EFFECTIVE ENABLER: MAN OR WOMAN?

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ABSTRACT

The growing number of women’s position in executive roles are no longer unusual in organizations, as women are now more educated and have started to assume leadership roles that are traditionally occupied by men, especially in the educational setting. A review of earlier studies shows that this issue has created interest and has been argued that men and women differ in leadership styles. This article examines the literature on the different leadership perceptions, styles, qualities, behaviors and culture between men and women leaders. It aims to provide visibility to the current and future leaders on the leadership styles relevant to organizations and highlights the various perceptions and current thinking on the leadership qualities based on gender. The inconclusive nature of the research on leadership based on gender has also stimulated researchers to further suggest androgynous leadership for contemporary organizations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

An on-going debate has appeared in the management literature as to whether female and male managers use different leadership styles, (Appelbaum, Audet & Miller, 2003; Burke & Collins, 2001; Kark , 2003; Negrin & Sheaffer, 2004; Park,1996). Male leadership has always been the norm although there is an increase in women representation in managerial posts in recent time. In institutions of higher learning such as polytechnics and community colleges, number of women leaders is growing and this has prompted the researchers a further investigation on the different leadership styles exhibited by both men and women leaders, to make themselves effective enabler of technical and skill education.

Nevertheless, leadership is a subjective notion and recent developments in leadership studies show that researchers began to focus their attention on transformational versus transactional leadership. According to Burke and Collins (2001), there is a small but significant finding that management styles emphasized by female differ somewhat from the management styles emphasized by male. The result also indicates that female managers are more likely than male managers to report practicing transformational behavior; the most effective leadership style.

Several authors have noted that women will continue to have significant impact on the economies and play important roles in society in the twenty-first century (Davidhizar & Cramer, 2000; Stanford, Oates & Flores, 1996; Valentine & Godkin, 2000). According to Cubillo and Brown (2003), women have now become viable and valuable contributors to the workforce.
Consequently, extensive research on leadership based on gender were carried out to explore the leadership qualities of men and women but the inconsistencies of the findings have prompted some of the researchers to agree on certain characteristics deemed necessary for organizational effectiveness (Appelbaum, Audet & Miller, 2003; Burke & Collins, 2001; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Kark, 2003; Negrin & Sheaffer, 2004; Park, 1996).

2.0 STATISTICS OF LEADERS BASED ON GENDER IN POLYTECHNICS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

This section demonstrates the actual scenario depicting women representation in the technical and skills institutions under the purview of the Department of Polytechnics and Community Colleges Education (DPCCE) from the year 2006 to September 2008. The statistics as shown in Table 1 is obtained from the “Quick Facts” of DPCCE from 2006 to 2008. In this context, leaders refer to the Directors of each institution. The under-representation of female leaders in both types of institutions implies that “masculine managerial model” as portrayed by male leaders is still widely prevalent in polytechnics and community colleges, taking into consideration the technical nature of polytechnics and skilled-based environment in community colleges. One interesting point relating to the issue is that there is an increasing trend in women’s roles as leaders in both polytechnics and community colleges.

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<th>Institution</th>
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<td>Polytéchnics</td>
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<td>Community Colleges</td>
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<td>(Main campus)</td>
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Table 1: Statistics of Polytechnics and Community Colleges Directors Based on Gender

* Branches are still under the management of the main campus.
In the context of Malaysia, the negative perceptions on female leadership and the lack of knowledge of both male and female leaders on the potential of the unique leadership traits of women in today’s modern world as reported by Koshal, Gupta and Kosha (1998) as well as the under-representation of women leaders in institutions have made this review necessary.

3.0 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Specifically, this study seeks to explore the different perception of leadership effectiveness based on gender, through a review of some relevant literature. In addition, the literature review also looked at how societal culture plays a critical role in determining how people look at men and women leaders, and their views of whether they are effective enabler. This literature review also considers the effective leadership traits of male and female leaders.

