

WOMEN IN BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP: CRITIQUES AND DISCUSSIONS

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Abstract: Female leaders have emerged over the last forty years and are making their mark in the business world. On the other hand, inequality in the workforce leads to salary gaps and struggles for promotions. Strides have been made, but there is more work to be done. Female managers/leaders should understand the history of inequality in all around the world. They should understand the traits of a charismatic leader as these traits could help boost their desirability within the business world. Finally, *identifying* a profile of a successful female leader can help demonstrate the direction in which any female manager should head.

Key words: Female Leadership, History, Inequality, Characteristics

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals (Robbins & Judge, 2008). This ability can be either formal or informal and can be applied to managers and non-managers. Historically, many leaders have been men, and women have struggled to gain respect in the business world as leaders. Throughout the world, women continue to fight for equality in the workforce and to find a place among their male counterparts in leadership roles. By reviewing the status of women in business all around the world, one can have a greater understanding of their struggle (Morrison and von Glinow, 1990).

In early 1990s, only five of the Fortune 500 industrial and service companies had female CEOs (Feminist Majority Foundation, 1991), and of the highest paid officers and directors of the 1,300 largest industrial and service companies, women were less than 0.5% (Dodge & Gilroy, 1995). The numbers have improved, but at the end of the 1990s one survey found only 11% of Fortune 500 board members were women (Mann, 1999). In 2010, in the United States, 51% of in professional and managerial positions, and 25% of chief executives were dedicated to women (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). In Fortune 500 companies (2010), women held only 15.4 percent of corporate officer positions, 14.8% of board seats and 2.4% of CEO titles (Evans, 2011). However, in 2011, women occupied 47% of the US workforce (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011) but only 5.2% of the CEOs (Catalyst, 2011a) and 16% of the companies' board seats (Catalyst, 2011b). These statistics raise the question of why women have limited access to critical leadership roles (Kawakami et.al, 2000). Therefore, for women to be successful they must be charismatic leaders, so it is important to know what the traits are of a charismatic leader (Bass et al., 2008).

Finally, forming a profile of a female leader can also be helpful in understanding the role women play in business leadership. In the present paper, we try to elaborate some main issues in the literature of female leaders. The main point of focus is the characteristic traits of women leaders who are doing their best to prove their equal opportunities in being successful leaders. In order to do so, first we discuss the history of women leaders. Then, we elaborate the concept of charismatic women leaders, and finally, the unique characteristics of women leaders are discussed.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS: TIMELINE

During the time between the 1880s and the 1920s, western civilization saw a boom in women's participation in business, both as workers and as managers. This period transformed the United States into one of the world's most important economies. This period in history redefined women's roles in business. Women began working outside of the home and were often in subordinate roles such as

helpers, laborers and clerks. Occasionally, a woman might establish her own company and assume managerial control. These companies were usually within the sphere of female enterprise and focused on items and services women typically purchased (Blaszczyk, 2002). To some scholars, despite gains in women's status, men are more likely to become successful leaders than women and the styles that successful leaders follow are more masculine. Then female leaders face a dilemma: In one hand, if they follow a masculine leadership style, their male subordinates will dislike them. On the other hand, if they adopt a warm and feminine style, they will be liked, but not respected (Kawakami et al., 2000).

The last sixty years has seen a significant change in the status of women in the workforce. While the majority of leadership positions in both the USA and throughout the world have been held by males (Weyer, 2007; Stelter, 2002), American corporations began promoting women into managerial roles, and by the end of the 1980s, women owned half of American businesses. In addition, women are pursuing education in greater numbers and currently outnumber their male counterparts, graduating from college each year. Women obtaining higher education degrees, occupy 52% of today's middle management positions (Robwrite, 2012). In sum, women are better educated than before; they comprise the majority of undergraduate college enrollments in industrialized countries and are catching up in the developing countries (Cheung and Halpern, 2010).

Prior to the 1990s, the gap between male and female salaries was great, but strides have been made to reduce this inequality. Unfortunately, men are still more likely to be promoted than a female counterpart with equal experience (L'Heureux-Barrett and Barnes-Farrell, 1991; Thurlow, 2009). Moreover, according to the literature there is considerable evidence that women are not paid in direct accordance with performance outcomes. Indeed, even in female dominated markets like publishing (where evidence shows that men do not outperform women, or women even have an advantage), men seem to get more than their fair share of rewards (Kulich et al., 2007).

While many countries promote equality in the workplace, many countries do not. An example is seen in the Arab Nations. According to an article in UN News Centre, women in the Arab culture are denied equality of opportunity and this has "*crippled the Arab Nation from becoming a world leader in economy, commerce and culture*" (2006). Arab women lack access to education, lack the ability to participate in public matters and lack empowerment in the business world. There is a significant difference in the number of women working with that of men. In some Arab countries, women make up less than 10% of the workforce (ElSafty, 2003). This gap is a reflection of the seclusion of women in the Arab culture. Several Arab nations continue to withhold political participation of their female population making it that much more difficult to change current practice.

