

Feminist Leadership & Institutions

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Feminist Leadership and institutions can seem incompatible.

We associate Feminist Leadership with:

Collaboration, centring people, inclusivity, dismantling biases, self-awareness, transparency, accountability, sharing power, building consensus, self-care, harnessing differences.

We associate institutions with:

A lack of accountability and transparency, stability, rigid structures, economic growth, patriarchy, hierarchy, fear of losing power.

So why is there this gap and how can we address it?

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"Once we join institutions we are pushed to absorb and internalize the values of that institutions. But if we want to drive change, we need to bring in the values of Feminist Leadership."
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Why is there a gap between institutions and Feminist Leadership?

- Unequal social norms dictate how structures are built, and they are often built to sustain power within certain groups
- Norms around communication, decision-making, etc. also reflect who is in power, and people can be penalised for straying from these norms
- Institutions seek to preserve themselves, so they are resistant to change
- Capitalism: some institutions are driven by economic growth, others by need for funding
- Neoliberal narratives about individual and personal success
- Hierarchical leadership structures and ageism (also between women)

How can we address that gap?

- Recognise the competencies of other women in the team and appreciate one another
- Women in more senior roles actively supporting and mentoring younger women
- Build and promote intergenerational work teams to recognise and learn from each other
- Create 'whisper networks' and talk to each other across institutional boundaries
- Form external partnerships to support internal agendas if you are the lone feminist voice
- Find allies in management who support cultural transformational and keep them accountable

The barriers to thrive which we encounter in institutions are socially constructed and can be removed.