4.0 DEFINITION OF TERM

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders develop positive relationships with subordinates in order to strengthen employee and organizational performance. They encourage employees to look beyond their own needs and focus instead of the group overall, Burke and Collins (2001). According to Pounder and Coleman (2002), transformational leadership encompasses four main characteristics which include:

- Idealized influence or charisma- the leader provides vision and a sense of mission, instills pride, gains respect, trust and increases optimism.
- Inspirational motivation- the leader acts as a model for subordinates communicates a vision and uses symbols to focus efforts.
- Individual consideration- the leader coaches and mentors, provides continuous feedback and links organizational members’ needs to the organization’s mission.
- Intellectual stimulation- the leader stimulates followers to rethink old ways of doing things and to reassess their old values and beliefs.
**Transactional Leadership**

According to Pounder and Coleman (2002), transactional leadership encompasses four main characteristics which include:

- Contingent reinforcement or contingent reward – the leader’s rewards to followers are contingent on their achieving specified performance levels.
- Active management by exception – the leader actively seeks out deviations from desired performance on the part of subordinates with a view to taking corrective action.
- Passive management by exception – the leader does not seek out deviations from desired performance and only take action when problems present themselves.

**5.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

**5.1 Different Perceptions Relating to the Leadership Roles of Men and Women Leaders**

This section provides a critical review of some past studies that have emphasized on the existence of a difference in perceptions in leadership roles between men and women leaders. It is a common view that women are different from men in many ways (Claes, 1999; Eagly, 2000; Kloot, 2004; Rigg & Sparrow, 1994; Rosener, 1990). Traditionally, men with their masculine characteristics are perceived as more effective leaders and female behaviors are considered ineffective for managing (Rigg & Sparrow, 1994). According to Rosener (1990), gender stereotyping and poor perceptions of women are common in organizations. These stereotypes are based on observations of their behaviors in gender-typical social roles and the consensual beliefs about the attributes of females and males (Eagly, 2000). Apart from that, prejudice against female leaders occurs especially in circumstances that engender perceptions of incongruity between the feminine gender and leadership roles (Richardson & Loubier, 2008).

Numerous studies by Claes (1999), Eagly (2000), and Kloot (2004), for example, have been conducted on the leadership styles of men and women leaders. The research findings revealed that there is a difference in the leadership roles of men and women leaders. A study by Richardson and Loubier (2008) for example, indicates a tendency of males to be agentic and females to be communal.
5.2 Gender Differences in Leadership Style

As women have become more prominent figures as organizational leaders, there has been a growing curiosity amongst researchers to identify the differences in leadership styles between men and women leaders and their effectiveness in organizations. More recent research suggests that there are differences in leadership styles employed by males and females (Batram, 2005; Burke & Collins, 2001; Kark, 2003; Park, 1996; Pounder & Coleman, 2002). Gender-role socialization produces individual differences in the characteristics of men and women, which have rendered women less skilled than men to compete in the business world.

Recent studies such as Burke and Collins (2001) also have generally concentrated on leadership models that contrast transformational leadership style with the contingent reward and management-by-exception styles, while past researchers have demonstrated that managers who display transformational leadership are espied as most effective and satisfying managers by their subordinates. Avolio, Waldman and Einstein (1998) suggested that employers also recognize transformational behavior as the most effective leadership style and that transformational leadership has a positive effect on an organization’s productivity and financial result.

5.2.1 Women are Seen as Better Leaders

Based on experimental studies relating to gender issues in management, it was found that women differ from men in their being caring, collaborative and enhancing participative decision making. Men however tend to be rational and competitive (Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Zarafullah, 2000). Women managers are more likely to use the former than the latter managerial style, which is people-oriented or transformative-oriented managerial pattern. According to Negrin and Sheaffer (2004), they demonstrate personal involvement and provide empathic solution, and also tend to empower underlings, favour a decentralized structure and participatory teamwork. They also noticed that woman managers also confront stronger stressors better than their male counterparts, for example, households, responsibilities and inferior social networking.

Burke and Collins (2001) have suggested that female leaders seem to be more participating with transformational leadership style, in contrast to male leaders. In addition they noticed that female perceived themselves more effective in communicating, and in coaching and developing subordinates. They also noted that females perceived higher effectiveness in time management.
Hence, if women developed appropriate traits and skills, they would be better equipped to compete with men and would advance at comparable rates (Kark, 2004).

Women’s involvement in managing households and raising children has made them develop gradually natural qualities such as nurturing qualities (Pounder & Coleman, 2002), capacity for prioritization (Heigessen, 1990), as well as psychological qualities based on relationship, encouragement and support (Grant, 1988). These natural qualities of women which men have little or no exposure are relevant to their roles as leaders and thus have given women the advantage over men (Heigessen, 1990).

