

A terrible legacy: the lingering impact of predecessors on current leaders.

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Abstract

This article uses a case example of a public sector CEO transition to comment on the impact of gender and leadership style on leadership transition in times of organisational reform and upheaval.

It confirms previous research that abrupt leadership exits impact negatively on organisations (Gilmore 2006; Ballinger and Schoorman 2007) and that strong, directive leaders cast long shadows (Gronn 1999) making transition slow and painful. It further suggests that three other aspects of the leader/follower dynamic influence leadership transitions. These are gender of leaders, style of leadership and the influence of change in a time of reform.

Key words: leadership, gender, leadership transition, CEO

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* 1951 (act 1, scene 111)

Introduction

In comparison with the myriad titles available on leadership, little has been written about the difficult period of transition between one leader leaving and another starting (Gilmore 2003), especially when a leader exits swiftly. Early succession research focused primarily on the changing market position of companies with a CEO change (Gronn 1999). Yet more lately, researchers (Ballinger and Schoorman 2007; Farquhar 1996; Gilmore 2003; Gilmore and Ronchi 1995; Gronn 1999) have explored and noted the anxiety surrounding leadership change.

This article presents a case example where 3 years after the exit of the CEO, staff are still struggling to come to terms with the change. Gilmore and Ronchi (1995) argue that it takes some time for staff to shift allegiance from the previous leader to the new and that sometimes this shift can be impeded or blocked altogether by the shadow cast by the predecessor, especially if the predecessor is a strong, directive leader. It has also been argued that the more unexpected the leadership change, the greater the impact on staff (Ballinger and Schoorman 2007).

In the case outlined here, both these circumstances are apparent: The previous CEO was described by staff as 'bullying' and 'charismatic' and he did leave the organisation suddenly. In this article, I argue that the transition period has been affected by several additional factors. These factors are (i) the different gender of the previous CEO and the present CEO, (ii) the fact that the transition followed a time of reform and upheaval and (iii) the differing style of each CEO.

The previous leader, whom I call Greg Tillerⁱ, presided over a local government authority in Australia (the City of Glenview) during a period of wide ranging reform imposed by the State government. More than three years after his departure, staff still talk about him, as if he had left yesterday. The new CEO, his replacement, Barbara Schofield, is different both in gender and in approach to the work of the organisation she heads.

Firstly in this article, I will outline the literature regarding leadership transitions and the factors that influence a leader gaining competence in the position, including consideration of the influence of gender and style in leadership, noting that issues of gender become apparent when a woman assumes the position of CEO. Following this I outline the case itself using quotes from the present CEO and staff to indicate the depth of emotion that is attached to perceptions of leadership. Finally I explore the factors that may be influencing staff today in their difficulty with letting go of the past and conclude that leadership transition is a complex dynamic influenced by followers' perceptions, external threats posed by change, leadership style and gender expectations.

By comparing the two leaders in this case and reviewing the lingering impact of the earlier leader on the current situation, there is an opportunity to move beyond a simple description of leadership as a set of specific traits and behaviours.

Charisma and distance in leadership

The previous CEO in the case example given here was described by staff as 'charismatic', whereas the current CEO is described as 'controlling, distant and aloof'. Traditionally the epithet 'charismatic' has been attributed to great political leaders, kings and prime ministers (Shamir 1995), but as leadership theory developed several theorists argued that charismatic leadership (or transformational leadership as Bass and Avolio 1993 call it) could be found in any organisation and indeed at any level (Shamir 1995:20).

It is argued (Katz and Kahn 1978) that distance is required for an attribution of charisma to be placed on a leader. Strangely in this case, the previous CEO was described as close and charismatic, yet the current CEO is described as distant. The original idea of charisma in a leader has itself undergone transformation in the leadership literature since Weber's times and Shamir (1995) argues that close associates can ascribe charisma to a leader because of personal qualities they see in day-to-day interactions.

