



The Future We Want

a toolkit to promote gender equality
and the empowerment of **women**
with visual impairments



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

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“Gender Equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is therefore the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community and their society.”

Baseline definitions of key concepts and terms by UNESCO

“Empowerment is about people -both women and men- taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance. No one can empower another: only the individual can empower herself or himself to make choices or to speak out. However, institutions including international cooperation agencies can support processes that can nurture self-empowerment of individuals or groups.”

Baseline definitions of key concepts and terms by UNESCO

About this Toolkit

Gender equality is fundamentally related to sustainable development and is part of delivering our commitments to equal human rights for all.

Within the organizations of persons with visual disabilities, gender equality and the empowerment of women is extremely vital as women and men face different challenges in full participation, representation and decent work opportunities. It is therefore a shared responsibility of all to adopt policies, plans and measures that lead towards equality and reduce intersectional discrimination based on gender, ensuring at the same time equitable access to resources and basic services as to obtain an inclusive and gender responsive organization.

This toolkit, which is the product of a co-funded EU activity, is designed to be used by organizations of the visually impaired. It is produced and released in a special year, as 2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action, the outcomes of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women.

The toolkit was developed with the purpose of mobilizing organizations of persons with visual impairments to focus greater attention on gender equality and the empowerment of

women. Its aim is to raise awareness regarding the importance of including gender in the decision-making process and in all other areas so as to enable change in policies, strategies and activities within an organization. The toolkit has been designed to be used on multiple occasions, depending on the specific situation of the organization at a given time, is divided into various sections that provide knowledge, techniques and tools in different areas. Section one, introduction, outlines the key gender-related issues within the organizations of the visually impaired. Section two describes the development of policies on gender equality and the empowerment of women followed in section three by the EDF's tool on how to enhance inclusion of women and girls in the work of the organization. Sections four and five describe how to write up gender equality plans and present SRF's gender plan. Section Six includes a wealth of information that can be used when organizing training programmes on leadership and the empowerment of women.

The toolkit format has been designed to allow you to easily navigate through its various sections and is also available in a ready to print version.

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Section

1

Introduction - Key Gender-Related Issues in Organisations of the Visually Impaired

By: Ana Peláez Narváez, ONCE Executive Councillor for International Relations and External Development and Chair of the European Disability Forum Women's Committee

Overall, it can be said that organizations involved in the third sector for social action have been known for promoting recognition and the exercise of citizen's social rights, for attaining social cohesion and inclusion in all their dimensions, and for preventing the exclusion of certain social groups, such as persons with disabilities, from enjoying an appropriate level of welfare. In our case specifically, we have extended these commitments to the area of visual impairment, seeking to use our direct social action in delivering services and our capacity for political dialogue to secure non-discrimination and equal opportunities for the people we represent and for whom we work.

Despite our efforts in issues related to social justice and equality for persons with a visual impairment, at times we have failed to take into account the imbalance that exists between the sexes, not only in our structures but also when drawing up policies and programmes. In addition to meeting the legal requirements set out in current legislation, we have a clear responsibility to boost equal opportunities and equal treatment of both sexes, and we must also consider this additional social justice commitment.

In general terms we can state that disability organizations form a sector in which professional activities are largely feminized (between 60% and 70% of all paid staff are women), and work conditions for many of the female employees are lower than for their male peers; they are not offered realistic opportunities to strike a work-life balance because the impact of gender is not considered in working conditions (part-time work, fixed-term contracts, etc.). Despite this, women make up a higher percentage of those involved in voluntary duties and direct intervention in our organizations. In short, we are replicating the gender-based and stereotyped division of duties as women work mainly in intervention while men hold positions of responsibility where they are, of course, over-represented.

It would be erroneous to believe that the high proportion of female employees in the organizations that make up our movement ensures we are considering and working towards equal treatment and opportunities, because to do so would contribute to the perverse effect of invisibilising these employees not only in power relations but also in respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms in relation to their reference groups.

Furthermore, we shouldn't neglect negative or skeptical attitudes towards equality which are the result of what can be considered an overestimation of the effect of gender on the lives of our organizations. These attitudes lead to a rejection of strategies that aim to promote equality because they are viewed as irritating, wearisome and repetitive in parroting politically correct discourses, and if ignored they will lead to flagrant discrimination of over half the people involved in our respective movements and grassroots. It is evident that gender relations are not aesthetic, so we are forced to revisit some of our theoretical approaches and how we act in this respect.

Faced with the risk of regression in the small steps taken towards equality, organizations of persons with visual impairment must adopt policies, plans and measures leading towards equality that reduce intersectional discrimination based on gender via a twin-track approach: in the very mission, vision and values of the organization, whether it is an advocacy and lobbying organization or an organization that manages and delivers services and support, as well as in resource management processes, including human, financial, material, communication and strategic resources.

The first track involves ensuring gender is properly mainstreamed in all actions, services and programmes the organization provides, and that it responds systematically to the practical and strategic needs its male and female users may have.

To do this, registration systems for programmes and services must first be put in place with data disaggregated by sex and other gender-sensitive indicators. These systems will ensure we are able to know how they behave in regard to their distribution among beneficiaries of the programmes and services, discover what causes the imbalances and what mechanisms they are based on, in order to then adopt measures to eliminate them by means of appropriate evaluations.