Researchers have argued that women possess characteristics of transformational leaders such as:

(i)  *Nurturing subordinates for personal and group improvement* - Such notion is supported by studies conducted by Rossener (1990) and Bass, Avolio and Atwater, (1996);

(ii)  *Collaboration with subordinates, support consensus decision and team-based as well as giving positive feedback to individuals and team* - These people-oriented characteristics of women leaders are supported by studies done by Sergiovanni (1984), Rigg and Sparrow (1994), Cheng, (1994) and Coleman (2000).

(iii)  *Building up relationships with subordinates* - Many researchers are of the opinion that women naturally possess characteristics of contemporary leadership such as building up relationships (Colwill & Townsend, 1999; Kolb, 1999; Moss & Jensrud, 1995;). Women leaders tend to develop these individualized unique relationships with their subordinates (Yammarino et al.,1997).

Researches by Cantor and Bernay (1992), as well as Rosenthal (1997) have strongly indicated preference for female as leaders based on the natural transformational leadership characteristics exhibited and employed by women leaders. They noticed that their strong communication, intermediary and interpersonal skills have made them more favorable especially in an educational setting as compared to the dominance, autocratic and masculine image of men. In contrast, Pounder and Coleman (2002) have shown that male leaders exhibit strong characteristics of transactional leadership. They also noticed that they are more inclined to task oriented, goal setting, and practice management-by-exception.
The above findings concluded that there are a difference in the leadership roles of men and women. Women are perceived to exhibit transformational leadership characteristics which Rossener (1990) describes it as the “interactive” style. While according to Koshal, Gupta and Kosha (1998), men with their dominance and aggressive nature and autocratic behavior are labeled as transactional leaders. However, abnormal behavior exhibit by women leaders as a result of the tension and difficulties experienced by them to meet the social expectation of femaleness in them, might account for the differences in the leadership style (Pounder & Coleman, 2002; Schmuck, 1996).

5.2.2 Men are Considered Better Leaders

The fact that women are portrayed as weak leaders, (Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Schein & Davidson, 1993) good supporters due to the supportive and nurturing nature of women, (Pounder & Coleman, 2002), and expected to be more caring and relationship-oriented (Eagly, 1997) have led to the notion that men make better leaders. A study by Kruse and Wintermantel (1986) has revealed that men obtain higher ratings than women, in relation to the concept of leadership and the concept of manager. Furthermore, men do receive more favorable evaluations from their subordinates than do women (McGlashan, Wright & McCormick, 1995).

5.2.3 Research Indicating No Difference in Leadership Behaviors of Male and Female Leaders

Despite having all the findings that consolidate the notion that there is a difference in the leadership roles of male and female leaders, literature review on leadership styles based on gender have shown that there is in fact no such difference (Evett, 1994; Kark, 2004). Thompson (2000), for example, holds the view that male and female leaders are found to be equally effective in educational setting and that they have common conceptions of ideal qualities. Kolb (1999) likewise, states that both genders have common behaviors of leaders. Male and female leaders also exhibit similar managerial capabilities (Davidson & Burke, 1994) and competencies (Vilkanas & Carton, 1993), for example, similar amounts of task-oriented and people-oriented leadership behaviors (Powell, 1990) are exhibited by male and female leaders.
Carless (1998) believed that both men and women leaders employ transformational leadership, and both have common conceptions of what leaders should try to accomplish (Moss & Jensrud, 1995). This conclusion is further supported by a study conducted by Maher (1997) which reveals that there is no difference between male and female managers on the transformational-transactional leadership dimensions. Nevertheless this view is in contrast with the results of the study by Druskat (1994) and Bass, Avolio and Atwater (1996). While Maher (1997) has argued that his study has been done across a number of organizations, Druskat’s (1994) study has only been done in a particular type of organization and that of Bass, Avolio and Atwater (1996) in a particular industry.

The above studies have inclined to suggest that gender is therefore not a key determinant of actual leadership styles. In fact, some researchers argue that there are more similarities than differences as those holding managerial positions have a lot in common regardless of gender, (Fierman, 1990).

5.3 National Culture and Its Influence on the Expectation of Male and Female Leaders

The preference for a particular leadership may be influenced by the national culture of the subordinates under study (Carless, 1998; Erez & Earley; 1993). In countries like China for example, patriarchal values are very strongly knitted in the culture, where women face a hurdle in their quest for senior management post (Coleman, Qiang & Yamping, 1998). Nevertheless, in the United States where democracy is embedded in the culture, women will have no difficulty assuming leadership roles (Luthar, 1996). Furthermore, according to Hofstede (1980), this scenario depends on the extent to which classification of leadership; that is, whether masculine or feminine is imbued in the national culture. Musuen-Bae (1998), for example, noted that a leader who is employed by an individual is considered a mere function of culture rather than gender. Therefore, they seem to hold the view that national culture may affect the expectation of male and female leaders.

