## Do Women Managers have Distinctive Leadership Style?

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### Abstract

*The success of an organisation depends on its leader. Organisational performance is determined by the leadership style to a great extent. The number of women getting into leadership positions in organizations is increasing gradually. Men and women are found to differ in their traits and so in their leadership style. Traditionally characteristics of male managers have been identified as the major leadership styles. However, as a result of globalisation, the organizations are becoming less hierarchical and more team based which demands need for building relationship, developing greater interdependency, sharing knowledge and responsibilities and accomplishing task by empowering and facilitating subordinates. As organizations are becoming more transformational, the skill sets and participatory and collaborative leadership style that is commonly exhibited by women is the prerequisite for the progression of an organization. This article discusses on the gender differences in the leadership styles and how the leadership style of women can add advantage to an organization.*

**Keywords:** women, leadership style, organization, gender difference

### Introduction

Leadership involves establishing and sharing a clear vision, providing necessary knowledge and methods to realize that vision, and implementing by coordinating the conflicting interests of all members. Leadership is a practical skill that requires ability to influence others in achieving a common goal. Leadership is an important function in bringing success to an organization. Making important decisions, influencing the thoughts, attitude and behavior of others and implementing the decisions effectively is the key for successful leadership.

Leadership style is the way and approach by which a leader sets direction, inspires followers and implements the plan. There are different leadership styles. The appropriate style depends on the situation, nature of work and nature and composition of followers. A leader can adopt any style based on his/her personality and circumstances. Each leadership style has its own advantages and disadvantages. The success of a style depends on the culture of the organization. The success of an organisation also depends on the leadership style adopted by leaders. Hence, leadership style is gaining its importance in the changing scenario. An organization requires myriad combination of leadership styles to gain competitive advantage.

In this context, studies from various literatures show that men and women differ in their traits and leadership styles. Women are commonly found to be people centered and empathetic. The large influx of women into workforce has created a diversified culture and new styles of feminine leadership that adds competitive advantage for an organization. Different leadership traits together form a leadership style. When women and men are proved to differ in their traits (either it occurs naturally or as a result of socialization process), they may also differ in the leadership styles. The different leadership styles of men and women are discussed in this article. This article further throws light on the gaining importance of women leadership styles in corporate.

## Evolution of Women Leadership

Jogulu & Wood (2006) analysed various traditional leadership theories from the gender perspectives as follows: According to Great man theory proposed by Denmark during 19th centuary, great men have unique exceptional qualities that distinguish them from their followers. These qualities were believed to be innate. During those periods, women were not perceived to have qualities of a leader. This was at the time when women were not visible in paid employment. Trait theory focuses on traits that are required for successful leadership. These traits were defined in masculine terms and women traits like nurturing and caring were not recognized as roles of leadership. There was only perception of "think manager-think male". Blake and Mouton developed the concept of managerial grid that discusses about two dimensions namely concern for people and concern for production. This concern for people were viewed as characteristics possessed by women. Researches show that even when women were employed in organizations, they were only given supportive roles rather than managerial roles that held the responsibility of leadership. All theories before 1990 viewed men as natural fit for leadership positions and defined leadership in masculine terms and did not raise the profile of women in management. It considered the concept of leadership itself as a male model. Various studies were done to explore the gender differences in terms of behavior and traits but the behavior and trait of women were equated to deficiency, which has implications at work.

Moran (1992) cited the two possible explanations provided by Eagly and Johnson for women being more democratic and men being more autocratic. First, women who have managed to succeed as leaders might have highly developed interpersonal skills. The other explanation is that women are not accepted as readily as men for leadership positions and women had to find other ways to accomplish their goals. "Thus proceeding in a participative and collaborative mode may enable many female leaders to win acceptance from others, gain self-confidence, and thereby be effective. Because men are not so constrained by attitudinal bias, they are freer to lead in an autocratic and non-participative manner should they so desire" (p.248). On the contrary, women leaders suffer increased job stress and pressure from gender discrimination in the workplace, especially in masculine industries and this pressurizes women to follow masculine leadership style in order to be viewed as successful leader (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Sapp, Harrod & Zhao, 1996 as cited in Stelter, 2002). On the other hand, Rosener (1990) points out the women of today as second generation of managerial women. The first generation of managerial women had to follow the same rules of conduct as that of men in order to succeed but now women are making their way by adopting unique styles and creating a different path (as cited in Moran, 1992).

