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Leadership Styles and Conflict Management Strategies of Prominent US Female Cable Industry Leaders [Slides]

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Why Female and Cable?

- Women are still woefully underrepresented in cable's highest-level ranks (*Cableworld, 2007*)

- The cable industry is undergoing rapid changes as a direct result of the Telecommunication Act of 1996 and technological development of digital cable and broadband Internet service.

- Innovation and competitiveness are crucial to the success of the industry and how female leaders contribute in this highly uncertain time will provide lessons for other female media industry workers and the media industry at large.

Glass Ceiling in Cable Industry

- Glass Ceiling: the barrier to women in their promotion to top executive positions

- The PAR Initiative of Women in Cable Telecommunications (WICT) is an example of a structural approach to solve the glass ceiling problem. It identifies pay equity (P), advancement opportunities(A), and resources for work life support (R) as the three structural factors to foster success of women in the cable industry and regularly report the progress of participating companies in their policies regarding these three areas

Research Question

- What are the leadership styles and conflict management styles used by outstanding female leaders in the US cable industry?

- What are the factors that enabled the female leaders in cable to break the glass ceiling?

Research Method

- In-depth Interviews of *CableWorld*'s 2006 most powerful women list published in November 2006.
- 10 were invited for interviews, 4 accepted and participated in the study.
- Participants of the study have worked in cable companies or represents the cable industry and hold a corporate management title: Lynn Yaeger , Executive Vice President, Corporate Affairs, Time Warner Cable; Benita Fitzgerald Moseley , President/CEO of WICT, a 5000-member organization representing women in the cable industry; Jill Campbell , SVP, Operations, Cox Communication; and Colleen Abdoullah, President and CEO of WOW! (Wide Open West), a company providing Internet, cable and telephone services.

Method

- The interviews were customized to specific individuals, in addition to a set of common questions, and emphasized the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

- The authors audiotaped interviews with the permission of the interviewees in order to record the details and exact quotes to ensure accuracy and validity.

Themes

- specific female leadership styles and strategies that are used in the media industry, including leadership styles and conflict management strategies;

- networking strategies;

- mentoring;

- career experiences and strategies of overcoming discriminations and barriers;

- factors of personal success

Female Leadership Styles

- The participating leaders all exhibit transformational leadership styles and interactive leadership styles typically used by women as discussed in the literature on female leadership

- "knowing how to empower," "to grow together and work like a family," "to be supportive," "to be approachable all the time," "to put people first and treat them with my respect and trust," "to be open with new ideas and changes,"

Conflict Management

- The pressure resulting from such competition inevitably pushes conflicts between superiors and their subordinates to their extreme.

- Female leaders mostly preferred the strategy of **integrating** to solve conflicts in their organizations. That is, they considered highly the needs and desires of both parties in a conflict and tried to satisfy the needs of both sides by solving the problem itself, thus creating a win-win situation,

Networking Strategies

- Female leaders network differently than male leaders.

- Female leaders tried to take opportunities to join in different projects and tended to include all members within their network, without putting themselves in the top positions. They kept close relationships with their network, usually through informal channels

Mentors and Mentorship

- Women mentors are believed to be helpful to young females entering the industry for grooming them to be leaders and that is important to establish themselves early in the career.

Overcoming Discriminations and Barriers

- Females need to work harder, prove their abilities in the male-dominated industry and take advantage of the lower expectations of women by impressing colleagues and supervisors with outstanding performance.

- Most of them expressed that it is not easy to accomplish balance between career and family, but they tried to make conscious efforts to do it well with the support of the spouse/partner and prioritize strategically.

Mixed Opinion on Glass Ceiling

- YES: *"I am not satisfied with the progress that women have made on the operations side of the business. It is still a white male dominated industry. When you look to the very top it is still primarily men. But, I am very hopeful there will be parity in the next ten to fifteen years as the current generation retires. "*

- No: *"There is a lot of hard work you can do, but the glass ceiling idea is really not there anymore. Women bring many different perspectives, and the perspectives are very necessary in meetings."*

Personal Success Factors

- Timing and luck
- Mentors in the company
- Company is inclusive
- Support from spouse
- Volunteering and networking

Implications of the Study

- Women with competent leadership skills and performance can break the glass ceiling.
- CEOs could be more sensitive to diversity by promoting women to executive positions to have more perspectives and get a better balance.
- The current advancement in communication technologies and improving women-friendly work policies would be of great benefit to women who need to deal with conflicts between career and family. Women indeed can thrive in the highly competitive cable industry environment through their job performance and insights.
- Our study reveals that it is important for more female leaders to be available to mentor young women and serve as a sounding board for women, just as what our interview subjects have done
- Importance of the support of a spouse in a woman's career success.

Vision of the Cable Industry's Future by Female Cable Leaders

- The heaviest investment in the future in the cable industry would be in the Internet businesses and telephone businesses, as well as the entry of the telephone companies as a formidable competition that can offer the same services as cable.

- The complexities of the new products and the need for education with a rapid technological change in the industry are a challenge for leaders. Women can be on a more equal level playing field with men in this environment.