As in any country struggling with inequality, the Arab Nation has its share of emerging leaders in both the political and the business realm. These women are pioneers in leading women into more powerful roles. Some of the most notable female Arabian leaders include, Reem Arca (fashion designer for Neiman Marcus),

Sheikha Munira Qubeysi (religious leader), and Sabrina Jawhar (Saudi Arabian journalist). These women are important figures in the fight for gender equality in Arab Nations (ElSafty, 2003). Their contributions can help guide other women seeking change and autonomy.

The battle for women's rights started back in the late 18th century, which set the stage for the rise of women's movements. Women grew increasingly dissatisfied with the limitations society had placed on their activities (Radovic Markovic, 2007). Middle Eastern women- just like millions of women around the world- are struggling for equal rights and for the opportunity to work and increase their standards of living. The assumption that most Middle Eastern women are kept at home is not valid anymore since more women are entering the workforce (Fernea, 2000). However, women of the Middle East suffer from the gender gaps both in social and economic spheres caused by culture and traditions of their societies, some of which are mentioned in the last paragraphs (Javadian and Singh, 2012).

Although in some countries of the region, the facts are quite different (Javadian and Singh, 2012). For instance, in Iran, based on the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report (GEM, 2008), more than a quarter of Iranian entrepreneurs are women. However, Iran tends to have a low index of support for women entrepreneurs and little is known about Iranian women entrepreneurs (Razavi et al., 2008). Iranian women are active in many fields of the economy and the number of women founding new businesses is increasing, although one might expect different picture of women in Muslim countries (IRIN, 2003). However, while their number is increasing and Iranian women are more than men in achieving higher education, there are still fewer women entrepreneurs in Iran-compared to men (Sarfaraz, 2010).

However, the tradition of African American women's leadership is absent from the literature in general (Alston, 2012; Bower and Wolverton, 2009), and "*African American women leaders remain in a quandary*" (Gable, 2011); based on some research works, well-known African American women leaders have similar characteristics- such as using a leadership style as an art, being both rational and emotional, and having a social influence- that have carried them through and helped to shape them into significant forces in their society (Lewis, 2011). According to findings of a research done by Rosette and Livingston (2012), these women leaders are evaluated more negatively than Black men and White women in their leadership styles.

To some scholars, African women leaders/managers have been largely invisible in the literature (Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009, 2013). While as Ozumba and Ozumba (2012) argue that across the African continent there is evidence of African women leaders, as early as the 7th century (e.g. Berber Queen, Kachine of the Maghreb; 9th century Magajiyas of Daura; 16th century Queen Amina of Zazzau; and 19th century Nehanda of Zimbabwe). However, some efforts have been done; like the Feminist Leadership and Movement Building Institute (FLaMBI) which was established in 2008, in collaboration with African women leaders (Ryan-Rappaport, et al., 2012).

Taking into account the structural conditions based on which Asian women leaders face a rather disadvantageous socio-political context—including a predominantly misogynist gender ideology in terms of political agency (Fleschenberg, 2008); Yet, some of them, such as Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Benazir Bhutto, Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia, etc. are considered as the most active leaders of the continent (Chowdhury, 2009). Such women leaders were engaged in political affairs as well, and required themselves to change their societies (Shuli, 2011).

Discrimination against women leaders and their impact on policing seems to be more progressive in Europe than the US. Discrimination occurs and prevents women leaders from obtaining the leadership positions in Europe. Moreover, there is a need to explore the lack of females in top leadership positions (Hughes, 2011). At the same time, stereotypes of women in some European countries became more favorable with stereotypes of women viewed as more active and strong, whereas the stereotypes of men became less active and strong (Toh and Leonardelli, 2012).

To some scholars, a transformative collaborative model of leading is both more typical of women leaders and in fact very effective, especially in large organizations. At the same time, we shall consider that emphasizing women leaders' "unique" leadership style also has its dangers, as it could strengthen gender stereotypes (Rosener, 2011).

In sum, while women and men are equal when it comes to exhibiting leadership style and behavior (Weyer, 2007), as a topic of research during the past three decades, it is still a "*topic of considerable complexity*" (e.g. Eagly and Johnson 1990). As Weyer (2007) elaborates, "*the attempts to clarify the issue can be divided into two separate schools of thought as outlined in the following: (i) researchers who propose a minimization of differences; and (ii) investigators who endorse stable differences between the genders*". Even though, there is general agreement that women face more barriers to becoming successful leaders than men do (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). It should be noted that in this paper, we consider both schools.