Smith et al., (2004) highlighted the research of Gardiner and Tiggermann as women are found to follow people oriented approach in female dominated industries whereas task oriented approach in male dominated industries. Women's tendency to be democratic lessens when they hold male dominated roles. Research data confirm women's greater propensity for putting the needs of others above their own. Women's socialization has taught them the importance of contributing to the goals of others and collaborating in a group. This difference of leadership traits between men and women provides combination of leadership styles, which has implications at work.

## Gender Difference in Leadership Styles

Men and women are found to differ in their traits owing to various reasons. There is still an ongoing debate on whether these differences are natural or constructed by the society. The biological differences and the process of socialization by assigning differing gender roles have lead to such differential traits. Hence, the leadership style and approach of men and women are also believed to differ due to the above reasons. Table.1 shows the different leadership style of men and women and they are discussed in detail below.

McCauslan and Kleiner (1992) found the three aspects of leadership in which men and women differ. Task accomplishment style (the way an individual initiates, organizes and directs activities), interpersonal style (building relationship morale, subordinate satisfaction and commitment towards work) and decision-making style (participatory, democratic and autocratic). Gray's (1992) points out that "men are goal-oriented; they define their sense of self through their ability to achieve results. Women, on the other hand, are relationship oriented as they define their sense of self by their feelings and by the quality of their relationships".

David Bradford and Alan Cohen conducted a leadership survey among women using the three categories of leadership: developer, conductor and technician (McCauslan & Kleiner, 1992). Women viewed their major role to be a developer by empowering their subordinates and sharing full responsibilities to carry out activities and as a conductor where women will get their work done through their subordinates by helping them. Only very few women gave importance to the technician role that involves providing expert knowledge to subordinates in a particular area to solve a problem.

**Agentic vs Communal**: Eagly&Carli (2007) explained that women are communal as they give importance for group dynamics and decision making process whereas men are agentic as they emphasize on the outcome and are task oriented (as cited in Margaret Madden 2011). This is supported by Growe & Montgomery (2000) that men view leadership as leading by having control over others for task accomplishments and by means of hoarding all information while women view leadership as a position that facilitates the accomplishment of tasks.

**Task Oriented vs. Interpersonally Oriented:** Engen & Willemsen (n.d) cited the work of Bales (1950) as that interpersonally oriented leadership focuses on building relationship with subordinates by helping and doing favors, looking out for their welfare, explaining procedures, and being friendly. Task oriented leadership expects subordinates to follow rules and procedures, and focuses on maintaining high standards of performance by making the role of leader and subordinates explicit. Some authors consider task oriented and interpersonal oriented leadership as separate, relatively orthogonal dimensions whereas others consider these orientations as two ends of a single continuum.

**Participatory Style:** participatory style involves asking suggestion from subordinates while solving problem and in decision-making. Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that "women follow more participatory approach, are more democratic, allow for power and information sharing, are more sensitive, more nurturing than men, focus on relationships and enable others to make contributions through delegation" (as cited in Kiamba,2008). Sharing information enhances the sense of loyalty among employees and improves communication flow. Women appreciate employees when they deserve and even the smallest recognition will enhance people's self worth. Rosener (1990) says that this recognition will result in improved productivity and Bass (1985) found that participative management is strongly associated with many facets of transformational leadership (cited in Moore, 2012). Tedrow (1999) also noted that "characteristics such as building coalitions and advancing individual and community development are construct that women display in their relational styles. Women are also better at conflict management, have better listening skills and show more tolerance and empathy" (as cited in Kiamba, 2008). Growe & Montgomery (2000) found that women's relational styles of leadership are not considered as norms of leadership and many view them as weakness of women. Adopting such style only marginalises women and are not recognised or appreciated. Women had to follow men's leadership styles in order to attract promotion and recognition.