Secondly, it is important to analyze those action areas where the organization must pay special attention because of gender to male and female beneficiaries with disability by designing specific programmes based on the characteristics of each sex. The limited studies carried out to date involving people with a visual impairment point to health, violence, abuse and sexual and reproductive rights as areas that must be addressed separately on the basis of the needs and demands set out by men and women.

To achieve this, those responsible for these tasks within the organization must be given suitable training in gender issues, and these people must ensure the gender perspective is included in actions, services and support. It is a mistake to take for granted that all professionals will act with the gender perspective in mind simply because the majority of technical staff in disability organizations are women.

Furthermore, in terms of management processes it is also necessary to put in place protocols that explicitly set out this commitment and the organization's recognition of the need for equality, ensuring that the gender focus is systematized and incorporated into the organization's management and culture.

In relation to human resources, organizations of the visually impaired should drive actions that ensure equality and non-discrimination in their workforces, among other options by introducing measure such as promoting women's participation in decision-making processes; ensuring more men are given technical and administrative

positions; offering training and technical support programmes to women (this includes both training to take up leadership positions and subsequent training); promoting the design of policies, plans and measures to seek a balance between personal, family and working lives; and involving men in these measures.

As regards managing economic and financial resources, all efforts should be made to ensure the budgets of organizations of the visually impaired are gender sensitive. This concept entails the incorporation of the gender perspective in all stages in organizational programming, projects, activities and strategies and seeks to ensure the interests, needs and priorities of men and women in their different social groups are appropriately addressed and included. This process involves realigning the organization's budget priorities from an inclusive perspective, thus ensuring a fair distribution of the organization's economic resources.

It is also important to focus on an organization's information output and communication strategy as they can become key tools in actively supporting gender-related issues. For this reason the gender impact must be considered in drawing up, editing and disseminating information about the organization, not only in communication material such as newsletters, briefing notes, articles, leaflets and posters, radio programmes and promotional material, but also in the individual communication processes of those holding leading positions (speeches, presentations, conferences, etc.). At the same time it is helpful to produce information products specifically aimed at women on issues that directly affect them by means of instructional materials that can easily reach them, including by setting aside space on the organization's web page.

In view of the above, there is every reason for the European Blind Union and its member organizations to adopt an equality plan, regardless of the size of the organization or the number of people involved in it; not just for reasons of social justice, but because it will add value to the organization as it will enable it to update the way it operates and its management procedures.

Implementing an equality plan will not only bring about improvements in those areas that affect women, but will also bring to light other areas where improvement is possible and foster internal cohesion within the organization.

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Section

2

Guidance on the Development of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (GEEW) Policies

By: Maria Kyriacou

The information in this section is adapted by the May 2014 Guidance on the development of gender equality and the empowerment of women policies UN Women Coordination Division.

Why do we need to develop a policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women?

- To increase our efforts to advance the agenda for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women through the practical implementation and
- To provide strong leadership within our organizations to ensure that a gender perspective is reflected in all our organizational practices, policies and programmes.

When to design or update a policy?

- After carrying out an evaluation, a review or an audit of the organization's perspectives on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

How to develop a policy?

If the organization has no previous policy or review, and the policy is developed from scratch, then as a first step it might be useful to develop an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the organization in regards to GEEW. This analysis can be carried out using a variety of tools for assessing the internal policies, the operation and the overall capacity of the staff and the organization to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women.

There are a number of simple and easy to use tools available on the internet that can easily be adapted according to the context and mandate of each organization. Such a tool is the "Gender Equality Capacity Assessment Tool" developed by the UN Women Training Centre. The tool aims to assess the capacity of individuals and also contains guidelines for implementation, gathering of information, consolidation and analysis of data, development of reports and follow up. The information gathered with this tool can be complemented with more qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and systematic observation.

The tool can be downloaded at:

<http://goo.gl/C4mAJF>

Suggested outline of the gender equality and empowerment of women policy:

- Begin with a Foreword, by the head of the organization, stating the organization's overall commitment to GEEW, and how this policy will ensure that the organization meets its GEEW mandate.
- Introduction and background
- Make reference to international mandates such as the Beijing Platform for Action, to the international conventions related to women rights ([UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women](#), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). Make specific reference to articles 6 and 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Refer to any previous GEEW policies and/or action plans that the organization worked on in the past.

Set out the vision for the organization at the end of the policy period, and/or a mission statement or statement of commitments, stemming especially from the CRPD.

Describe within a paragraph the process of developing the policy (explain how both gender mainstreaming and the equal representation of women will be included).

Provide the outline for the rest of the policy.

■ Context

Set out the context for the GEEW policy (the inequalities on which your organization plans to work).

Explain why GEEW is important to your organization and how it will help your organization achieve its overall goals and objectives.

Delineate what GEEW means internally in your organization (i.e. that is GEEW is everyone's business, and that the policy will define goals and objectives so everyone is clear about their responsibility and the resources and capacity they will need in order to promote GEEW adequately).

What lessons has your organization learned so far from their work on GEEW.

Define how your organization would incorporate GEEW in its strategic planning process.

List all specific outcomes and expected accomplishment on gender equality and women's empowerment.

List any intended results and corresponding indicators.

■ Implementation planning

In order to establish an implementation plan, the organization's policy should involve first the determination of the level of resources and capacity required to fulfill the policies objectives, and the establishment of an accountability framework including a monitoring and evaluation plan.

