

International Women's Conference

Strategic Women's Leadership: Workshop 1

Main Points from the Workshop on Women and Strategic Leadership: public service reform and gender

1. Professor Sue Richards (on secondment to the National School of Government from the University of Birmingham) and Dr. Su Maddock (on secondment to the National School of Government from the University of Manchester) led two workshops on this theme.
2. The aim of this workshop was to explore the opportunities created by the ongoing programme of public service reform for better harnessing the capabilities of women in work.
3. The workshop presented an over-arching framework which linked public service reform and gender and posed the questions "where do we go next in terms of public service reform and the gender agenda?"
4. The workshop leaders made three propositions:

I. The Context

- Women, by virtue of their specific social and personal circumstances, have had to develop certain capabilities such as inter-connectivity, collaborative working and innovativeness.
- Over the years, public service reform has seen a pulling of power up to the top and into the centre. It suited the specific circumstances a decade or so ago to concentrate power to achieve the types of change needed then. Now, the need has changed.

II. The Opportunity

- The world has moved on. The context and state of public service reform has moved on bringing with it an increasing recognition of the need to de-escalate the centralisation of power trend and to release power to promote a more innovative, energised and empowered public service.
- This predicted trajectory plays to women's strengths and women are seen as necessary, critical players within this changing context.

III. The Challenge

- We work in culturally gendered organisations, that is, the climate in which we work is one in which men's and women's perceptions

of each other are played out and this affects what we do and how we do it.

- Women face specific challenges in terms of existing and being effective in the differing types of ‘gendered cultures’ that exist within the public sector.

5. In terms of breakthroughs, delegates attending the two workshops, identified a number of strategies and tactics for coping with existing gendered cultures where women’s innovation and collaborative approach is usually stifled:

- Maintain contacts and be assertive in networking.
- These issues are not just about the individual but also about institutional processes. We need to look for ways to challenge inappropriate institutional forms.
- We need to monitor the impact of existing policies and initiatives on women eg: flexible working, down-sizing etc.
- We need to look for ways to encourage and to model a collaborative working environment.