

Male vs Female Leaders: Analysis of Transformational, Transactional & Laissez-faire Women Leadership Styles

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Abstract

The study aimed to find empirical evidence on whether female leadership styles differ or similar to male's leadership styles. The research compared women and men on transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire formulated based on Bass and Avolio's (1997) Full Range Leadership Development Theory, was used to determine leadership styles. The Overall findings from this study suggest that female leaders have more transformational qualities, which they may favour because it provides them with a means of overcoming obstructions to their leadership and naturally demonstrate their ability to meet the requirements of their gender role and that conforming to their gender role can impede their ability to meet the requirements of their role.

Keywords: Female Leadership, Transformational leadership, Transactional Leadership, Laissez-faire Leadership

Introduction

Over the years the presence of women in corporate managerial positions has been increasing. But the pace of growth is very slow. Whilst today, there are more women in executive positions than ever before, very few females have climbed to the top of the corporate ladder. The male gender still dominates the highest-level positions in the business world.

A study conducted in 2002 by Stetler found that the presence of females in corporate leadership positions in the United States is approximately 40% but with only 0.5% of those in top managerial positions. The percentage of female managers ranged from 25% in Germany to 43% in Australia and the percentages for top managerial graders in Germany and Australia are considerably higher at 5% and 15% respectively. In India the percentage is approximately 4%.

In Sri Lanka the statistics are significantly weaker with only 0.09% of working females reaching the higher levels of the corporate echelon, in spite of 32.8% of the labour market being female (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka). This is all the more disturbing considering that Sri Lankan females are among the most literate in Asia (Global Literacy Report), and the country consistently tops the sub-continental rankings in terms of female literacy as well as being the only country in the South Asian region to produce more female than male graduates from its local universities (University Grant Commission Sri Lanka). However when it comes to labour force participation, the male labour force participation rate of the country is currently double the corresponding rate for females. In the international context too, of 163 countries for which data is available, Sri Lanka has the twentieth largest gap in the labour force participation between the sexes (Women in Labour Markets: Measuring progress and identifying challenges, 2010).

Given the above statistics the presence of female leaders in the top most positions in the business world, a question arises as to what obstructs females from reaching senior leadership positions in the corporate world. Do females possess inferior leadership qualities? Does social pressure from the outside world hinder them from climbing the corporate ladder? Whatever the answer to the question may be, effective leadership is recognized as one of the key elements that keep employees motivated and committed to organisations. Therefore progressive organisations consider understanding and promoting effective leadership an important factor in coping and dealing successfully with environmental pressures.

One school of theory suggests that men and women managers have different leadership characters and qualities. Men are accorded with aggressiveness and competitiveness, while women are the opposite. Due to these attributes, men and women managers manage organisations differently. These researches indicate that men tended to command and control (Rosener, 1990), are competitive, and like to be seen as decision makers, often reluctant to discuss issues with their colleagues and staff (Flanders, 1994), were directive and authoritative (Rigg and Sparrow, 1994) and demonstrated task orientation (Park, 1996).

On the other hand women managers leaned towards transformational patterns using interpersonal skills (Rosener, 1990), actively instigating discussions with those involved in order to reach a consensus decision and avoiding confrontation by the use of encouragement and compromise (Flanders, 1994), concern for and understanding of people (Johnson, 1995), seeking to develop them and adopting a participative approach (Rigg and Sparrow 1994).

These researchers have pointed out that men and women managers are characterized with different qualities in the management literature as to whether men and women managers really used different managerial styles.

At the same time other schools of researchers (Ferrario, 1994; Wajcman, 1996; Vilkinas and Cartan, 1997; Vilkinas, 1998) concluded there are no differences in men and women managers' managerial styles. Their works have clouded the veracity of the prior conclusion of gender differences in managerial style.

To answer the question as to whether women's typical leadership styles differ from or are the same as men's, and whether any such differences were an asset or a barrier to women who seek to rise in hierarchies of corporate power and influence, this research is conducted in ten public quoted companies in Sri Lanka. Men and women leaders were compared on transformational and transactional leadership styles.