Resources and capacity

The policy should clearly state resources on two levels:

Internal resources to ensure that the organization has the capability to meet its GEEW mandate and the programmatic resources that will be

provided during the lifetime of the policy.

In terms of capacity, the policy needs to set out how required in-house capacity will be developed in order to meet the organization's GEEW goals and objectives. A starting point is an assessment of staff capacity in GEEW.

Accountability - Accountability for achieving the planned results of the GEEW policy should rest with the board of the organization.

Tracking the strategy

The policy should:

Establish a baseline at the start of the policy period in which progress can be tracked.

Ensure ongoing monitoring, describing the procedure and securing a report at least once a year to the board of the organization or the governing body.

Plan an evaluation at least every five years feeding in to the updating of the GEEW policy.

Section

3

**A Tool to Enhance Inclusion
of Women and Girls in EDFs
General Policy Work**



This draft tool is being developed to support the mainstreaming of the rights of women and girls with disabilities in all EDFs work. This will help us to implement the Gender Action Plan. In combination with training, and support/ collaboration with other organization and our women's committee it will build our capacity.

Legal/policy framework:

1. Are there references to the EDF women's manifesto and action plan?
2. Are there references to the international conventions related to women rights?
3. [UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women](#)
4. [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
 - 4a. [the other UN Human Rights Conventions](#)
5. Do we refer specifically to [articles 6 and 7 of the UN CRPD?](#)

Data:

6. Do the data show gender differences or correlations with other important variables:

Age, Poverty, Disability, Sexual orientation, people in need of high levels of support, ethnic origin and race

7. Have sex-disaggregated data been collected and considered regarding those likely to be affected or referred to in the policy?

Consultation:

8. What are the plans for consultation with the Women's Committee? Has the Human rights officer reviewed the proposed policy?
9. Should we consult with other organizations in the development of this policy? If the Policy is public, based on advocacy towards the EU institutions on general human rights policies, do consider which networks we should discuss this with. They may include:
 - EWL
 - ILGA
 - Age Platform
 - ENAR

Policy content:

10. Have specific needs of women and girls with disabilities been identified, considered and integrated in designing this policy document?

For example: Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies considerably jeopardize the safety and protection of women and girls with disabilities, notably reducing their chances of survival. Women and girls with disabilities are more vulnerable than other persons before, during and after the occurrence of risks such as armed conflict, occupation of territories, natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies.

11. Have recommendations been provided to ensure that specific situation of women and girls is improved in the policy?

Recommendations may include:

- improving upon any previous legislation / public policy / programme that was discriminatory, disadvantageous or ignores women and girls with disabilities

- establishing legal and other protection of women and girls with disabilities
- Calling for gender disaggregated data strengthening women and girls with disabilities role in decision-making
- Increasing women and girls with disabilities access to and control of resources;
- Contributing towards empowerment of women and girls with disabilities any other way, e.g.
- Calling for training of staff in gender equality and disability

For example on education: Families and teaching staff must be given complementary training on the gender perspective applied to disability with a view to securing respect for a suitable image of girls and women with disabilities, recognizing and respecting their human rights and focusing particularly on eradicating negative stereotypes which are widely-held in society and hinder their development as people and full inclusion on equal terms as others.

Language and form

12. Is the language gender sensitive and non-sexist? For more information, see [UNESCO guidelines on gender neutral language](#)
13. Are the photos gender balanced and non-sexist? (equal representation of women and men, no stereotyping of women or men, creation of positive images of women and girls with disabilities)
14. Are quotes gender balanced? (are we quoting women and men equally? Do quotes highlight issues of women and girls with disabilities?)

Section

4

Plan of Action for Gender Equality in the Associations of the Blind and Partially Sighted

Translated into english and adapted from the “draft of the new Norwegian association of the blind and partially sighted gender equality plan” by Helena B. Redding

The political role

Goals:

In the organization, it shall be as natural for women as men to be politically active and hold political leadership positions.

Efforts should be made to ensure a minimum of 40% of each gender in positions of trust within the organization – also leading positions. Women and men shall equally represent the organization externally.

This entails a minimum of 40% representation of each gender on county boards, the central board, the national executive committee and the congress, as well as any of the committee appointed by the aforementioned levels of the organization. Appointing candidates for external assignments such as representation on boards or advisory committees will also help to ensure equal representation of the genders.

Measures:

The nomination committees, appointed by the county associations and congress should strive to nominate an equal amount of male and female candidates.

Same gender balance should be attempted when the organization proposes candidates for boards where the organization holds office, as well as to national and international advisory boards.

Increase women's and men's self-esteem, motivation and competence through training courses. Courses should include information on the organization and techniques, leadership training, presentation techniques, economical understanding, training in improvement of self-esteem, dealing with conflict and so forth.

Information on items on agendas should be written in such a way that the elected representatives will be able to familiarize themselves with the case in question in the shortest possible time.

The role of the employer

Goals:

Women and men in same employment should be awarded the same wage for the same work, or work of equal value as long as seniority does not call for adjusted wages.

The organization should strive for gender equality as far as possible within all job categories.

Measures:

An analysis of wage differentials by gender in the organization should be made.

Efforts should be made to remove unwanted part time employment.

The organization should work towards a balanced gender equality amongst rehabilitation assistants, rehabilitation contacts and member contacts.

