WOMEN LEADERSHIP – A SAFE SHIP IN STORM

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Abstract: Women are continuing to make a major impact through their participation in organizations and their ownership of business and it is reasonable to assume that the number of women taking up significant roles in society will increase in future. Women, today constituting a large portion of the work force have very few leaders at the top constitutional or organizational positions. This paper tries to analyze the hindrances to their growth and also suggests the favorable steps for promoting the growth of women leaders. Some other ways in which female and male leaders differ—their typical values and attitudes are also of great importance. These differences may be more important to organizational and political outcomes than differences in leadership style. The growing impact of women in the workforce has kept the leadership style of women on the research agenda. Actually the sex differences in leadership styles are largely a consequence of the context in which male and female leaders work.

Keywords: Work force, women leaders, organizational positions, significant role.

Introduction: There are certain basic qualities or characteristics that most people associate with leadership. Some of these include self-reliant, independent, assertive, risk taker, dominant, ambitious, and self-sufficient. Most people would agree that people who possess these attributes are often labeled as —leaders." Effective leadership can be categorized in the following way. An effective leader is someone who motivates a person or a group to accomplish more than they would have otherwise accomplished without that leader's involvement. We can liken this to the sporting arena where a team is comprised of individual players; each with certain skills, but the team is honed into a finely tuned instrument by virtue of the coach orchestrating them into a cohesive unit. In this manner, and only with the proper motivation and care, will this group of individuals gel into a team and accomplish more together than they ever could on their own merits. With this framework set in place, one would argue that leadership effectiveness is not gender-specific, but there seem to be many attributes that are found in both males and females that lend themselves to becoming an effective leader.

From the days of old to the modern era, many are still of the opinion that men are the ones who are destined to lead, and women, no matter how prepared or qualified, will serve as followers for most of their lives. The fact that men are born to lead, and that the woman's place is at best, by his side, but never in front, is becoming harder and harder to accept and defend in the modern era.

In this paper, we have taken a close look at some of the most basic qualities needed in an effective leader. While some qualities seem to be more present in males than females, there are still many females who posses the necessary characteristics to be very effective leaders. Yet nowhere do we find any evidence to suggest that the most fundamental or required characteristic for leadership effectiveness is the gender of the leader. In terms of leadership, in most cultures, the meaning is masculine, making the prototypical leader a quintessentially masculine man: decisive, assertive, and independent (Bailyn, 2006; Calás & Smircich, 1991; Dennis & Kunkel, 2004; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Willemsen, 2002). Whereas, women are thought to be communal—friendly, unselfish, care-taking— and thus lacking in the qualities required for success in leadership roles (Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Schein, 2001; Fletcher, 2004). Women of Asian descent are particularly likely to be stereotyped as passive, reserved, and lacking in ambition, and Latinas are often seen as overemotional (for a review, see Giscombe & Mattis, 2002), characteristics that would appear to disqualify these women for leadership.

The mismatch between qualities attributed to women and qualities thought necessary for leadership places women leaders in a double bind and subjects them to a double standard. Women in positions of authority are thought too aggressive or not aggressive enough, and what appears assertive, self-confident, or entrepreneurial in a man often looks abrasive, arrogant, or self-promoting in a woman (for a review, see Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). African American women are especially vulnerable to such stereotypes and risk being seen as overly aggressive and confrontational (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). In experiment after experiment, women who achieve in distinctly male arenas are seen as competent but are less well liked than equally successful men (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004: 416). Merely being a successful woman in a male domain can be regarded as a violation of gender norms warranting sanctions (e.g., Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). By the same token, when women performing traditionally male roles are

seen as conforming to feminine stereotypes, they tend to be liked but not respected (Rudman & Glick, 2001: 744): they are judged too soft, emotional, and unassertive to make tough decisions and to come across as sufficiently authoritative (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In short, women can face trade-offs between competence and likability in leadership roles.

Many research studies have assessed the styles of male and female leaders since the fifties and found that there definitely exists the difference 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 lessmale-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.

If a central developmental task for an aspiring leader is to integrate the leader identity into the core self, then this task is fraught at the outset for a woman, who must establish credibility in a culture that is deeply conflicted about her authority (Ely & Rhode, 2010). Workplace biases exacerbate the problem, posing challenges for women at every stage.

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).

Such women show no tendencies toward a Passive or Avoidant leadership style. In other words, they indicate that they almost never avoid leadership behaviors such as clarifying expectations with employees, and they do not wait until work issues go wrong before taking action. The associated traits with this type of leadership style include higher levels of Accommodation and lower levels of Openness, Empathy, Aggressiveness, Assertiveness, Stress Tolerance, and Cautiousness. This combination of traits is reflective of a leader who may be uncomfortable expressing her viewpoints and has less potential to read and respond to the needs of her team. There exist even bolder claims about female leadership. Pinker (2011), in his recent book, The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined, pointed out that most violence has been committed by men leading our nations and tribes to war. Pinker further argued that the ascendance of women is one cause of the worldwide decline of violence that he documented in his book. Even more confidently established is the positive correlation of societal gender equality with economic productivity and national wealth (World Bank, 2012). Gender equality of course increases as women gain access to leadership positions. The broader cultural shifts enable women to occupy leadership positions nowadays. The women leaders facilitate the cultural shifts that restrain violence and increase economic productivity and national wealth. But there are certain barriers which cause high negative impact on women leaders such as:

- Feelings of guilt for not spending enough time with family because of work
- Family responsibilities interfering with work
- Resistance from other current leaders
- Having to outperform male leaders to be considered effective
- Lack of support in the household when work is

demanding

It is interesting to note that three of the five challenges with the most negative impact for the successful women leaders relate to work-life balance issues. The challenges with the least negative impact appear to be related to dealing with female leader stereotypes, unfair performance evaluations, and exclusion from male leaders' social networks. Women also exhibit moderate level of Transactional leadership behaviors. This shows that these leaders at times engage in reward-and- punishment behaviors with their employees. An example of this behavior is defining expectations with subordinates and offering recognition when goals are achieved or, conversely, enforcing a form of punishment when expectations are not met. Linking Transactional leadership style with personality, we find that higher levels of External Structure along with lower levels of Risk-Taking are related to more Transactional leadership behaviors. Those who exhibit a greater inclination toward this style tend to be comfortable working within established rules and regulations and also tend to have a risk-averse personality.

We have a grand exercise in comparing women and men, mainly as leaders, in the context of groups, organizations, and nations. There is considerable evidence that female leaders have a somewhat more participative, androgynous, and transformational leadership style than their male counterparts. There are also multiple indications that women, compared with men, enact their leader roles with a view to producing outcomes that can be described as more compassionate, benevolent, universalistic, and ethical, thus promoting the public good. 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.

There is a non-significant gender difference in leadership effectiveness. To empower more women to reach the highest ranks, we must focus on three key areas: socializing leadership early in life, modeling leadership and building confidence through role models and networking, and providing or enhancing corporate development programs that move more women forward. Specifically, corporations should:

- identify and develop those high-performing women who aspire to lead;
- provide the kind of individual feedback that reinforces and builds confidence and high-performance;
- build empowered and effective networks with the express goal of generating opportunities for women's leadership growth;
- actively give qualified women leadership opportunities;
- put in place challenging and aspirational career paths for women at work.

In a world where the attributes of the most effective leaders include the ability to generate collaboration, effective communication and respect, it seems only logical that the path to leadership should be characterized by the same qualities. It is necessary that there should be a way to move more women forward is to identify high-performing women and give them stretch assignments that will help them reach their full potential.

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