**Transactional vs. Transformational leadership:** Bass (1985); Lowe, Kroeck & Sivasubramaniam(1996); Avolio, Bass & Jung (1999); Rowald and Rohmann(2009) explained transactional leadership as that leader and follower exchange valued intangibles

like economic, personal, political, emotional, or psychological in nature (as cited in **Antonaros 2010).** The greater they exchange the stronger will be their relationship. According to Burke & Collins (2001) it is subdivided in to contingent reward leadership (managers will establish work standards and subordinates are expected to meet that based on which rewards and punishments are given) and management by exception (managers will identify errors made by subordinates and disciplinary actions will be implemented)

Antonaros (2010) presents the discussions on leadership by various authors such as: According to Bass (1997); Howell & Avolio (1993), transformational leaders work with followers to achieve a common goal. They will take followers to next level by putting them in front and will inspire them to achieve superior results and will consider individual needs. It goes beyond meeting immediate needs. Basu & Green (1997) added that it requires high level of moral development and high level of trust. It fosters creativity and innovation and helps in building good relationship. Transformational leaders have commitment to new vision and have ability to share the vision. Studies have found that women tend to use transformational leadership more often than men (Aldoory and Toth 2004; Bass and Avolio 1993; Druskat 1994; Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen 2003).

There are four interrelated sub components in transformational leadership: charismatic, Inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration. Burke and Collins (2001) revealed that "females [were] more likely than males to report doing the following: serving as positive role models for subordinates who aspire to be like them (attributed charisma); inspiring employees to believe in and strive for a common purpose (inspirational motivation); encouraging followers to be creative in problem solving and to question assumptions (intellectual stimulation); and spending time developing, teaching, and coaching their subordinates (individual consideration)".

According to Khankhoje et al., (2001) "Women CEOs tend to have more of a desire to build than a desire to win, they are more willing to explore and compromise as also solicit others' opinion" (p.7).They involve group in the decision making process. These are indicators of transformational leadership and have greater influence on the performance and competencies of their employees.

**Women are Transformational Leaders**

Bensimon (1993) says that "women leaders define their identity in terms of relations, view themselves as interdependent, and perceive the world as made up of physically and socially embodied entities that are continuous and governed by needs other than control" (as cited in Madden, 2011). Growe & Montgomery (n.d.) discusses the four behaviors of women leaders used by Gillet-Karam (1994): (a) a vision behavior- take appropriate risks to bring about change; (b) a people behavior–provide care and respect for individual differences; (c) influence behavior–act collaboratively; (d) values behavior- spend time building trust and openness.

Burke, Karen M. Collins, (2001) identified communicating, conflict management, coaching and developing, delegating, personal adaptability, time management and problem analysis and decision making as managements skills. These skills are part of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was found to be highly correlated with these management skills. Females reported higher perceived effectiveness on the management skills of communicating, and coaching and developing. These skills were the most highly correlated with transformational leadership. Females are also found to be good at time management but it is least correlated with transformational leadership. Female are more likely to be transformational than men.

Schyns *et al.* (2008) have found that followers and supervisors simply expect female managers to behave in a transformational manner as it is considered to be a female leadership style. Consequently, they are not rewarded for exhibiting this behavior whereas men are rewarded considering it as a positive surprise (as cited in Appelbaum et al., 2013). Bass, Avilio& Atwater (1996) found that female leaders were rated for exhibiting transformational leadership behavior more frequently than men by both female and male subordinates and Yammarino (1997) showed that female leaders form unique one-to-one interpersonal relationships with their male and female subordinates (as cited in Khankhoje et al., 2001).

Traditionally, masculine traits are viewed as standards of leadership. People tend to expect women to simultaneously behave like typical male leaders (authoritative, task oriented, and confident), yet also seem feminine (friendly, kind, and considerate). Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky(1992)found that the more women deviate from common expectations of their gender, the more they experience prejudiced reactions (as cited in Antonaros2010) . The leadership styles of women were perceived to be inconsistent with the demands of leadership position but transformational leadership will help women to be effective leaders.

Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) (as cited in Smith et al., 2004) later demonstrated that women are viewed less favorably when leading in a direct manner; however, women tend to adopt a direct style less frequently than men. The impact of gender stereotypes on leadership domain is explained by social role theory. According to Eagly et al., (2003) Women may favor a transformational leader style because it provides them "with a means of overcoming the dilemma of role incongruity—namely, that conforming to their gender role can impede their ability to meet the requirements of their leader role" (p.573). Women are more transformational in categories like education; health care but slight differences in transformational leadership between men and women were observed in business and mixed settings (cited in Smith et al., 2004).