The role of a provider of rehabilitation and habilitation services

Goals:

The organization should provide equal opportunities for men and women, and pay attention to any systematic differences in demand that may be linked to gender.

Measures:

Identify whether the gender balance of the members harmonizes with that of participation in rehabilitation and habilitation courses.

Identify whether the contents of the courses are aimed equally towards men's and women's needs and interests.

The national board should receive a report annually, giving status of gender equality in respect to the gender equality plan.

Section

5

Sample of Gender Equality Plan

Together, we can shape the organization, society
and our own lives

SRF organization's common vision on gender
equality

Adopted by Congress in 2006



Equality

Women and men, girls and boys should have the same power to shape the organization, the society and their own lives.

Gender equality is part of the concept of equality as regards the relationship between women and men. Equality is achieved through distribution of power and resources.

Gender equality is when women and men, girls and boys based on their individual preconditions and needs have the same rights, obligations and opportunities in all areas of life.

Both women's and men's knowledge, experience and values should be safeguarded and utilized.

SRF strives for equality between women and men. Through our shared vision of equality, we ensure that the gender perspective is not lost in our work.

An important task for both men and women is to continue the changes initiated as a result of our previous equality plans. **The Next Step Together** document adopted in 1996 as well as **Different but all equal** document from 2000.

Our common vision for gender equality includes all the levels within our organization. The board, the district and local association's boards are all responsible in ensuring that gender equality is included as the way of SRF's work.

National Association Congress, the District Representatives and the local branches annual meetings are all responsible to follow-up on gender equality.

The organization

SRF is an organization that is characterized by openness and democracy, in which all members can make their voice heard and everyone's views are welcome. This means that we will have an even distribution of power and influence.

Measures should be taken to promote gender equality in the work of the SRF.

Women and men should have equal rights and opportunities to be active members and to shape the conditions and decision making processes.

We should work together for a gender balance in our decision-making bodies.

We will develop our meeting formats so that more people feel involved.

We can achieve equality through education in various forms within and outside of SRF.

We should pay attention to gender equality and gender aspects in our information activities, including through targeted information.

We will continue to work to increase women's participation and involvement in SRF at all levels.

We will continue to develop women's network Lina.

We shall also give the men in SRF the opportunity to discuss the man's role as visually impaired.

We shall also emphasize gender equality and the importance of empowering women in all our international cooperation projects.

Society

Based on the idea of human equality we, the SRF, stand together in asserting the rights of visually impaired to participate on equal terms in all areas of life.

In our organization we have built a reputation as skillful advocates. We have the tools to work against discrimination of those who are visually impaired. These tools, we will develop and also use in our work for equality and against discrimination based on gender.

SRF strives for equality between women and men. We must therefore make visible the gender discrepancies that exist today and that need to be eliminated. Both men and women must participate actively in this work.

An important task in our advocacy work is to highlight the differences in women's and men's needs and living conditions.

Surveys show particularly large differences that disadvantage women in the following areas:

- Health
- Working life
- Economy
- Information technology
- Support and service

Our own lives

Gender equality is about counteracting gender related injustice. Specific targeted efforts are therefore needed both for girls and for boys, for women and for men to strengthen the ability to develop their own identity. This must permeate all habilitation and rehabilitation activities.

Women with visual impairments face gender based discrimination that all women face. In addition they also face disability based discrimination which raises the obstacles to achieving gender equality and non-discrimination in other areas.

Within the SRF, we have created a community to support each other, so that we can live an active and independent life.

A considerable number of our members feel lonely and would like to spend more time in the company of other people. More women than men are living on their own. SRF therefore has an important role in breaking the isolation of our members and thus strengthening their independence.

Something we must pay attention to is that sexual harassment must not occur within SRF. We must also work actively to prevent violence against visually impaired women. We need to strengthen and extend support to vulnerable women and increase our awareness of the prevalence and the nature of violence against visually impaired women.

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Section

6

**Organizing Training Programmes on
Leadership and the Empowerment
of Women**

By: Helena B. Redding

Master suppression techniques

The master suppression techniques, also known as domination techniques, are conscious and unconscious strategies used to assume power over others. In the late 1970s Berit Ås, a Norwegian social psychologist, developed the theory of and identified the five master suppression techniques. With this, she has created a tool, which can be used to identify the techniques, to make them visible and thereby being able to neutralize their effect. Master suppression techniques are defined as strategies of social manipulation by which a dominant group maintains position. These techniques are seen to be used in politics, organizations and places of work.

In theory, techniques like these may be used on all suppressed groups. However, Berit Ås believes that they are used in specific combinations and situations in regards to women.

The five master suppression techniques are:

- Making invisible
- Ridiculing
- Withholding information

- Double bind (Damned if you do, damned if you don't)
- Heaping blame and putting to shame

Making invisible

Have you ever experienced being overlooked by a Chairperson, when you have given a signal that you want to speak or noted that your input is not to be found in the minutes?

The object of this technique is conveying the message that you do not exist; that what you say or do has no importance or value. This technique can be expressed in a number of different ways, verbally as much as by way of body language. It could consist in your input at a meeting be dismissed or discussed in a dismissive way, involve distraction such as when you are speaking people are shuffling papers, clearing their throats or whispering to the next person. It can be that they show no response to your input, no one takes notes, asks questions or show any interest in what you are saying. The object is to make the target of this behavior feel insignificant and insecure. Overlooking a person is an effective way of hindering participation.