Literature Review

Modern leadership theories highlight that effective leaders inspire their followers and nurture their ability to contribute to the organisation. This approach initially emerged in Burns's 1978 definition of a type of leadership that he labeled transformational.

According to Burns, transformational leadership involves establishing oneself as a role model by gaining the trust and confidence of followers; the leader ensures that followers are consciously aware of the importance of sharing organizational goals and values. They also ensure that followers know how to achieve these goals by mentoring and empowering them. Burns (1978) further states that transformational leaders motivate their followers to go beyond their own self-interests and extend effort on behalf of the organization by appealing to the higher order needs of followers.

Yukl (1989) defined transformational leadership as a process of influencing major changes in attitudes and assumptions of organizational members and building commitment for the organizational mission and objectives. Transformational leaders are said to appeal to higher ideals and moral values of followers, heighten their expectations and spur them to greater effort and performance on behalf of the organization (Bass, 1990a; 1995; Bass & Avolio, 1990b). Bass and Avolio (1990b) suggest that transformational leaders inspire followers with a vision of what can be accomplished through extra personal effort, thus motivating followers to achieve more than they thought they would achieve. The relationship between a transformational leader and followers is characterized by pride and respect (Bass & Avolio, 1990a). The employees often develop a high level of trust and confidence in such a leader. The employees are proud to identify themselves with the leader and develop a strong sense of loyalty to them. Bass and colleagues (Avolio, Bass & Jung, 1995; 1999; Bass, 1985a; 1997) have identified five factors which represent behavioral components of transformational leadership: 1) idealized influence (attributes); 2) idealized influence (behavior); 3) inspirational motivation; 4) intellectual stimulation and 5) individualized consideration. Idealized influence attributes occur when followers identify with and emulate those leaders who are trusted and seen as having an attainable mission and vision. Idealized influence behavior refers to leader behavior which results in followers identifying with leaders and wanting to emulate them. Leaders demonstrating idealized influence or charisma instill pride in their subordinates and command respect (Bass, 1990a; Bass & Avolio, 1990a). Idealized influence is coupled with an emotional attachment of the followers to identify with the leader. Inspirational motivation implies that leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' tasks.

Bass and Avolio (1990b) described transactional leaders as those leaders who appeal to subordinates' self-interest by establishing exchange relationship with them. This type of leadership involves managing in the more conventional sense of clarifying subordinate responsibilities, rewarding them for meeting objectives and correcting them for failing to meet objectives. In other terms the leadership can be described in two characteristics: the use of contingent rewards and management by exception. They described contingent reward as the reward that the leader will bestow on the subordinate once the latter has achieved goals that were agreed to. Contingent reward is therefore the exchange of rewards for meeting agreed-on objectives. By making and fulfilling promises of recognition, pay increases and advancement for employees who perform well, the transactional leader is able to get things done. Bass (1985a) therefore argues that by providing contingent rewards, a transactional leader might inspire a reasonable degree of involvement, loyalty, commitment and performance from subordinates. Transactional leaders may also rely on active management by exception which occurs when the leader monitors followers to ensure mistakes are not made, but otherwise, allows the status quo to exist without being addressed (Bass & Avolio, 1995).

In passive management by exception, the leader intervenes only when things go wrong. In general, one can conclude that transactional leadership is an exchange relationship that involves the reward of effort, productivity and loyalty. The leader helps the follower to identify what needs to be done to accomplish the desired results. The leader, however, only takes the follower's basic needs into account. Therefore, as Bass (1985a) contends, transactional leadership uses satisfaction of lower order needs as the primary basis for motivation. The focus in transactional leadership is on role clarification. The leader helps the follower in understanding exactly what needs to be done in order to meet the organization's objectives and goals. A

successful result of transactional leadership would be an expected outcome.

Both transformational and transactional leaders are described as leaders who actively intervene and try to prevent problems, although they use different approaches. Therefore it can be said that although it is empirically separable these two types of leadership resulted in effectively the same outcomes.