Based on the societal expectation of female and male gender, Pounder and Coleman (2002) have noted that there are some female leaders who exhibit male gender qualities and vice-versa; for example, female leaders are autocratic and male leaders have nurturing personalities. On this point, a study by Oslan, Synder and Hunter (1998) in the United States has revealed that men and women leaders are equally successful when both lead with male characteristics. Nonetheless, other studies have shown that although female autocratic managers are perceived to be higher performers than autocratic male managers, Luthar
(1996), female autocratic managers are generally evaluated negatively compared to their male counterparts (Jago & Vroom, 1982). Also, Campbell, Bommer, and Yeo (1993), noticed that a leader may actually face possible leadership ineffectiveness if he or she performs in contrary to the gender expectations; for example, an autocratic female leader may find herself in an array of difficulties that may affect her performance as a leader. Notwithstanding these, Appelbaum et al. (2003) has pointed out that both male and female leaders can learn from each other.

5.4 Androgynous (Neutral) Leadership

Currently, findings of a study by Richardson and Loubier (2008) shows that leadership style and identity develops from a combination of surface level, deep level, psychological, and social factors. They agree that not only one attribute that a leader brings to an organization determines the efficacy of the leader but that leader’s whole being which includes education, work experience, values and the lived diversity experiences. On this contention, some writers such as Pounder and Coleman (2002), Korabik and Ayman (1989), and Reaveley (1989) have opined that modern leaders need to be androgynous, (a term used to describe a leader regardless of biological gender) especially in a hostile (full of conflicts and pressures), dynamic and highly competitive environment. In addition, Pounder (2001) have suggested that the type of leadership employed by male and female leaders be termed as masculine and feminine instead of transactional and transformational. Therefore, for effective management in the education setting, leaders irrespective of gender, require a blend of both feminine and masculine skills (Hall, 1997; Riches & Morgan, 1989).

6.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS REVIEW

This review has provided insights into the leadership qualities and leadership styles of male and female leaders. The findings of many researchers whose works have been reviewed here will help current and future leaders in Polytechnics and Community Colleges to understand the various types of behaviors exhibit by both the male and female leaders. It has also enlightens the top management on the interactive leadership style which is increasingly important in today’s flattened organizations where priority is given to team participation and consensus form of decision making. In addition, this review is expected to facilitate the enhancement of new ways of understanding of the benefits from the potential of female leadership style. The unique talent and contribution of women as leaders in a dynamic environment should not be wasted by both men and women.
7.0 CONCLUSION

“Gender congeniality” perspective which emphasizes on the fit between gender and particular leadership roles has always been a critical issue in the leadership roles of men and women leaders; for example, educational institutions may be perceived as more congenial to women despite the fact that men still dominate the leadership in this sector. National culture and societal expectation still play an important part when it comes to acceptance of women leaders in male dominated field such as in the Polytechnics. Perhaps, women can still be considered for leadership roles in skill-based institutions such as community colleges, knowing that women with their unique female traits that favor an interactive style of leadership, women can be equally effective leaders.

As a substantial amount of public funds have been allocated yearly for the development of institutions of higher learning such as the polytechnics and the community colleges, Malaysian Budget (2008 and 2009), these institutions are constantly under great pressure to attain sustainable growth and demonstrate successfully “value for money” performance (Goedegebuure, Maassen & Westerhiejden, 1990; Kearns, 1998; Serban & Burke, 1998). Considering these seriously, it seems to be imperative for the policy makers of this country to learn from the findings of past studies, (Conger and Kamingo, 1988; Schein, 1992; Yukl, 1994) and where necessary to adopt the characteristics of effective leadership irrespective of gender to ensure high organizational performance and effectiveness. Delaying such moves may likely make many female leaders who are thrown into male dominated environment feel isolated. This situation may seriously affect their mental health, Kanter (1977), Gardiner and Tiggeman (1999). But if women are given equal chances to develop their leadership capabilities, whether women would make more effective enabler of technical education remains to be seen!
Bibliography


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