Ridiculing

This technique uses a manipulative way to portray the arguments of, or the opponents themselves in a ridiculing fashion.

Examples:

- Surely you don't mean that – followed by a chuckle
- Making fun of your accent or comparing you to a funny television character
- Being told you look cute when you are angry, when you make an accusation of wrongdoing against someone.
- If no one protests against such like, we give the signal that we accept this sort of behavior.

Withholding information

To exclude a person from the decision making process, or knowingly not forwarding information so as to make the person less able to make an informed decision.

Example:

- Decisions are made not in conference, where everyone is present, but during a telephone call prior to a meeting, or at an informal gathering where not all are invited.

Double bind (Damned if you do, damned if you don't)

If you are conscientious, people say you are fussy, if you are outspoken, they say you are too dominating, and if you are a good listener, you are dismissed as being weak. You are either too passive or too aggressive – double punishment.

Examples:

- If you do your tasks thoroughly, you are accused of being too slow. If you do your work efficiently, you are accused of being sloppy.
- If a leader tries to be democratic – a good listener who is interested in each members input before making a decision, the leader can be considered weak. If on the other hand the leader stands his ground and fights for what he feels is right, he can be considered dictatorial.

Heaping blame – putting to shame

This suppression technique involves making you feel ashamed and guilty for an action or a situation, even though you are not the cause of the situation at hand. This can involve speaking to a person in a critical manner in front of others, to embarrass someone, or insinuate that they are themselves to blame for their position.

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The different leadership styles

Effective leaders are able to set and achieve challenging goals, to take swift and decisive action even in difficult situation, to take calculated risks and to persevere in the face of failure. Strong communication skills, self-confidence, the ability to manage others and a willingness to embrace change also characterizes good leaders.

A leadership style is something we all have, but often are not aware of. Our style of leadership is something we should give some thought, and try to develop in the direction we wish.

Many styles of leadership have been defined, but they often cross one another or share certain aspects.

We are all unique – with different strengths and demeanor. We all have our individual style of leadership, but we can both develop and adapt it to suit our environment, tasks and/or the people we are working alongside. If a group of people are given a practical task, you will soon see the different types of leadership emerge, and group positions become known as the group sets about solving the practical problem or task. This will more often than not

make the group members more aware of their personal style of interaction.

Here are some well-known styles of leadership:

Leadership style 1: The instructing leader

This leadership style is characterized by strong governing and less supportive behavior. The leader decides what to do, develops a plan of action, sets goals and decides who will do what. The leader puts the plan into action, prioritizes along the way and keeps a close eye on the work in progress. If adjustments are needed or major changes must be undertaken, the instructing leader will make such decisions alone. Instructing leadership style is built on one-way communication.

This style of leadership comes closest to the authoritarian leader. Many would deem it old-fashioned, but it can be a sensible and important style to use in situations of emergency such as after a car crash or in case of a fire, where the person in charge has no time to involve others. This can also be a style of leadership to use when downsizing or reorganization is needed in order for a company to survive.

There are other situations where an instructive style of leadership would not be a good solution. An example of this could be in cases where decisions that require time and involvement of employees/group members who have a level of expertise that should be taken into the equation.

Leadership style 2: The consultative leader

The consultative or advisory leadership style is characterized by guiding and supporting behavior. Just like a directing style of leadership, the leader decides what is to be done, plans the work and decides who does what, when and where. What distinguishes this style from the previous one is that the leader is more open to a two-way line of communication and is supportive. The consultative leader encourages employees/group members to give their input and opinions. This type of leader has an “open door” policy, where he is available and to a great extent visibly present. This leader is still the person who makes the final decisions after considering input from the employees.

This type of leadership style is good to use when an employee/group member lacks motivation.

There are situations, of course, where this style of leadership is not preferable. A consultative style of leadership would not work well in cases where employees/group members have necessary experience and expertise to solve the problem or execute the task themselves.

Leadership style 3: The contributing leader

A contributing style of leadership characterized by a strong supportive but less governing behavior. Under this type of leadership, the employees/group members are to a far greater extent, empowered and accountable.

The leader involves the employees/group members when looking for solutions and the employee is asked for input and opinion on the task. When the employee/group member has questions, the leader is quick to encourage, assist and support. This is a typical coaching style of leadership, where the leader facilitates the persons to find solutions themselves to any problems that arise. In this lies confidence in the persons being able to come up with good solutions. The learning effect is greatest when an employee/group member is able to find solutions themselves.

An example of when this style of leadership can be well suited is when an employee is feeling worn out. After many years on the job, a person may know its tasks inside out, so it isn't necessary for the leader to explain how the task should be done, but the employee may have a need for support during a period where motivation to simply get themselves to work may be low. The leader is therefore present, on the employee's terms. The leader involves, inspires and supports the employee by adapting the tasks for best suitability. A lot of time is used on open discussions and dialogue, and the leader shows care and concern for the employee's wellbeing.

This style of leadership is of little value when the employee/group member lacks skill and/or work experience. There is little point in asking how a task should be solved if you are not qualified to answer. That can lead to frustration.