When researching these two active forms of leadership, one finds that they are often contrasted with a third style of leadership, which is called *laissez-faire* leadership. Bass describes the *laissez-faire* leader as an extreme passive leader who is reluctant to influence subordinates' considerable freedom, to the point of abdicating his/her responsibilities. In a sense, this extremely passive type of leadership indicates the absence of leadership. *Laissez-faire* style of leadership is also referred to as management-by-exception (Bass & Avolio, 1990a). Management-by-exception characterizes how leaders monitor subordinates' negative behavior and exert corrective action only when subordinates fail to meet objectives. Leaders who manage by exception intervene only when procedures and standards for accomplishing tasks are not met. It can therefore be concluded that by '*laissez-faire*', it is meant that the leader is not sufficiently motivated or adequately skilled to perform supervisory duties.

The established gender differences between men and women can influence, to some extent, the leadership styles practiced by each, because of the dynamics of role incongruity as well as the influence of gender roles on behavior by means of the spillover and internalization of gender-specific norms. Thus women may prefer a transformational style because it provides them with a means of overcoming the predicament of role strangeness, where conforming to their role as leader can impede their ability to meet the requirements of their perceived gender role, while on the other hand conforming to their gender role can impede their ability to meet the requirements of their leader role.

Empirical evidence support that the transformational leadership contributes to the objective achievement of organisations, therefore any sex difference in the tendency to manifest this style might produce a sex difference in leaders' effectiveness. A Meta – analysis of 39 studies carried out previously showed positive correlations between leaders' effectiveness and all components of transformational leadership. The contingent reward component of transactional leadership was also positively related to effective leadership (Lowe, Kroeck & Sivasubramanian 1996, DeGroot, Kiker & Cross 2000, Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, Engen 2003). A study conducted by the Centre for Leadership Studies in 2000 using MLQ measure produced similar findings. This study further revealed a negative relationship between leaders' effectiveness and two of the remaining leadership styles, passive management by exception, which is one of the components of transactional leadership, and *laissez-faire* leadership.

As Yoder (2001) claimed, transformational leadership may allow women to avoid the overly masculine impression they might emanate by exercising hierarchical control and engaging in narrowly argentic leadership behavior. At least if the organizational context does not feature powerful hierarchical roles and a tradition of command-and-control leadership, a transformational style, accompanied by the contingent reward behaviors of the transactional style, may be an effective approach to leadership that encompasses some behaviors that are consistent with the female gender role's demand for caring, supportive, and considerate behaviors. The individualized consideration behaviors of transformational leadership; which are marked by developing and mentoring followers and attending to their individual needs. Other aspects of transformational leadership do not bring into line with the gender role of either sex (e.g., demonstrating attributes that instill respect and pride by association with a leader). Few, if any, transformational behaviors have characteristically masculine implications. Consistent with these assumptions, studies have shown that subordinates perceive greater overall correspondence between leaders' feminine personality attributes and their transformational style than their transactional style (M. Z. Hackman, Furniss, Hills, & Paterson, 1992; Ross & Offermann, 1997).

Moreover some aspects of transformational leadership with the female gender role would allow these behaviors to be fostered in women by the spillover of its norms onto organizational behavior and many women's personal acceptance of these norms as standards for their own behavior. Transformational leadership style may be congenial to women, not only because at least some of its components are relatively communal, but also because these particular communal behaviors may help female leaders deal with the special problems of lesser authority and legitimacy that they face to a greater extent than their male counterparts.

Additionally considerable body of research has shown that women can be disliked and regarded as untrustworthy in leadership roles, especially when they exert authority over men, display high levels of competence, or use a dominant style of communication (Carli, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

These negative reactions can be minimized when female leaders are careful to also display warmth and lack of self-interest by, for example, expressing agreement; smiling, supporting others, and explicitly stating an interest in helping others reach their goals (Carli, 2001). From this perspective, certain aspects of transformational leadership may be crucial to effective female leadership— specifically, the transformational behaviors of focusing on mentoring followers and attending to their needs (individualized consideration) and emphasizing the mission of the larger organization rather than one's own goals (idealized influence, inspirational

motivation). Contingent reward behaviors, involving noticing and praising subordinates' good performance, may also foster positive, supportive work relationships.

