most often grow up with (...) It involves reinforcing and re-claiming collective leadership and making it the norm rather than the exception in our organizations".



Lysa John

"Feminist leadership for me is the process that can address the challenges imposed to women by the patriarchal model where we are in our societies. I mean domination, I mean control, I mean competitiveness, I mean all the issues of power. We need feminist leadership to address that".



Cécile Ndjebet

"Most models of leadership are deeply patriarchal, so feminist leadership has to be (...) transformational leadership, leadership with, rather than leadership over. Leadership that fights to create space for others to lead, especially those denied that space by patriarchy"



John Coonrod

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Caplor Horizons – Background

Established in 2014, Caplor Horizons is an independent charity. We work with other charities and responsible businesses and now have over 50 Advisors. These are outstanding people that bring specialist knowledge and experience. They contribute their time on a voluntary basis, or at reduced rates, so that Caplor Horizons can provide high quality and distinctive services at an accessible cost.

Working locally, nationally and internationally, we help other organisations think differently about themselves and the new horizons that they face. We support them in strengthening their leadership, renewing their strategy and improving their influence.

We want to encourage and assist a new generation of organisations that are committed to making a positive and lasting impact. We believe that if we are to achieve real, sustainable change, we need to inspire and enable people to learn differently, think differently and act differently.

Our vision is: *A world where leaders deliver a sustainable future for all*

Our purpose is: *To be courageous, compassionate and creative in facilitating transformational change*

Our values are:

- **Courageous** – We are courageous change makers committed to challenging assumptions, taking risks and having difficult conversations
- **Compassionate** – We are open, understanding and heartfelt, encouraging the nourishment of our whole selves and others
- **Creative** – We learn, think and act differently, and are innovative and resilient in an ever-changing world

Our beliefs are:

- Through diversity we ignite dynamic innovation
- Collaboration helps achieve greater impact
- Everyone matters
- We are all leaders in our individual and collective ways – we are all change makers!
- Learning is more effective if it is fun, engaging and creative
- Building on people's strengths creates greater resilience

Our strategic goals:

- Goal 1: Transforming Leadership
- Goal 2: Strengthening Resilience
- Goal 3: Increasing Collaboration

Learning differently
Thinking differently
Acting differently