Leadership style 4: The including leader

Is a style of leadership where the leader is keen to include all partners in decisions. The inclusive leader wants, and appreciates input from others and wishes employees /group members to

be responsible for their contribution to the cooperation and to the results of any given task. An including leader works towards developing partnership where one consistently produces results to the groups' advantage. They always have the wellbeing of the group or community at heart. When a leader has an including leadership style, the participants or employees usually feel valued, and even though such a style of leadership requires more from each co-worker, it gives each person room to grow.

Respect is a basic factor in the including style of leadership. The leader must be structured, have good overview of all tasks, communicate well – all of which are things that can be achieved by practice.

An inclusive style of leadership can be used in all areas, at a place of work, in board meetings, in work groups or in a family. It is about being a leader who is willing to focus and keep the overall view in mind, whilst asking all members of the group for input, and that all involved take responsibility for themselves and their part of the task or project.

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In a boardroom, for example, an including style of leadership will ensure not only an open dialogue , but motivate active participation when finding a solution to a problem or setting a course of action. To ensure that all members of the group are heard, inviting and inspiring those who may be shy, to bring forth their ideas. This way the leader can support and help participants blossom.

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Chairing a meeting - some tips

A meeting that is chaired and conducted well can help us achieve desired goals in a good and timely manner. If you have taken on the task as chairperson for a group/board or been asked to plan or conduct a meeting, here are some tips that may be of help.

In preparation for a meeting, it can be of great help to put some thought in the following:

- What are your aims for the meeting? I.e. Communication/ new ideas/decision making/ sharing experiences etc.
- How will you know, or be able to measure, whether the meeting was a success?
- What format should your agenda have?
- Who is responsible for creating and sending out the agenda?
- How long in advance should the agenda be ready and sent out?
- What supporting documents will the attendees need?
- What timeframe do you think is needed for the meeting?
- What time of day or week should the meeting be held?
- Who is attending?
- Is a guest or guest speaker needed?
- What roles have to be assigned at the meeting? (Minute taker/ facilitator)
- Where should the meeting be held?
- What facilities and equipment is needed?
- Are refreshments needed?
- How should the seating arrangements be?

Good things to check and think through before and during the meeting:

- Make sure you arrive ahead of other participants if the meeting venue is unknown to you. You will then have time to make sure all is as it should be before the other participants arrive.
- Make sure you encourage participants to be active in discussions.

- If this is a regular meeting (i.e. board meeting) ask participants to report on progress of their assigned tasks since the last meeting.
- Ensure that everybody has a chance to be heard. In small meetings/board meeting this can be done by asking for input from all sitting around the table starting with those more quiet to give them an opportunity to bring forth their ideas first. In this way, the more verbal/active will no always have the first say, yet will have equal opportunity to participate in the discussion.
- Use the timed guideline to help you get through the agenda without having to rush through the last few items on the agenda.
- If participants' inputs are drawing out and you are worried about getting through the agenda, consider setting a time limit per speaker.
- Try to resolve any conflict that may arise during the meeting, in a constructive and clear manner.
- Summarise in few words key decisions and actions the meeting has agreed upon as you go through the agenda. In this way, each participant will know exactly what has been decided. This will also make the task of taking minutes so much easier.

After the meeting:

- Make sure that all actions and or decisions the meeting decided upon are followed through and or put in place before the next meeting.

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How to improve self-esteem

Taken from “the WBU leadership and mentoring training kit” available at:

<http://www.euroblind.org/working-areas/women/>

Improving self-esteem will take time, patience and energy. It is important to get to know what your strengths and weaknesses are. Acknowledging your strengths is important. If you feel that you do not have any, try asking a friend or a family member to help out. Interestingly, those people close to us can often identify strengths that we fail to see. You may be pleasantly surprised! Understanding and recognising your weaknesses gives you a firm basis on which to change some of your behaviour.

Remember: Women who are visually impaired have already proved they have strength and courage, in order to live with their disability everyday of their lives. They are already strong women.

“Getting to know you” Exercise

This is an exercise to help you, as a woman who is visually impaired, know who you are. You might think that this is a simple exercise or that you already have the answer, but sometimes we

don't have the time or the courage to ask ourselves who we are and where we are going. To develop good self-esteem and self-confidence this is a good place to start.

This exercise might be useful to do with a group of women who are visually impaired or you may wish to do it in your own time. Working in a group may help you get to know each other but if you feel more comfortable answering these questions at your own pace or on your own, then that's fine too.

If you do this exercise in a group then the following questions can be answered by writing down responses with each woman telling the group her answers.

Or the group may wish to split into smaller groups or couples where each person asks the other the following questions. The choice is up to you, as a group, to find that which is most comfortable.

“Getting to know you” Questions

Are you?

- Discovering that the path you’re on is a cul-de-sac?
- At a new beginning, taking the first steps?
- At the top of the hill, looking at the view and wondering ‘what now’?
- At a crossroads and wondering which way to go?
- Going in totally the wrong direction?
- Having fun and enjoying being you?
- Trudging along, doing OK but feeling that something might be missing?

Now ask yourself the following questions.