Although certain leader behaviors may ease the strangeness between the female gender and leadership roles, women may still have to meet a higher standard than men to attain these roles. As stated by Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997; Foschi, 2000, consistent with experimental and field research on the application of double standards in judging performances. It is likely that higher standards are imposed on women to attain leadership roles and perhaps to retain them as well. As transformational styles are particularly skillful in most organizational settings, a tendency for women to have a more transformational style than men could reflect the selection of women who have met the higher standard that is imposed on women. Female leaders may also display more of the effective contingent reward transactional behaviors and fewer of the ineffective transactional behaviors (i.e., passive management by exception) and laissez-faire behaviors. Moreover to be consistent with the hypothesis of a double standard, women who manifested these ineffective styles and thus performed inadequately may be deselected from leadership more quickly than their male counterparts (Foschi, 1992, 2000).

Hypothesis

Empirical evidence suggests that there is a strong relationship between leadership styles and overall performance of subordinates and that a transformational leadership style contributed positively to the overall performance of subordinates. What empirical evidence does not make clear is whether female leadership style differs from, or is similar to, male leadership style.

Hence the hypotheses below were formed to evaluate whether women's typical leadership styles differ from or are the same as men's typical leadership styles and whether the any differences could be an asset or a barrier to women who seek to rise in hierarchies of power and influence

Hypothesis 01:

Female leaders exhibit more transformational leadership qualities than male leaders.

Hypothesis 02:

Female leaders exhibit more transactional leadership qualities than male leaders.

Hypothesis 03:

Female leaders exhibit more laissez – fare leadership qualities than male leaders.

Methodology

Response Rate

The research sample was 10 public quoted Sri Lankan companies in the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) arena. Out of a population of approximately 3000 employees, a sample of 500 was selected using EXCEL random generator. Of these 150 successfully filled in and returned the questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 30%.

Demographic Data

Demographic data was collected on various aspects, and a summary of the results are presented in Tables 01, 02, 03 and 04. The statistics revealed that 60% of the participants were males and that 53% of all respondents have so far spent at least 11 years with the organization, while 62% have post-secondary qualifications. Moreover the statistics shows that only 10% of the participants are aged 50 or above.

Table 01 Demographic data: Gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	90	60%
Female	60	40%

Table 02 Demographic data: Education Level

Education	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percentage
Masters	8	5%	8	5%
Bachelors	18	12%	26	17%
Professional Qualifications	25	17%	51	34%
Diplomas	42	28%	93	62%
A/L	57	38%	150	100%

All of the respondents were Advanced Level qualified, while 93 respondents had post A-Level qualifications, while 18 participants had a bachelor's degree. 10 respondents were qualified at Master's level.

Table 03 Demographic data: Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percentage
20 to 29	57	39%	57	39%
30 to 39	48	32%	105	71%
40 to 49	30	20%	135	91%
50 to 59	15	10%	150	100%

39% of the survey participants were below 30 years of age, while another 32% fell into the next highest age group (30 -39). 20% of the employees were in the 40 -49 category. The least number of respondents (10%) belonged to the 50 – 59 age categories.

Table 04 Demographic data: Working Experience

Working Experience	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percentage
21 and above	15	10%	15	10%
16 to 20	36	24%	51	34%
11 to 15	28	19%	79	53%
6 to 10	38	26%	117	79%
1 to 5	33	22%	150	100%

Table 04 illustrates the years of working experience the respondents had with the respective organisation. According to the gathered data most of the respondents have 6 to 10 years' experience with their current employer. Second highest group of respondents belongs to 16 to 20 years' of working experience category. 33 people have 1 to 5 years of working experience within the organisation. Therefore most of the participants have been with the respective organisation for more than 05 years.