Leadership and gender

Mainstream leadership research has for decades tried to quantify the characteristics that make a good leader (Rost 1991; Bresnen 1995). Amanda Sinclair (1998, 2004) has written extensively on the heroic male stereotypes that pervade notions of good leadership. She argues that leadership is in fact 'a white, male idea' (Sinclair 2004:17). When reviewing the work of others on this matter, Ryan and Haslam (2007) use the phrase 'think manager - think male'. If leadership is about being ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient and self-confident then leadership is more commonly associated with men. Stereotypically women are affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, sensitive, nurturing, and gentle (Eagly and Karau 2002). Therefore when a woman is in a position of leadership, expectations of gender compete with expectations of leadership. Gender is an inescapable aspect of leadership dynamics (Collinson 2005a.) The construction of women leaders as 'other' is predicated on what Runte and Mills (2006) call 'cold war discourses' which put forward as hegemonic truths the lingering idea that men belong in the workplace and as leaders and women belong in the home as supporting wives and mothers. Eagly and Karau (2002) note that '[e]mpirical evidence is consistent with the principle that perceivers blend the information associated with a gender role and a leader role'. Gender role expectations are present in the workplace as in other settings.

While some authors suggest gender expectations unconsciously influence notions of leadership, others maintain leadership is a legitimate activity in the workplace, just difficult to grasp. Bennis and Nanus (1985:5) suggest that leadership is like love; we know it when we feel it, but we cannot easily define it. On the other hand, Meindl (1995), Pfeffer (1977), Alevesson and Sveningsson (2003) and in particular Gemmill and Oakley (1992) argue that leadership is more a concept in the mind of the beholder, rather than a set of skills, traits or behaviours to be measured.

Mant (1997) highlights the difference between the formal and the informal in work place relations. In considering leadership traits and styles, he argues that there is the formal role (position of CEO), there is also the experiential role (what the CEO thinks she is doing, i.e how she experiences it) and there is also the phenomenal role (how everybody else sees it).

There is a difference between the three roles and according to Mant the successful executive can see and relate to that. For Mant enacting the role successfully, involves the CEO being aware of what she believes she is doing, what the job description says and what people around her feel and project into the job. Taking these authors together, suggests there is more to leadership than simply the style of the incumbent. The case example that will be discussed here also suggests that the way a leader is perceived by staff is influenced by their experience of the previous CEO and the gender and style of the incumbent is compared with the memory of the emotional experience of being led in the past.

Romantic notions of leadership lead us to link positive outcomes with leadership (Meindl 1995) and not consider the impact of perceptions and gender role expectations. We believe the leader causes organisational success. The organisation would not be successful without the leader working his or her 'magic' on it. Gemmill and Oakley argue that leadership is a myth which functions to alleviate the anxiety associated with complex work situations. We are able to not think and not worry about the situations we find ourselves in, instead giving control of the situation to the leader. In a similar vein, Hirschhorn (1998) argues that followers may feel so anxious about external threats to their livelihoods (as during the local government reform period in this instance) that they trade their potency for protection by a leader that they fear, as this is better than facing the real threat.

Leadership transition

Gilmore and Ronchi argue that the anxiety of these types of changes makes it difficult for the staff to let go of the old and connect with the new. They say 'with time, in most cases subordinates shift their reference point from the predecessor to the newcomer' (Gilmore and Ronchi 1995:11). The presenting situation here suggests that three years after the departure of one CEO, staff were still struggling to make the shift to supporting the new

CEO. What is a reasonable amount of time for this to occur? Ballinger and Schoorman (2007) argue that when a leader exits unexpectedly and goes to another organisation (both of these conditions apply to Tiller) then the negative impact on staffⁱⁱ is higher than if the succession is planned and if the leader moves up within the organisation and 'remains close' (2007:125).