Women's tendency to negotiate, mediate, facilitate, and communicate is required for more effective leadership style than men's emphasis on power and control. Feminine style reduces hierarchy, satisfies subordinates, and achieves results (Gender and Leadership, n.d).Women are found to be good at helping their team in discussing their fears, uncertainties and promote self-awareness. This helps to know the connection between how people feel and how they perform. Women are good at facilitating discussions and find solution by getting ideas from everyone. This fosters innovation. Martell & DeSmet (2001); Yukl (1994); Hater & Bass (1998) have described female leaders as taking a more "take care" leadership approach whereas males follow "take charge" approach (as cited in Merchant, 2012).

**Connective Leadership**

Blumen introduced the concept of connective leadership that aims at connecting individuals to others for the accomplishment of mutual goals. "Connective leadership, which connects individuals creatively to their tasks and visions, to one another, to the immediate group and the larger network, empowering others and instilling confidence, represents a crucial set of strategies for success, not only in the workplace, but in our interdependent world community" Blumen (2013). It encompasses both transactional and transformational leadership

Blumen has developed three sets of achieving styles. The style that an individual adopts to achieve goals is known as achieving style, which has three associated styles: direct, relational and instrumental. Relational style is the accepted style of women and instrumental style is attributed to women. These both styles must predominate in the changing environment. Direct style emphasizes individualism, self-reliance and belief in one's own abilities. Relational style focuses on collaborating with, contributing to, and

deriving a vicarious sense of accomplishment from others' success. It includes traditional role behaviours associated with women like nurturing, helping, caring etc. Instrumental style uses the self and others as instruments for accomplishment by creating networks of relationships, entrusting one's vision to others, and thereby empowering others through one's confidence in them. The dynamic integration of direct style with relative and instrumental style provides the basis for connective leadership.

It is evident from the above literatures that women exhibit behaviours focusing on creating network of relationships. Women display these behaviours either due to socialisation process or these are innate tendencies of women. Irrespective of the various reasons assigned to their behaviours, the organization must recognize the distinct leadership potentials that women inherently possess and promote more women to leadership positions.

## Table 1: Leadership styles of Men and Women

| Leadership Style of Men | Leadership Style of Women |
|---|---|
| Take charge approach | Take care approach |
| Task oriented: Gives importance to task accomplishments | Relation oriented: Facilitates the accomplishment of task and enable subordinates to make contributions through delegation |
| Autocratic and directive approach: Have control over others, Cold and competent | Participatory and democratic approach: Allow power and information sharing, Friendly and incompetent |
| Agentic: emphasize on outcome and task oriented | Communal: emphasize on group dynamics and decision making process |
| Transactional leadership style: Exchange valued intangibles, contingent reward and management by exception | Transformational leadership style: share the vision, go beyond meeting immediate needs and build good relationship |

## Conclusion

The difference in leadership style does not necessarily imply negative connotations to one of the sexes. The complementary attitude, behaviour and roles of men and women would improve effectiveness in leading organizations. As the organisations are becoming flatter, less hierarchal and collaborative, the traits associated with women are found to be more appropriate in the changing scenario and to make good business sense. The organisation must develop leadership style that is needed to lead the organisation of tomorrow irrespective of gender. Gender diversity will bring to an organization multiple skills, knowledge and perspectives. This leads to higher levels of creativity and innovation. Gender and leadership must be looked in a new perspective.

Organizations must break the traditional practices and must develop new leadership styles that form a common bond among diverse members of organization by harnessing the potentials of both men and women. The organization must value and ensure development and utilisation of those unique abilities of women to remain competitive in multinational and multi-gender environment. Leaders must be flexible in adopting different leadership styles depending upon the nature of organization, task and situation. The traits required for successful leaders are present in both masculine and feminine leadership styles. Gender does not reflect effectiveness of a leader. Both men and women must understand the differences between them in their innate tendencies of behavior and attitude. They must learn and improve different leadership abilities from each other.

The transactional and transformational leadership behaviours would be complementary in improving the organizational effectiveness when demonstrated appropriately.

The transformational leadership style is gaining its importance in the contemporary organizations. As women leaders are found to possess these traits inherently, it would be of great value to the organization. Organizations must recognize the significance of female leadership style and must provide more opportunities for women in leadership positions. The organization must also create an environment that enables every employee to maximize their potential. This would help organization to utilize the potentials of women for their progress and also paves a way for women empowerment.

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