Methodology

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used to gather information from the respondents. The MLQ was formulated from the full range leadership development theory questionnaire which was introduced by .The questionnaire contained 45 statements, each corresponding to one of the nine components of either transformational, transactional or laissez - faire leadership styles.

The transformational leadership style is divided into idealized charismatic behaviours and attributes factors including idealized influence (attributed), idealized influence (behaviour), inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Transactional leadership style is divided in to two factors contingent rewards and management by exception, management by exception is also divided into management-by-exception active (MBEA) and management –by-exception passive (MBEP). Thus MLQ 5X (revised) contained 9 factors. The Five point Likert Scale was used by the participants to mark the most suitable answer, the scaled was ranging from 0 – 4 (0 – not at all, 1 – once a while, 2 – sometimes, 3- fairly often, 4- frequently if not always). Gender of the leaders was gathered by asking the participants to insert the gender of the leader.

Table 05

Definitions of Transformational, Transactional and Laissez – Faire Leadership Styles in the MLQ – 5X

MLQ – 5X scales with subscales	Description of leadership style
Transformational	
Idealized Influence (attribute)	Demonstrates qualities that motivate respect and pride from association with him or her.
Idealized influence (behaviour)	Communicates values, purpose and importance of organisation's mission.
Inspirational Motivation	Exhibits optimism and excitement about goals and future states.
Intellectual Stimulation	Examines new perspectives for solving problems and completing tasks
Individualized Consideration	Focuses on development and mentoring of followers and attends to their individual needs.
Transactional	
Contingent Reward	Provides rewards for satisfactory performance by followers
Management by Exception (active)	Attends to followers' mistakes and failures to meet standards
Management by Exception (passive)	Waits until problems become severe before attending to them and intervening
Laissez – Faire	Exhibits frequent absences and lack of involvement during critical junctures.

Data Analysis

Data collected through the Questionnaire was analyzed through Microsoft Excel 2007 and SPSS 15.

Descriptive Statistics - Mean & Standard Deviation Scores

Table 06 - Transformational Leadership

	Overall			Female			Male		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Idealized Influence (Attributed)	150	2.85	0.89	60	2.87	0.87	90	2.83	0.88
Idealized Influence (Behavior)	150	2.9	0.92	60	2.91	0.93	90	2.88	0.91
Inspirational Motivation	150	2.82	0.93	60	2.83	0.97	90	2.81	0.96
Individualized Consideration	150	2.86	0.85	60	2.93	0.80	90	2.8	0.86
Intellectual Stimulation	150	2.87	0.97	60	2.88	0.96	90	2.85	0.96

Table 07 - Transactional Leadership

	Overall			Female			Male		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Contingent Rewards	150	2.88	0.97	60	2.89	0.95	90	2.87	0.99
Management-by-Exception-Active	150	2.80	0.90	60	2.75	0.89	90	2.97	0.91
Management-by-Exception-Passive	150	2.86	0.90	60	2.70	0.89	90	2.90	0.91

Table 08 - Laissez- Faire Leadership

	Overall			Female			Male		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Laissez- Faire	150	0.96	0.93	60	.08	0.86	90	1.12	0.97

Table 06, 07 & 08 contains descriptive data for the five transformational leadership subscales, three transactional subscales, and laissez – faire subscale. All leadership variables hold a sample size of 200.

Hypothesis 01 of the research is Female leaders exhibit more transformational qualities than male leaders.

Leaders of both genders have obtained mean values closer to 3 in all the subcategories of transformational leadership. However it can be observed that female leaders have obtained higher mean values for all the categories of transformational leadership subscales.

The highest mean value has been obtained for the sub-category individualized consideration with 2.93 and the highest gap between means is also visible in this category. The second highest category of mean figures has been obtained in the subscale of Idealized Influence (behaviour) with a mean score of 2.91, while male leaders have obtained mean figure of 2.88 for this particular category.

Accordingly it can be argued that female leaders have more transformational leadership qualities than male leaders. Thus the researcher accepts Hypothesis 01 and concludes that female leaders have more transformational leadership qualities than male leaders.