1. What does being a woman mean to you?
2. What are the advantages of being a woman? (Give examples of qualities, experiences, opportunities)
3. What are the drawbacks to being a woman? (Give examples of closed doors, prejudice, lack of opportunity etc.)
4. What does it mean to you to be a woman who is visually impaired? How has it affected your life so far?
5. How many opportunities have been opened or closed as a result of your visual impairment?
6. How relevant is being visually impaired to the way you want your life to develop?
7. The time in my life when I have had a good time is when?
8. I like myself best when I?
9. My ideal future looks like?
10. A woman who has had a great deal of influence on me is/was
11. A woman who has had a positive influence on me is/was
12. The thing about me I would most like to change or develop is

How to be assertive

Taken from “the WBU leadership and mentoring training kit” available at:

<http://www.euroblind.org/working-areas/women/>

1. Listen effectively
2. Say what you think and feel
3. Say as clearly as possible what you want to happen
4. Consider what the consequences are for you and others in any joint situations

1. Listening effectively

Being an effective listener is not something many people are born with. It is a skill that comes from practice and anyone can learn it.

- Listen carefully to what is being said. If you don't understand, ask the person to explain; they won't bite you, they will probably be happy someone is taking the time and care to really listen.
- Demonstrate that you understand what the other person is saying. You can say something like “you seem very angry and disappointed”. This

helps make clear to you and the other person what the main issue is. It can also help put the problem into focus.

- Do not interrupt with your feelings/thoughts etc. while they are speaking. Allow the other person to state their problem without interruption before you speak.

2. Say what you think and feel

- Take responsibility for your feelings.
- You have every right to say what is bothering you or making you angry but focus on the behavior not on the person. Don't take it personally!! What someone thinks about your behavior is not necessarily what he or she think of you.
- Take your time when speaking, do not allow the other person to interrupt you.
- It is all right to pause when starting to speak, or in the middle of a sentence. This will help you get clear your thoughts and feelings.

3. Say clearly what you want to happen

- Do not drop hints or beat around the bush. The other person might not understand the real problem.
- State clearly what you want to happen. By doing this you know you will be understood. Remember your rights; you have the right to ask for what you want and the right to express your feelings.
- Listen carefully to the response that you receive.

4. Find joint solutions and the consequences

- Find the gap or area in what you want and what the other person wants. By using listening skills and letting the other person hear your feelings, finding an area that could be a solution for both of you is possible.
- Joint solutions mean that you are both satisfied with the outcome as opposed to compromise, which means neither of you may get what you want.

- When exploring joint solutions look at the effect these may have on yourself and other people.
- Sometimes solutions are not always possible and a compromise needs to be made. Make sure that you are happy doing this. Finding a way that is satisfactory to both of you can sometimes be better than leaving issues unresolved although sometimes issues need to be left until a later time to allow both you and the other person the space to think about what has happened

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Communication

Each person is made up of three parts: thought, feeling and behavior/action.

Communication is both easy and complex. Communication is about expressing thoughts, feelings, opinions and ideas to one or more persons. If you are a good communicator, the chances are greater that people will listen to what you have to say.

Some people are born with effective communication skills; others have to develop these over time. To develop good communication skills we must practice by putting ourselves in situations where we must communicate with many different people in different settings.

Most of us need to learn to be more precise in what we say. We must also be good at confirming what we hear so we know we have understood correctly. Misunderstandings can cause frustration and mistakes.

It has been said that we hear only half of what we have been told.

Understand only half of what we hear
Believe only half of what we understand

And remember only half of what we believe

There is not much left of the information or message we have just been given....

Active listening

Active listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well we listen and take note of what we hear has great impact on our relationships be it at work, in our organization or in our private life.

We listen to receive information

We listen to understand

We listen to enjoy

We listen to learn

When you contemplate all the listening we do – we should be pretty good at it, but the fact of the matter is that most of us are not!

Good communication skills require us to know ourselves well, and to be aware of our own communication style.

If we are going to become better listeners, we must practice. We must pay attention when we communicate, check and be sure that we hear and register the message that the sender is giving us.

To enable us to do this we must concentrate, and not let background noise and other things disturb us. This also means we must not start preparing our answer or counterarguments, whilst we listen to the other person we are conversing with.

Most of us have experienced conversations where we have felt that the other person was not really paying attention. This is a very unpleasant experience, which can give a feeling of being devalued. A good way to show that you are listening, is to provide small words or sounds of confirmation. Here are five key elements of active listening:

Pay attention! (do not allow yourself to be distracted, and never prepare your answer or counterargument whilst the other person is talking)

Show that you are listening to the person by providing short words or sounds of confirmation.

Provide feedback (to be able to be certain that you have understood correctly – confirm what you have heard or ask clarifying questions)

NEVER judge (Interrupting is a waste of time. It only frustrates the speaker).

Give the person a chance to finish before you ask a question.

React appropriately. Active listening is a model of respect and understanding. You gather information and perspective. You gain nothing by being condescending. Be factual and honest in your response. Show respect, even if you do not agree. It can be healthy to agree to disagree

Becoming an active listener is quite demanding – especially if you have not been very good at it before. We are all creatures of habit and if we have not dealt with it before, we often have old habits we must change - but it is really worth the effort. You will be able to establish a good relationship with the person you are communicating with and you will be able to discuss and come to a mutual solution based on equality.

We must remember that each proposal deserves to be heard. Though we might have heard the proposal before, it may come from a new board member who is not aware of this. Situations also change, so that even though the proposal was not feasible before, it may be a possibility now.

The family perspective

- An organization is like a big family
- All you do – and all you do not do – affects the others in the family
- We are thus interdependent of each other, and have expectations and requirements.
- In relationships, there is no «neutrality». We are either positive, clear and constructive, or we are negative and even destructive. Explanation: Just imagine you are sitting at a board meeting. You have an important proposal to make. Half the board members agree and are enthusiastic, the other half stay silent. By not commenting or giving any kind of feedback, you might think they are being neutral, but the fact of the matter is that most people will experience them as being negative to the proposal – simply because they give no feedback what so ever.