Research in the arena of new CEOs gaining competence and control in the position generally suggests there are stages (Ballinger and Schoorman 2007) to go through from survival, to control, stability and finally leadership (Parkay, Currie and Rhodes 1992). In the study by Parkay et al the 'writing was on the wall after one year'. Other researchers suggest competence in a CEO position is generally gained within three years. Gabarro (1985) identified the stages as taking hold, immersion, reshaping, consolidation and refinement. While Gabarro says the process is not defined by time spent at each stage, and that some stages may contract while others may become attenuated, approximately two and a half years is required to have moved through the stages. Gmelch (2000) found just less than two years was required for a university Dean to move to the stage of refinement. Hambrick and Fukotomi (1991) found that the new CEO usually reaches consolidation and stability in the second year and moves to either re-shaping or dysfunction in the third year of tenure. The literature therefore suggests that a CEO should be competent and confident in the role generally within two years. There is no indication of any incompetence in either the incumbent CEO or the previous CEO in my case example and yet there was little acceptance of the current CEO by staff after three years of her tenure. The literature of leadership competence noted above does not consider the impact of follower perceptions on the ability (and time taken) to gain competence in the role. However, Gilmore (2006:17) argues that endings 'stir up complex dynamics in both leaders and followers' and Farquhar (1996) notes that followers go through relationship stages with (in her example) a transformational leader; these are entry, action, accomplishment and accommodation. If the leader exits suddenly and early, then followers may be trapped in the early phases that are characterised by dependency on the leader. I suggest that followers in my case example were trapped in the dependency stage and could not shift allegiance, even after three years.

The Presenting Situation

The history that I describe in this article is essentially a 'by-product' of a larger study. I came to the City of Glenview to investigate the impact of local government reform on leadership style in the public sector. I spent six months in the local government authority shadowing the CEO, Barbara Schofield. My purpose was to find out if the changes made to local government in the prior decade had impacted on the way leadership is both perceived and enacted in the public sector. These changes were far reaching and required local government to emulate business practices including an emphasis on cost-cutting, capping budgets, transparency in resource allocation, downsizing traditional bureaucratic organisations into separate agencies, separating the provision of services from purchasing of services, introducing market mechanisms, requiring staff to work to performance targets, indicators and output objectives, employment by contract based on performance and increasing emphasis on service 'quality', standard setting and 'customer responsiveness' (see Pollitt 1995; Hood 1991; Osborne and Gaebler 1993).

I interviewed a random sample of staff from all levels of the organisation and observed staff meetings at all levels of the organisation over the six-month period. I interviewed the Glenview CEO on two occasions, once just upon commencement at Glenview and again towards the end of my six-month observation period. The questions asked of her and her staff centred on her management style, the usefulness of management theory, the differences between the public and private sectors, ethical dilemmas at work and the impact of the reform period to the operation of local government.

In addition to interviewing staff, the CEO, Councillors and observing in meetings, I also compared the financial position, organisational structure, staffing levels and the community satisfaction levels of the municipality with previous years before the reforms were introduced.ⁱⁱⁱ

The City of Glenview is a large organisation with just under 1,000 staff located in a suburban area of a major city. The CEO is a woman in her late 40s. She had been CEO for 3 years when I arrived. My interest was in discovering how this CEO viewed her role; if she saw her role as similar to that of any private sector CEO and how it was perceived by her staff. When I spoke to staff at all levels, I was surprised by the fact that everyone (without fail) referred to the previous CEO when describing the present one.

I was intrigued by the universality of this reference to the past and determined to document the situation with the expectation of adding to accounts in the literature of the impact of past leaders on those of the present.

The situation I encountered was not unlike that described by Gouldner in his pioneering work on succession in the 1950s, where he notes 'almost to a man, workers in the plant were in the spell of a backward-looking reverie. They overflowed with stories which highlighted the differences between the two managers' (Gouldner 1954:80).

I had the same experience at the City of Glenview and so too did a new member of staff, who had only been at the local authority for 3 months. She said: -

They focus on Greg Tiller. It's all they talk about. That's breaking down a bit. The ones who idolised Tiller are not coping now. It's a terrible legacy. Liz

When I interviewed staff at the City of Glenview, asking them to discuss the style of the current leader, all staff made comparisons to the leader who came before and when asked to describe the current organisational culture, interviewees discussed the climate of fear under the previous leader and noted its lingering effects. It was the general view, that the effects were still being felt.

It became clear to me that staff perceptions of leadership matter, whether they are accurate or not, as does organisational history and the impact of previous leaders. At Glenview staff views about the current leader were influenced by their relationship with the previous leader and the current leader was judged in comparison.

