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# The Emancipated Organization

A conversation with Kim Campbell



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## CONVERSATION

# The Emancipated Organization

Insights on gender, leadership, and power formed over 25 years on the front lines.

*Kim Campbell has spent her life shattering glass ceilings. She served as Canada's first female prime minister and minister of national defense as well as as minister of justice and attorney general. An author, diplomat, consultant, corporate director, and now chair of the Council of Women World Leaders and a visiting professor of practice at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, Campbell lectures widely on gender and leadership. In a conversation with HBR's Gardiner Morse, Campbell explores the nature of masculine business cultures and the costs of excluding women from leadership roles. These excerpts of the conversation were edited for clarity.*

**You've held many positions that are traditionally filled by men. What's the greatest obstacle you encountered?**

There is a deeply rooted belief that women are not competent and can't lead. That's because there's an overlap in people's minds between the qualities that we associate with leadership and the qualities that we associate with masculinity – decisiveness, aggressiveness, competence. There is much less overlap between leadership qualities and those we associate with being feminine – an inclination toward consensus building, to being communal, expressive, nurturing. That's why for many people it was rather disturbing that I was prime minister. A woman wasn't supposed to be prime minister. I wasn't entitled to be there.

There are all sorts of examples of this gender bias at work – people acting consciously or not on the expectation that women just aren't as competent as men. A study of how symphony orchestras hire musicians showed that when candidates audition from behind a screen,

many more women are hired. And we're up to our eyeballs in research reports showing that identical résumés are rated differently by reviewers depending on whether they have a man's name or a woman's name on them. The female version, of course, fares worse. Incidentally, this isn't just men discriminating against women; women rank the female résumé lower too.

**Why are some men anxious about having women in leadership roles?**

Well, there are many reasons. The first is that they may not think a woman can do the job. But also, having a woman in a leadership role can threaten their masculinity. Particularly in jobs where the work is considered very masculine – policing, fire fighting, coal mining – if a woman can do it, for some men that's a huge threat. In a corporate environment, where men are invested in the sanctity of organizational hierarchy – the sense of the pack – and where they might derive some of their masculine identity from their position in the hierarchy, for some men it's unthinkable to have a woman at the top. That's not a pack they want to run with.

**Men may sense they have a lot to lose by inviting women into the leadership inner circle. What do they have to gain?**

Well, aside from the obvious – the engine's only running on half its cylinders if you exclude women – there's the potential to address some cultural problems that affect the conduct of business. *Fortune* magazine recently ran an article about why companies fail, and if you look at the problems that contributed to their failures, a major theme is the effect of the social structure. In highly hierarchical, "masculine" organizations, people can be afraid to speak up when

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they know that things should be done differently – they'll fall back on "I was just following orders." Now, that's an oversimplification, but it's very clear that when you introduce women into leadership teams, they have less enthusiasm than men for the hierarchical structure. The hierarchy can become less rigid and more fluid and can lose some of its power to protect bad leadership. Studies show that when you have a critical mass of women in leadership, you have less corruption. That may be because women haven't been powerful enough long enough to learn how to be corrupt, but it may also be because women are more responsive to authority outside their own peer groups, whether that's the law or their own values.

**You've said that having women in leadership is more important now than ever. Why now?**

We're living in a time when we see the frightening limitations of masculine cultures. Cultures that are totally masculine can give rise to fundamentalisms – they can be intolerant, narrow, violent, corrupt, antidemocratic. That's at a state level. At a corporate level, a macho culture made Enron possible. This isn't an anti-male position, by the way. The idea is not to get men off the stage but to get women on the stage with them.

**As minister of defense, you had a leadership role within a deeply masculine organizational culture. Do you think there should be more women in war rooms?**

Absolutely. When it comes to sheer capability in this role, there's no distinction between women and men. When I became minister of national defense, we had troops in 15 countries. The first thing I said was that I thought it was highly premature to beat our swords into plowshares. I had been a professor of international politics; I had taught strategic studies. I probably knew more about the military strategy of the nuclear era than any of my recent predecessors. Understanding what goes into making military policy is totally unrelated to one's gonads.


But when it comes to the culture of a war room, women do bring a different orientation. I think because I was a woman I was less sus-

ceptible to, less seduced by, the peer pressure and the male fascination with hierarchy that comes with military culture. When the chief of the defense staff and the brass would come in and make a presentation, it was very seductive, all this "Yes sir" and "No sir" and heel clicking – the whole comportment that military people have. So everyone was sitting there rather mesmerized by this display and it just didn't faze me. I'd ask tough questions and persist, and it would turn out that some of the things they were saying with great certitude weren't nearly so certain when I pressed them about it.

Here's an example. When our troops were in Somalia, I got an incident report that described an altercation at a bridge. Shots were fired, and the report said they ricocheted and a Somali was killed. I read this explanation and I thought it was total rubbish. What was described could not have happened. The logistics made no sense. And I sent it back and said I found the explanation entirely unsatisfactory. There was great consternation because most ministers tended to say, "Well, if that's what the military says, that's what happened." The expectation was that I wouldn't pursue it.

**What needs to change in order for women to get real access to the inner circle?**

First, we have to address men's anxiety about sharing that space. That will come partly from their growing experience of women in leadership roles. Beyond that, as a society we have to find the equivalent of the screen the musicians auditioned behind. We need to eliminate our preconceptions based on gender. Ultimately, the solution must be gender literacy, teaching people to cast off their preconceived notions.

The goal is for men and women to share the stage, to create a culture where they can express the full range of their capacities – so that women can express the forceful, dynamic leadership qualities they have without being penalized, and men can express the intuitive, empathetic qualities they have that are often not valued and that get suppressed by a totally male culture. I think women have a lot to learn from men, and vice versa. 

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