Hypothesis 02 - Female leaders exhibit more transactional leadership qualities than male leaders.

The feedback regarding transactional leadership indicates that both genders have been rated close to a mean of 3. Further analysis indicates that while female leaders led the subscale of Contingent Rewards with a mean score of 2.89, the sub categories Management by Exception – Active and Management by Exception – Passive were led by the males with mean values 2.87 and 2.81.

Accordingly it can be argued that male leaders have more transactional leadership qualities than female leaders. Thus the researcher rejects hypothesis 02 and concludes that female leaders have less transactional leadership qualities than male leaders.

Hypothesis 03 - Female leaders exhibit more Laissez – Faire leadership qualities than male leaders.

The overall mean value for Laissez – Faire leadership is 0.96 and the male leaders have obtained a higher mean of 1.12 while female leaders have obtained an average of .08 for the category.

Hence it can be argued that male leaders have more laissez - faire leadership qualities than female leaders. Thus the researcher rejects hypothesis 03 and concludes that female leaders have less laissez – faire leadership qualities than male leaders.

The scores for the transformational leadership subscales for both genders are slightly less than what Bass and Avolio (1997) consider ideal levels for effective leadership. For the most effective leadership they suggest mean scores of greater or equal to 3.0 for individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence (behavior), idealized influence (attributed) and inspirational motivation. Bass and Avollo (1997) also suggested a mean score of 2 for contingent reward, which is lower than the current study’s mean scores for both genders. The suggested range for management by exception (active) was 1.0 to 2.0 and the mean scores obtained for the current study were 2.87 for females and 2.85 for male which are slightly outside the range. Suggested score for management – by- exception (passive) is 1.0 the scores obtained in the study is .912.7 for females

and .89 **2.9** for males both are below **significantly above** the suggested score. Lastly the suggested score for laissez-faire is 0.0; however mean scores obtained in the current study was higher with 0.78**0.08** for female leaders and .89**1.12** for male leaders.

Conclusion

The research findings reveal that female leaders display more transformational leadership qualities than male leaders, who demonstrate higher transactional and laissez – faire leadership qualities.

It can be argued that transformational, transactional and laissez – faire styles of women and men may differ to some extent because of the dynamics of role incongruity as well as gender roles' natural influence on behaviour by means of the spill over and internalization of gender – specific norms.

Therefore the female leaders may favour a transformational style because it provides them with a means of overcoming obstructions to their roles as leaders and naturally demonstrate their ability to meet the requirements of their gender role and that conforming to their gender role can impede their ability to meet the requirements of their role as a leader.

Female leaders have obtained higher mean values for all the subscales of transformational leadership, particularly for idealized influence and individualized consideration. The idealized influence (behaviour) stands for the leaders' ability to communicate values, purpose and importance organisation's mission and individualized consideration represent leadership qualities of focusing on development and mentoring of followers and attending to followers' mistakes and failures to meet standards. It can be argued that these qualities are natural to female leaders as the female gender role personifies communicating, caring, supportive and considerate behaviours. Other aspects of transformational leadership do not seem to be aligned with the gender role of either sex.

When it comes to transactional leadership subscales, it can be noticed that female leaders have topped only the contingent rewards category which stands for rewarding subordinates for satisfactory performance.

Male leaders had obtained higher mean values for the two subscales management by exception – active and management by exception – passive (2.97 and 2.90 respectively). Leadership in these two subscales are characterized by attending to followers' mistakes and failures to meet standards and waiting until a problem become severe before attending to and intervening. Given that Male leaders were given a higher mean score for both these categories, perhaps it can be argued that these two qualities are more male communal.

Transformational leadership as well as the contingent reward aspect of transactional leadership may provide a particularly appropriate context for highlighting women's competency in leadership. Their competence in these qualities of leadership, which are explicitly supportive of subordinates and therefore of organisations as a whole, are incontrovertible proof of the value that women leaders add to the dynamics of organisational development and growth.

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