Studies show that a small group of people are much more effective and

productive when a project is to be implemented than when a project is implemented by just one person. When a small group works together on a project, you have the benefit of more ideas and solutions as well as there being more “safety valves” in respect of any errors there might be in the plans. If a group is to pull together, a good and effective communication is of the utmost importance.

Effective communication

To foster effective communication in a group a good portion of courtesy must be mixed with openness.

Effective communication requires that all parties be:

- Motivated
- That all have the ability to tailor and adapt their message/point.
- That the group uses the same language and terminology.
- That all understand that people are different in respect of values, personality and style of behavior, and therefore relate differently to situations.

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The good conversation is characterized by:

- A positive attitude and atmosphere
- Respect and equality
- Mutual transparency
- Willingness and ability to give praise and recognition
- Being good listeners as well as speaker/communicators
- Flexibility
- Responsibility

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The six thinking hats

Different personality types make a well-rounded team. However, it is important to take advantage of the dissimilarities and play on each other's strengths!

Edward de Bono classified the “six thinking hat” model that can be used to explore the different perspectives in a situation, challenge or project.

The 6-hat technique is devised to help individuals adopt a variety of perspectives within a subject that may be quite different from what they might naturally assume. Edward de Bono felt that people develop habits of thinking which then limits the use of different mind-sets or perspectives. Teamwork can become more effective by consciously using this technique.

In de Bonos' technique, he names six different approaches or perspectives and symbolizes each one with a different colored hat. This to make the perspective easier to memorize.

These different thinking hats are:

1. **White:** think of a white piece of paper – it is neutral but holds information. The white hat represents information, statistics and objective facts. When you wear the white hat at a meeting, you request more information. You put proposals and arguments aside and look at the information that is left.
2. **Red:** represents warmth, feelings and intuition without having to justify or explain. In serious or critical arguments, you are not expected to show any emotions, but many put up the red hat and transform the emotions into logical arguments. The red hat allows you to express your feelings without having to apologize for them.

3. **Black:** represents critical thinking and caution, focusing on dangerous areas. Imagine a judge all dressed in black, getting ready to render his verdict. The black hat is the one, which sends out warning signals. When wearing the black hat you can prevent errors taking place. The black hat symbolizes critical thinking and points out why something is not possible or reasonable to implement. When you put on the black hat, you take on the analytical part of the project. However, be careful, using the black hat too much can dampen creativity and bring negativity into discussions.
4. **Yellow:** as the sun. Represents positivity, optimism and hope. When you put on the yellow hat, you are looking for possibilities and how to put a plan into action. Each creative idea needs someone to put on the yellow hat to point out possibilities.
5. **Green:** represents creativity, hypothesis and new ideas. It stands for new ways of doing things and finding solutions.

6. **Blue:** Think of the sky. The blue hat represents control and organizing all steps of a project and all other hats. When you put on the blue hat you consider how best to use all the information and knowledge available. When wearing the blue hat you consult the other hats asking for advice, conclusions and proposals. Leaders or chairpersons often use the blue hat at meetings. The person wearing the blue hat is the one who should be in control whilst the other members can come up with ideas and suggestions. The blue hat is to be used to organize the process.

Before starting work on a new project for instance, it can be very beneficial to use the six-hat technique.

It is said that if this method is used consciously it can

- increase productivity in decision making.
- improve the thinking process by making you focus on one perspective at a time.
- improve communication
- encourages creativity
- help to avoid unproductive discussions.

Examples of how one can use this technique:

You have called a meeting where a problem is to be addressed and a solution found. The six thinking hat technique can then be used in sequence to first identify the specific problem, then to develop a set of solutions, and finally choose the desired solution.

A meeting can start by using the blue hat to discuss leadership and execution of the meeting and to agree on the ultimate goal, aim or target. Then the red hat will give the meeting a chance to listen to opinions and reactions to the issue at hand. The green and yellow hats will bring discussion over to new positive ideas for solutions. During the next phase, the meeting can alternate using the white and black hat to ask for, and look at, facts and possible solutions with constructive criticism.

If you use the six-hat technique in a group it allows the whole group to focus on one perspective at a time and cooperate to view the problem and find the best solution.

The method can also be used on an individual level. All persons are different, and we use different hats

during different activities and in diverse situations. Therefore, it is a great asset if groups/boards etc. are compiled of different types of people with different perspectives. If this is not the case, then using the six-hat technique will help you get a similar result.

Most of us will recognize our way of thinking, and feel most comfortable with one of the six colored hats. It is good to be aware of your own perspectives, so that you can actively put up the remaining hats to look at each issue/problem/project from all perspectives.

Most people feel most comfortable using one type of hat rather than others but we tend to put on different colored hats depending on where we are and what we are doing. Each board or workgroup needs breadth, different types of individuals who bring with them different aspects. Can you imagine how productive a board filled with people who naturally wear the black hat would be? Everyone has strengths and it is on these strengths the leader, chairperson or organization has to build on.

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It currently operates within a network of 44 national members including organizations from 27 European Union member states, candidate nations and other major countries in geographical Europe.

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The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe