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Naga Sai Sindhura Lakshmi Chaluvadi
NChaluvadi01@wildcats.jwu.edu

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Differences in Leadership Styles between Genders: Outcomes and Effectiveness of Women in Leadership Roles

Position Paper

By

Naga Sai Sindhura Lakshmi Chaluvadi

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Abstract

Women, today constituting a large portion of the work force have very few leaders at the top constitutional or organizational positions. In this paper we try to analyze what's causing hindrance to their growth focusing primarily, if there exists any differences in the leadership styles employed by male and female leaders. As was the case in previous literature, the evidence for sex differences in leadership behavior is still mixed, yet it is clear that these sex differences have not vanished. It is argued that sex differences in leadership styles are largely a consequence of the context in which male and female leaders work. Arguments and evidences from both sides on, "Do women really make better androgynous leaders?" is analyzed overall based on several inferences. This paper further focuses on the values and attitudes of women being in leadership positions leaving challenges for further research on the effect of external variables such as the work force, corporation structure, and necessity of innovation on the gender in the leadership role.

Rise of women as leaders

Gender differences and their leadership styles has become one of the most studied research topics in the recent years. Is there truly a difference in the leadership styles employed by the two genders, if yes, are they interrelated? This question enlightens many other factors unto why we have so few women leaders. Though women constitute for a large portion of the work force in today's world we seldom have women leaders in the top administrative positions. Previous research studies have shown that this lack of competitive holding of top positions is certainly due to the differences in their leadership styles. The ease of accommodation and constant modification of leadership styles is being an important issue for the corporate organizations today. As women become a proportionately larger part of the work force, one of the greatest challenges for organizations will be to assimilate a more diverse labor force into higher level management roles (Moran, 1992). Though women leaders are not so commonly found in top level management roles, my curiosity questions what leadership styles do they generally have?

The purpose of this article is to present an over review on the topic of gender differences in leadership style and to provide a synthesis of the voluminous amount of material that has been written on the topic, primarily in the literature of management, psychology, sociology, and political science. The first section of the paper throws light on the topic if there really exists some differences in leadership styles showing evidences that women make better androgynous leaders and the outcome of their results is more suited for the public good. The following section opposes the findings supporting the statement that differences in leadership styles do exist and also brings a point of stereotypic attitudes and behaviors that have affected the growth of

ambitious women into higher leadership positions of an organization. The last section of the paper discusses the effect of women as leaders at several levels of management, social and political levels and how our conventional wisdom has affected our attitudes and beliefs towards seeing woman as leaders. I personally opine that there exists some differences in leadership styles, as they differ in communication styles, situational handling styles and women make better androgynous leaders as they tend to communicate more expressively and can motivate the creativity and innovation in the team. So, the outcomes of such leadership styles are more suited towards the public good rather than the success of the corporate level organizations which might require more assertive and commanding leadership abilities.

Leadership styles differ from male to female

Many research studies have assessed the styles of male and female leaders since the fifties and found that there definitely exists the differences in leadership styles. However, these differences take the form of highly overlapping distributions of women and men—in other words, the differences are small (Eagly, 2013). One of the differences, is that, the female leaders are seen to adopt a more democratic and participative style than their male counterparts (Merchant, 2012). Men in leadership positions are found to adopt a top-down style, in general. This is the command and control style. Although female managers are not generally more interpersonally- or communally-oriented than male managers, this tendency emerged to some extent in less male-dominated roles, where the tendency for women to be more participative than men strengthened as well (Eagly, 2013). It thus show that women tend to apply more culturally leadership behaviors, when their role is not male-dominated. Now the question arises, that "is it beneficial to be a participative leader?" Studies reveals that it is not always. Being a participative

leader benefits depending on the context. There are also evidences that the middle ground

between directive and participative leadership styles obtain optimal results. A very strict

adaption of the directive and assertive style can effect social relationships and being less

directive can hinder the achievement of intended goal. Another meta-analytic generalization is

that women, more than men, combine feminine and masculine leader behaviors (Eagly, 2013).

Researchers have specially analyzed and uncovered an asexual style termed as

transformational style of leadership, a highly effective style, which comprehends several

interrelated types of behavior (Avolio, 2010). Thus transformational leaders succeed at being

inspirational role models, nurture good relationships, cultivate the skills of the member followers

and motivates to think out of the confines of the job requisites. Analysis also show that female

leaders employ transformational styles more than the males. Another leadership style,

transactional leadership is also seen in more female managers in which they tend to motivate

their members with positive, reward-based incentives. Men, in contrast, employs more strict and

less effective threatening styles of leadership. Enhancing confidence in these findings on

transformational and transactional leadership are two large studies that have replicated them

(Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003).

So, after analyzing the transactional and transformational leadership we see that women

do have better leadership styles. What could be the reasons behind these differences? On one

hand, women often face a double standard in attaining leadership roles, so a selection effect

could account for these findings (Eagly, 2013). The other reason could be that, the cultural

gender at work reacting favorably towards leaders with androgynous style than those with strict

masculine or lenient feminine styles. The small differences detected in leadership style are

consistent with highly overlapping female and male distributions. Also, there are some troubling nuances in findings on transformational leadership such as the possibility that men may not accept transformational leadership from women as easily as from men (Ayman, Korabik, & Morris, 2009). Normative opinion of researchers how that female leaders might breakthrough these stereotype culturally feminine behaviors while male leaders must apparently display more captivating aspects of transformational leadership styles, which are supplementary to the top level leadership capabilities.

Leadership styles doesn't differ between genders

Contrary to the findings in the previous section, literature also shows that there are no assessable differences in leadership styles between genders, but the fact that leadership styles in their roles are highly situational. This side of argument debates that neither of the genders are better in employing a leadership style, but the effectiveness is conditional to various internal and external environments of the group. Contingency theories recognize that there is no best style of leadership, but rather "leader effectiveness depends, or is contingent on, the interaction of leader behavior and the situation" (Riggio, 2008). Adherents are of a view that gender is not a key determinant of actual leadership style, need to explain, first, why perception is often to the contrary and secondly, if the gender socialization process mentioned earlier does not determine leadership style and behavior, just what does? Stereotyping is central to an explanation of why gender is often perceived to be the central determinant of leadership style. In terms of the topic in this paper, gender stereotyping is largely detriment of females in implying that they are inferior to men in leadership capacity. Valentine and Godkin (2000), for example, have noted a

substantial body of work that suggests that women face socially prompted stereotypes about masculinity and femininity that undermine their credibility as organizational leaders.

However, Kanter (1977) argues that organizational roles override gender roles when it comes to management or leadership positions. He brings forward that irrespective of the gender in a same leadership role, theoretically do not differ much in their leadership approaches, because leaders at these roles "are presumably more concerned about managing effectively than about representing sex-differentiated features of societal gender roles" (Kanter, 1977). Kanter (1977) also argues that managers in spite of their genders either of the leaders behave merely less stereotypic when they occupy the same leadership position because they are confining to the guidelines about the conduct of behavior of the given managerial role rather than leading according to their gender stereotype. According to Kanter (1977) this is because apparent sex differences in behavior is not a product of gender differences, but is rather because of differing structural positions; because women are often is positions of less power, they behave in ways that reflect that lack of power. Thus, men and women in equivalent positions of power behave similarly, suggesting no gender differences in leadership styles.

Other researchers also support the finding that there exists no differences in leadership styles between men and women in organizational leadership positions. But rather that "sex role stereotypes are not supported when the results of different studies are taken a whole…male and female leaders exhibit similar amounts of task-oriented and people-oriented behavior regardless of the type of study" (Powell, 1990). Here, Powell (1990) argues that overall, leadership differences between men and women are insignificant because they are cancelled out when looking at studies as a whole as both genders use equal amounts of task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviors. Oppositely, there is extensive available of literature that shows

that differences in leadership styles do exist , as men and women behave differently in thinking, acting and analyzing which is presumed also to effect the leadership style they employ. But in general they also argue that when both the genders take up top and equal roles in an organization they would closely display similar styles as they confine to the guidelines of their positions rather than behaving stereotypically.

Women as growing leaders and their values, attitudes towards public good

Post the analysis of gender differences and their impacts on leadership styles it would be more appropriate for us to see the effect of women's representation in leadership roles. Better performance of a leader is measured by better profits, better success and constant growth. The research on proving the same for women leaders became more complicated. On examining the fortune 500 or 1000 companies in US as well as Europe, in which women lead the organizations in the top management roles such as CEO have reported better financial performances under their leadership. (e.g., Carter, Simkins, & Simpson, 2003; Krishnan & Park, 2005). Correlations between proportions of women in high-level positions and firm performance do not prove a causal relation because they may encompass statistical anomalies such as reverse causation, omitted variables, selection biases, and unreliable measures (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010). Thus, it would not be surprising that research conducted under sophisticated controls has not found any statistical correlation between women leadership promoting the organization's performance. For example, in a large sample of U.S. firms, Adams and Ferreira (2009) found an overall negative average effect of the gender diversity of corporate boards when controlling for individual firm characteristics. Two econometric studies of Norwegian companies' compliance with the government-mandated 40% quota for women on

boards of listed corporations found a negative effect on corporate profits (Ahern & Dittmar, 2012; Matsa & Miller, 2012a).

In contrast, a study of U.S. corporations found a positive effect of gender diversity in top management teams (Dezsò & Ross, 2012). This favorable effect was shown in firms which focused on innovation thereby concluding that women leaders seemed to be more successful in level of management teams rather than at the level of boards. Above all, the findings are mixed and are undoubtedly subjected to multiple factors such as: challenges faced by the corporations, diversity beliefs prevalent, degree of male-dominance and external environmental factors. This leaves a challenge for future research as how the gender diversity of corporate teams and boards effects the companies. Arguably, there's also an assertion that gender-diverse groups perform better than that are less diverse as women possess different informational resources and also interacts in a way which improves the creativity and relationships in the team. However, the most extensive meta-analysis of the influence of diversity on group performance found that gender diversity has no overall effect on objectively measured performance outcomes and a negative effect on subjectively measured performance (van Dijk, van Engen, & van Knippenberg, 2012). Conclusively, though women are seen to have high transformational leadership styles, there is no statistical evidence that shows that the women leaders or the genderdiversity will drive up performance of the organization. This also becomes the niche area for research dealing with women leadership capabilities thereby proving their efficiency in corporations.

Apart from this, it is the attitude and the values of the leader and the link to do public good, might find some relation with the gender-differences. This aspect of leaders' psychology helps us understand their goals and motivations—what they want to achieve as leaders. Cross-national surveys have shown that, in general, women place more emphasis on the social values

of benevolence and universalism (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). Benevolence refers to "preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact" and universalism to the "understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature" (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005, pp. 1010-1011). Similarly, other research has found that, compared with men, women endorse social values that promote others' welfare (Beutel & Marini, 1995). In U.S. attitudinal surveys, women endorse socially compassionate social policies and moral practices that uphold marriage, the family, and organized religion (Eagly, Diekman, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Koenig, 2004).

Do these value and attitude differences affect leaders? There are numerous indications that they probably do. For example, as members of legislative bodies, women are more likely than their male colleagues to advocate for changes that promote the interests of women, children, and families and that support public welfare in areas such as health care and education. Although women are not a monolithic political bloc on these issues, political scientists have shown that these tendencies in general transcend political parties and nations. Similarly, a natural experiment involving Indian women village leaders who gained office through a government mandate revealed that women, more than men, enacted policies that provided for the public good, such as bringing clean water to their villages (Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2009). As for corporate boards, the proportion of women on corporate boards in the Fortune 500 predicted the companies' philanthropy and charitable giving (Williams, 2003). Likewise, the Norwegian corporations' fulfillment of the 40% quota for women on their boards was followed by smaller workforce reductions with economic contraction, an effect that accounted for the relatively lower profits. Researchers attributed these findings to the women's greater concern with the welfare of employees and their families (Matsa & Miller, 2012a). A

related study found that women-owned private firms in the United States were less likely than

firms owned by men to lay off workers during a period of financial stresses (Matsa & Miller,

2012b). Female executives may thus take into account a wider range of stakeholders, including

employees and their families. Ethical attitudes are also potentially important for leadership.

Meta-analyses of studies on ethical beliefs and decision-making have shown that women are

more likely than men to support ethical business practices (Borkowski & Ugras, 1998; Franke,

Crown, & Spake, 1997; but see Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010). Consistent with this

trend, the representation of women on corporate boards related to more positive social outcomes

and greater corporate responsibility, especially through companies not engaging in negative,

unethical business practices (Boulouta, 2012).

Conclusion

The important inferences mentioned in the above sections are drawn from the vast

literature that supports and opposes that leadership styles differ for genders. In this context, we

compared men and women as leaders, in the context of groups, organizations and nations.

Considerable evidences show that women possess more transformational and transactional and

participative leadership styles that their male counterparts. They also proved to be better

androgynous leaders. There are also implications that the outcomes of the women lead roles are

more benevolent, compassionate, ethical and universalistic spreading the public good. Does these

inferences about gender-related aspects of leadership question our conservative thinking? The

answer score is mixed.

Finally, given the evidence base that social science has produced so far, can I say that

women are better leaders than men? My personal answer follows mainly from my belief that

women leaders act more on behalf of the public good, but enthusiasm about this generalization

would depend on one's political stance. From my perspective, such leaders would improve our

world, but there are many unknowns. To find out whether our societies would thrive and prosper

if women shared power equally with men, more women would have to hold the reins of power.

My best guess is that the gains of moving expeditiously in this direction far outweigh the risks.

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