In the mid and late 1990s the position of CEO at Glenview had been in a state of flux due to reforms imposed by the State government on local government including the compulsory amalgamation of two local authorities into the new City of Glenview. Finally a five-year contract was offered to Greg Tiller. He was CEO at Glenview for just under three years when he left to take up another position outside local government. Greg Tiller was offered a more prestigious job by a government in another state. He left mid contract giving three-weeks notice in his formal letter of resignation to the Council. There seems to be a sense of loss surrounding his departure, even amongst those staff who did not like him.

There was then a short period with an interim CEO, an internal candidate. Following this period, the present CEO, Barbara Schofield was recruited from another local authority and appointed to the position of CEO.

I do not know Greg Tiller, the previous CEO but he was described, in my conversations with staff, as a charismatic, authoritarian leader who gave clear direction to his staff and expected them to follow his lead. The previous CEO was not on my research agenda at the time, but he was on everyone else's! Even though he had not been associated with the City of Glenview for more than three years when I arrived, the memory of him was still present. He seems to have been influential in both positive and negative ways. He gave clear guidance and direction. He was a father figure. But he was also described as someone who publicly humiliated staff, 'came down hard on them' and did not always follow through on his grand plans and schemes. He guided and nurtured supporters, yet women apparently found him domineering and obnoxious (according to two interviewed senior female members of staff).

Greg Tiller seems to have a hold over staff – whether they loved him or hated him. He was the one who could make things happen. Whether staff were with him or against him, they did feel involved in the activities of the organisation, they lived through the upheavals that come with a dynamic and forceful leader and a time of great change. He directed staff to work on exciting municipal projects such as sculpture competitions and exhibitions, a new botanical garden and a proposal to put all electricity cabling underground in the municipality.

All interviewed staff told me that Tiller had a group of protégé's whom he supported and with whom he had Friday night drinks in his office. He made it known that he was 'grooming' one of these staff members to take over his position in the future. However what transpired was that Tiller left unexpectedly mid contract and the Council (the governing body) selected a woman from outside the authority to be the new CEO. Tiller's protégé who was acting in the position, did not get the job.

The current CEO in this case, was still being compared (unfavourably) to the previous CEO more than three years into her tenure. In every interview and with every question I asked staff, whether it was about the current CEO or the culture of the organisation or the best thing about working there, reference was made to the situation under the previous

leader. The quotes below illustrate the strength of views about how things were under Tiller.

The new CEO says:

The stories people tell me about Greg Tiller are about when he came down on people with a stick. It's like the battered child syndrome. It doesn't go away. My style is so different, that has been bewildering for some people. Barbara

Other staff say:

It was a bit of a boys club in there under Greg. He projected the idea that if it needs to be done now, then we all jumped to it. Michelle

He was a legend. He drove people crazy, but once he was gone, there is a reverence for him. The women were happy to see him go, but the men were still grieving. The boys miss him the most...he is very charismatic, a big guy, solid... he often didn't follow through. The women found him domineering, obnoxious, didn't listen. The boys liked being whipped into shape I think. They talked about him as if he was God. They longed for him to be there. He's a hard act to follow. Marie

The previous CEO I used to call Dad. He referred to the councillors as 'his' councillors. We were 'his' managers. So managers operated in that style for 3 years. Under Greg Tiller it was family and he was Dad. He told us the direction up the mountain and we followed it. That's the ghost, the ghost of clear directions. Jose

After amalgamation, the CEO was Greg Tiller. He came in with a ruthless reputation and lived up to that for some people. Michelle

We have remnants of a patriarchal style led by Greg Tiller. That was the style he chose. It was a protective, patriarchal approach. Bill

How do staff describe the new CEO?

The new CEO, Barbara Schofield has a stated commitment to notions of rationality, balance and consistency. In interview, Barbara commented that her own management style is inclusive and empowering of others. She believes that effectively managing staff is the most important aspect of the work. Yet strangely, staff do not see Barbara in this way at all. In summary, staff see Barbara as cold and controlling. It is a paradox, that the most important thing for Barbara is consistency and empowerment, but others do not see

her in the way she wishes to be seen. Quotes from staff interviews show the strength of staff views on Barbara's management style.

...controlling, directing, she's a control freak.....not only is she the conductor of the orchestra, but she tells each person how to play their instrument. Bill

...aloof, distant, cold on a bad day. Marie

...can't see any difference between her and a man doing the job, she's a bit more ruthless than some of the guys [ruthless?] Yeah. Mike

I have seen her come down hard. She's single minded – knows where she wants to go. Seems very nice... she looks the same, but she is not the same [after not renewing the contract of the internal candidate for the position of CEO]. I have seen another side. Michelle

She's honest. She doesn't shy away from telling the good and the bad and the ugly. Liz

I wondered if Barbara's gender influenced perceptions. I asked her if she felt being a woman in the CEO role was significant.

I don't believe it influences me, in the way I respond. I don't try to meet people's expectations of me as a woman [Are you influenced by people's view?] I might be rebellious if I became aware of people feeling I couldn't do something because I was a woman.

It is hard to know if Barbara is as cold and distant as staff say, whether she is the victim of unconscious views about how a woman should behave, or if staff are unable to accept a different style because they were so enthralled with the previous leader. There was no evidence of incompetence and no perception of incompetence was expressed to me in relation to Barbara's role as CEO; comparisons were simply made in relation to style.

It may well be very difficult for a leader of nearly 1,000 staff to appear anything other than distant. But this was certainly not felt to be the case with the previous CEO at Glenview. Staff either loved or hated the previous CEO, he had the grand vision for the municipality, and he appears to have had a very hands-on approach to the work.

In contrast, Barbara focuses her energies on less 'exciting' projects for the long-term sustainability of the municipality and in this respect may well be a more responsible leader than Greg Tiller. This was acknowledged by the Mayor in interview.

She doesn't come up with the ideas that Greg had, he had the drive. She has had to contend with the superannuation issue, drains, fixing the pool. Greg talked about a botanical garden, underground cabling. These are exciting ideas. She has put good policies in place for the longer term. Betty

The Mayor and one member of staff saw that there could be a connection between the way Barbara is perceived by staff and their earlier experiences with Greg Tiller – a very different type of leader.

She is not controlling [like Tiller]. But keeps her cards close to her chest. Needs to articulate values more. She is challenging them [staff] to grow up. We survived CCT [local government reform period] and still here we are doing a good job. She is subtle, everyone has missed it. Jose

She's firm and stands no nonsense, but she cares about her staff. People find her easier to work for than [Greg Tiller] and so she gets better results. Betty

Compounding the situation in this case is the fact that the Tiller protégé was acting CEO, but was not successful in his campaign to be appointed to the position and went back to his previous second level directorship after Barbara's appointment. According to Barbara he spent the next six months undermining her leadership until his contract was not renewed. In this complex transitional setting, what does appear to be true is that attitudes to the current CEO are enmeshed with the past.

An interim administration provides an opportunity according to Farquhar to 'permit organisational repair following a traumatic departure' (1996:1008) but that does not seem to have been the case in this instance either. Gronn (1999:141) notes that a predecessor casts a long shadow when he or she nominates his or her own successor and (quoting Levinson 1974) he argues that leaders who do this are insecure about their own leadership and the legacy they may leave.

Reflections on the case example

An attack on the way things were done

It seems that staff saw the outside appointment of the new CEO as an attack on the way things had been done (Gilmore and Ronchi 1995) suggesting that no one internally was good enough for the position, including the internal candidate. Could it also be that having a forceful leader in a time of reform inhibits the ability of staff to shift allegiance to the new leader? Perhaps the perceived style or competence of the new leader impacts on the level of acceptance. Staff traded their own potency for protection under Tiller. The apparent rejection of the way things were done by the style of the new leader, may have led to uncomfortable memories surfacing for staff about the part they played in the old regime. It could be more difficult for a new leader to gain competence and approval in the work under these conditions. It seems that while the Council was prepared to have Tiller's protégé in the interim position, it was not prepared to have him in the position long term. There was a desire to have a different leader after Tiller, but that supporting her different style is not so easily done. Showing support and acceptance of a new leader means facing up to the part staff played in accepting the way things were done under the predecessor.

It is difficult for staff to see that Barbara may be trying to give them greater autonomy to take responsibility for their work, than they were allowed with the previous CEO. As noted earlier, Barbara describes the phenomenon as the 'battered child syndrome' where staff still find it hard to accept and trust a different leader, even three years after the departure of the previous CEO.

Betrayal of the past

Barbara certainly protects staff from the roller coaster ride they associated with Tiller, but somehow the drive associated with the Tiller days, is not there. The projected capacity he provided has gone. He has left the organisation and staff may be feeling depleted, impotent and resentful. It is possible that staff are very mindful of the ramifications of giving over power to a new leader and will not let that happen again. Gilmore and Ronchi (1995:21) argue that followers can feel jilted by the predecessor, making them reluctant to follow the new leader. Similarly Gronn (1999:141) suggests followers 'hedge their bets' with the new leader until they can be sure he or she will stay and be successful. It may be easier to shift their own sense of discomfort to an attack on the person who represents this betrayal of the way things were done.

Adding to the volatile mix in this instance is the fact that the leader left suddenly and just at the conclusion of the most radical reform period in local government history in Australia. Further injury may have been felt by the fact that his protégé was not selected to fill the position. It is difficult to trust a new regime, when the trauma of the past is not acknowledged.

Barbara acts with authority as CEO and no doubt with the best interests of the institution in mind, but in doing so she betrays the tacit understanding of role and expectation that people had under Tiller. Krantz (2006) reminds us of the use of word betrayal as in 'betraying a confidence' by bringing knowledge into the open. In this way she betrays the past. Her very presence contradicts the way things were done before she arrived. For staff struggling to accept change it is a betrayal of the past to acknowledge the good aspects of the current leadership.

Gender as betrayal

Another aspect of Barbara's betrayal is her gender. She is different from the previous leader simply by virtue of her gender. Eagly and Karau (2002) note that even while female leaders may receive a positive evaluation for fulfilling the role of leader, they may still be evaluated negatively for their violation of the expected role of women.

At Glenview staff were resolute in their dismissal of gender as a significant issue regarding their views of Barbara. They denied she was considered differently due to her gender. In fact the discussion of gender seems to have made some staff uncomfortable.

Gender has not entered into it...gender has never arisen. Betty

Yes, but it's just her personality. She can't change it Bill

One senior staff member felt it was impertinent when I raised the issue. I suggested to that staff member that if Barbara is controlling, as he suggested, it might be because she feels as a woman in charge of men, she must exert more control to be considered credible. He responded:

Rubbish. I can't know what is in her mind. I resent the question. What has that got

to do with it? It's irrelevant. It's insulting to raise it! Gender is not an issue! Bill

The blindness of leadership studies to the impact of gender role stereotyping runs deep in the management literature (Eagly 1992) and in the unconscious views of staff. As an example, Ballinger and Schoorman 2007 (quoted earlier) summarise many authors' writing on the topic of leader succession and develop a comprehensive theory concerning the various events that impact on leadership change, yet gender is not mentioned. Sinclair (2004:11) notes that having women in positions of authority often results in 'punitive, sadistic and dismissive' responses by others within the organisation. If Gemmill and Oakley are right, then whether a CEO is described as leader or as charismatic has more to do with his or her gender and perceived capacity to alleviate fears and anxieties at work than genuine ability in the position.

Leadership and distance

Staff described Barbara as distant, cold and aloof. What might this be signifying? Is it simply her personality or was she perceived in a particular way because of her gender. Although this was resolutely denied at Glenview, I believe there is a relationship with gender and gender expectations in the leadership role. If Barbara were a man in the CEO role she may well have been described as cool-headed, rational, consistent or fair. There is also a connection with the closeness felt with the previous leader ('I used to call him Dad'). It may be fearful to feel a sense of closeness to a leader when the last one left so unexpectedly.

It is interesting to consider the meaning of the word distant. Here I refer to Collinson's (2005b) article *Questions of Distance*, where it is noted that workers on an oilrig perceive the leader as distant, but the leader does not see himself in the same way. This perceptual mismatch was also true of Barbara. Could it be that women leaders are expected to be warm and nurturing and that if they are not, they are labelled distant and that the term is used pejoratively? Eagly and Karau (2002) suggest that because leadership ideals contrast with commonly held ideas about how women 'should' behave, it is difficult for a woman to be perceived as successful in a leadership position.

While Katz and Kahn argued that in order to maintain an aura of charisma, the leader requires some distance from workers, the opposite seems to be true in this case, i.e. Tiller

was considered charismatic and yet close, whereas Schofield is not charismatic (by description) and emotionally distant. Perhaps Schofield uses distance as a protective mechanism? Blackmore (1996:346) interviewed women school principals during a time of reform and found that women leaders 'developed a rhetoric of detachment and coping' as a means of protecting themselves from expectations of managing their own emotions and those of staff.

Meindl's (1995) view is that in reality few subordinates see the leader in action on a regular basis and so whether a leader is charismatic or cold is really a function of attribution by followers and a matter of social contagion, i.e it comes to be believed by staff in general and is passed on as fact to new staff. This could explain the comment by the new senior staff person, Liz (quoted earlier) who was surprised that Greg Tiller is 'all they talk about'. Indeed at Glenview the CEO has only four direct reports and noted herself that staff assume she has personally made a particular decision, when she could well have no knowledge of the detail of it.

...there are all of these decisions that they [staff] perceive I have made that impact on them. They are things that I haven't even heard of or know about. They are decisions that are distant from me. Barbara

This is an interesting quote from Barbara as she herself mentions her 'distance' from decision-making, yet the attribution of staff is that she has made decisions which impact negatively on them.

Leadership and loss

My experience at Glenview suggests that change brings up feelings of loss and abandonment from other times and places for staff (Gilmore 2006). The sudden loss of a major projective figure, such as Greg Tiller, causes psychological disarray amongst staff. It has the potential to carry significant meaning and the stress caused by this change to the way things are done at work is rarely given consideration. It is difficult to connect and feel a sense of loyalty to a new leader who is different from the old leader. It feels like a betrayal to the memory of the old leader to get on board with the new. It is a period of doubt and uncertainty. In addition, the new leader in this case is a woman and this in itself

brings up expectations and projections from staff about how women 'should' be and these can clash with how a leader 'should' be.

The past can be dealt with by attempting to ignore it, by re-imagining it as utopia or by incorporating its reality into a reflective narrative of the organisation. If it is ignored, it arises in sullen, resentful denial of the present or rose tinted nostalgia. To incorporate it into the narrative of the present means looking at the pain of loss and change, of trust and betrayal that has occurred both within staff and by the previous leader. This is difficult work. I think Glenview is struggling, unconsciously, with this issue. Staff want the 'peace and quiet' of a non-charismatic leader, but they feel disloyal to the past if they acknowledge this, so they see Barbara as cold and distant, rather than acknowledging their own desire for distance from the traumatic past. This struggle has been compounded by the divisive style of Greg Tiller and his sudden departure.

Staff at Glenview have been struggling silently with these issues with no public acknowledgment of their impact and no opportunities given to release the emotion behind the past. So it is re-lived and passed on in organisational culture to new staff who were not part of the initial experience. The past still lingers at Glenview because the collective loss of trust reverberates until it is acknowledged and reparation is made. Acknowledging grief at the loss is important to integrate the feelings of trust and betrayal. The two leaders are superficially different in their style, but integration of the two types is needed to move on. When I asked the Mayor to describe the ideal CEO, she said

Something between Barbara and Greg. The best thing I did as Mayor was employ Barbara. Tiller couldn't work with a female... I don't think that she has got quite the vision that Tiller had. She would never let you get into trouble, she has sound judgement.

The staff at Glenview trusted Tiller to guide them and lead them to the grand heights he inspired. But he left mid term with no explanation and no warning. He betrayed the loyalty that staff showed him. They were abandoned for a more lucrative job. When a loss of trust occurs staff retreat to local relationships to 'lick their wounds'. This is exemplified by the fact that when I asked 'what is good about working here?' all interviewed staff said their friendships were the most important and most valuable thing about the job. They were not prepared to trust another leader again. Judgements made by staff about a

leader's trustworthiness are critical to his or her success (Ballinger and Schoorman 2007:120).

Conclusions

My experience at Glenview reinforces the view that leadership is not simply a set of tools to be learned, nor is it a set of personality traits that one is either born with or not. It is a complex relationship built between people and it is time and place dependent. It is linked with mythical archetypes especially of father figures and it is unconsciously shaped by gender expectations. Gender is significant mainly because it guides the behaviours of the leaders and those led in ways they cannot readily recognise.

The capacity of staff to shift allegiance, in the example described, to the new CEO was compromised by several factors, namely the unexpected exit of the dominating leader during a time of reform and fear, his exit not only from that organisation, but from local government entirely and the failure of his protégé to gain the CEO position. This exit left staff in a state of powerlessness and fear. Also significant is the fact that the new CEO is a person of a different style and gender to the predecessor. All of these factors combined to make the transition difficult and slow.

A 'charismatic' leader like Tiller taps easily into our desire to be protected and cared for by the leader. Staff can depend on him; he shows the way, he protects them from external threats to their jobs. Connecting with a new leader, who has a different style of operation, causes staff to have to face their dependency on the previous leader. This raises uncomfortable feelings and it is therefore resisted.

The case study presented here suggests that the key to moving forward from a reform period and a domineering leader is time to reflect on the changes, along with acknowledgment of the good and bad of the past and to reflect without romanticising the past or being stuck in it. My experience at Glenview shows the power of the past to influence current attitudes and choices. This power is so strong at Glenview, that it influences staff who were not even at the organisation during the days of the reform period. The present is tightly linked with the past, the type of leader in the present is tightly linked with the leader of the past and the effects of this relationship are felt both consciously and unconsciously in every decision of the organisation. This social

knowledge is kept in the memories, stories, gossip and jokes of staff and it is replayed in staff attitudes and in the leadership relationship.

I think in choosing Barbara to follow Greg Tiller, the Council chose a person who could take on the projected fantasy role of distancing staff from the past. It was a necessary part of growing and changing, but too hard for staff and Council to do without placing their sense of disloyalty onto the new leader. They chose a new CEO who has characteristics that make these projections 'stick', namely she is task oriented, outcome focussed and not overly emotional in her style. She is the one then, who is controlling, aloof, and distant and staff can feel sullen, quiet resentment of the changes she brings in – over which they have no control and therefore no responsibility. Staff needed to move on from the days of the tough reforms instituted by State government, from the authoritarian leadership of Greg Tiller, from the hurly burly of a tough leader. They needed a time of stability and even-handedness and so Barbara was given the task. But letting go of the past is difficult and finding fault with the current CEO could be a way of dealing with the sense of disloyalty to the past.

The case example provides a reminder the complexity of leadership transitions. While it cannot be generalised to explain all occurrences in leadership transition, it serves to confirm previous findings that strong directive leaders cast a long shadow making transition slow and difficult and that abrupt and unexpected termination of a leadership relationship has a negative impact on staff. It shows further that staff carry with them unresolved feelings from the past and that they can place (conscious and unconscious) expectations on incoming leaders. It suggests that the impact of reform may be felt many years after implementation, that gender expectations impact on leadership attribution and that issues regarding trust and betrayal are basic to the leader/follower relationship.

It suggests that our understanding of the complex dynamics involved in leadership transitions would be enhanced by further research on the impact of gender, leadership style and leadership during a reform period on perception and attribution of leadership.

ⁱ All names in the presenting situation are pseudonyms

ⁱⁱ Ballinger and Schoorman believe their model applies to how a leader is perceived by direct reports. They do not generalise their theories to all staff

ⁱⁱⁱ The findings of this study can be found at <http://wallaby.vu.edu.au/adt-VVUT/uploads/approved/adt-VVUT20060918.161934/public/01front.pdf>

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