

The Enterprise Lens

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There is a subtle shift that happens between senior leadership and enterprise leadership. It's as simple and as complicated as this: Senior leaders talk about results. Enterprise leaders talk about tradeoffs.

✓A senior leader might say:

“We improved margin by 12% this quarter.”

✓An enterprise leader might say:

“We chose margin expansion over market share in Q3 because the capital allocation model favored long-term liquidity over short-term growth.”

Both leaders achieved the same results. But one revealed something far more important. How they think. At the executive level, organizations are not only evaluating outcomes. They are evaluating judgment. They want to understand how a leader navigates competing priorities:

✓Growth versus profitability

✓Speed versus risk

✓Short-term performance versus long-term stability

Enterprise leaders make those decisions every day. But more importantly, they make their reasoning visible. That visibility signals readiness for the next level.

Many exceptional female leaders encounter an unexpected barrier at this stage. They have built careers on delivering results. They run large teams. They manage complex operations. They consistently exceed expectations. But when they speak about their work, they often only provide outcomes, not how decisions were made.

Boards and executive teams listen for something different. They want to understand how a leader thinks when variables are complex and the stakes are high. Leadership scholars such as Herminia Ibarra have written extensively about this transition. In her research on leadership advancement, she notes that moving into senior leadership roles requires leaders to shift from demonstrating expertise to making strategic thinking visible within influential networks. When leaders begin explaining the strategic reasoning behind their choices, the conversation changes. They are no longer reporting results. They are demonstrating enterprise judgment.

Language is one of the clearest signals of leadership readiness. A leader who says: “We reduced operating costs by \$15 million.” has clearly delivered results. But a leader who says: “We reduced operating costs by \$15 million by consolidating suppliers and redirecting capital investment toward automation in our highest-margin product lines.” is revealing something deeper.

They are showing:

✓How they think

✓How they allocate resources

✓How they balance competing priorities

This is the lens through which enterprise leaders operate. And once it becomes visible, perception begins to shift. They are no longer simply executing strategy. They are shaping it. This transition from operational leadership to enterprise leadership is rarely about doing different work. It is about making your thinking visible at the level you want to reach.

That means speaking not only about results, but about:

- ✓The tradeoffs you navigated
- ✓The strategic considerations behind decisions
- ✓The long-term implications of the choices you made

This shift allows others to see something that may already be true. You aren't just managing outcomes; you're exercising enterprise judgment. And that is the signal organizations look for when deciding who belongs in the room where strategy is shaped.

Resources

Herminia Ibarra — Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers

<https://hbr.org/2013/09/women-rising-the-unseen-barriers>

McKinsey & Company — Women in the Workplace

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>