

TITLE: Mothers and Leadership: Bridging the Chasm

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OBJECTIVE: To develop a self-assessment tool for women who are re-entering the paid labor force.

METHODOLOGY: Twenty-nine mothers participated in the focus groups. They were, on average, 39 years old. Three had one child, 15 had two children, 8 had three children, and two had four children. The average age of the children was eleven years. The mothers had, on average, fourteen years of education. Ten of the mothers were currently employed outside the home. Eleven mothers were single parents. A pilot study had resulted in modifying the LPI so as to link mothering practices with leadership behaviors.

KEY FINDINGS: Subjects (mothers) described their "personal best" mothering experience, much as Kouzes and Posner had asked managers to describe their personal best leadership experience. Key themes emerged were communication, letting go, enabling and encouraging, and facing the challenges. Relating their experiences to the leadership behaviors represented in the LPI revealed that of 174 affirmative responses possible, the hit rate by leadership practice was Enabling (170), Challenging (166), Encouraging (165), Modeling (163), and Inspiring (148).

The focus groups of mothers indicated strongly that there is a parallel between mothering skills and leadership skills. Not only were the personal best stories connected in language and concept to leadership behaviors, but the focus group mothers' item by item analysis of the LPI questions provided evidence" (p. 59).

"The responses from the modified LPI suggest that within the sample of this study, the leadership practices within the LPI are valued in the workplace" (p. 59). In terms of how their mothering experience had developed or enhanced their leadership skills, "nearly all of the mothers/managers on nearly all of the questions reported ranges of somewhat enhanced to greatly enhanced" (p 60). "Mothers believed, overall, that their mothering practices were congruent with the descriptions provided in the LPI" (p 61).