TYPES OF WOMEN LEADERS: CHARISMATIC LEADERS

A review of leadership studies and management styles of men and women was conducted by a management team, and the results revealed that women were more democratic, encouraging participation, and the men were more autocratic, directing performance (Psychology Matters, 2006). Women leaders need to employ as many positive traits as possible in order to gain an edge in today's market. "Charismatic leaders are the most successful, the most respected and the most loved leaders of all" (Alain, 2011). Charisma is a trait that cannot be measured or seen. It cannot be taught. Charisma is an abstract energy that draws others; it is likability. A charismatic leader will always have followers because they are well liked and because followers choose to be a part of their team, they are not forced to be a part

of their team. A charismatic leader possesses several traits. These include: vision and articulation, personal risk, sensitivity to follower's needs and unconventional behavior (Robbins & Judge, 2008).

Charismatic leaders have a vision or a long-term goal and strategy. This provides a path by which subordinates can follow. This type of leader often takes risks, which might have high costs and result in personal sacrifice. This seems to enhance and build the self-esteem and self-confidence of their team. Charismatic leaders are perceptive to their employees and their abilities. They focus of being responsive to the needs and feelings of those employees (Robbins & Judge, 2008). Finally, the novel behaviors shown by charismatic leaders demonstrate courage and conviction, which enhances the dedication of their staff (Mládková, 2012).

In addition to the above traits, charismatic leaders demonstrate wisdom, communication skills, humility, substance and compassion (Basu, 2012). These additional attributes allow charismatic leaders to attract followers and inspire them to improve and be successful. These leaders tend to initiate change and improve the overall success of their business. Their optimism is a respected trait. Charismatic leaders are often servants to those that follow them. Women leaders benefit from being charismatic leaders and can use these traits to become more marketable.

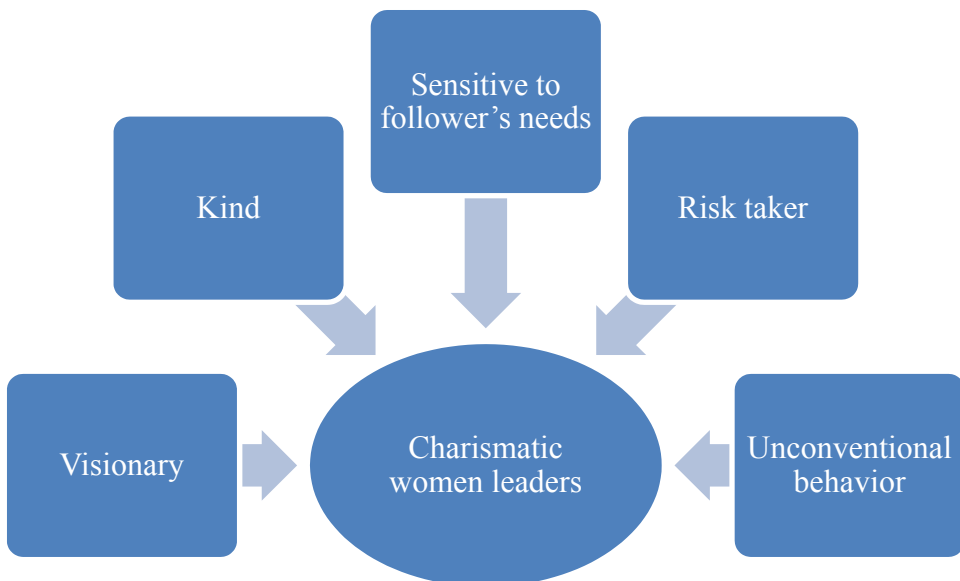


Figure 1. Main characteristics of charismatic women leaders

Source: Self-elaborated

PROFILE OF WOMEN LEADERS

There are several characteristics a woman must have in order to be a good leader (Helgesen, 2012). In fact, characteristics of women leaders differ significantly from the characteristics of women more generally (Schneider and Bos, 2011). Confident female leaders place a high value on relationships. They are successful in using direct communication. Successful women leaders are comfortable with a diverse workforce and can see the potential that a diverse group can offer. Women leaders rarely compartmentalize their work, which helps increase their insight on the work environment. Female leaders rarely work with hierarchical type management styles, preferring to lead from the center of the organization. Finally, these leaders often see the big picture and understand the steps needed to obtain reasonable goals (Chin, 2007; Helgesen, 2012). Communications skills, compassion, humility, patience, and strength are also considered as key characteristics (Folta et al., 2012).

According to many female writers, "*Women often have a different attitude to power compared to men*" (Prigent, 2011). Regarding women's attitude, Halsebo (1987) defined women as "*able to exercise power in a more constructive way, mobilize human resources better, encourage creativity and change the hierarchical structures*" (Prigent, 2011). Women leaders have to work on a managerial culture first. Such leaders succeed to see beyond the boundaries of the routine activities and classical settings (Budrina, 2012).

Some characteristics are ascribed more strongly to women than men. For instance, women have more *communal characteristics* which describe primarily a concern with the welfare of other people (for instance, affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturant, and gentle), while men have more *agentic characteristics* which describe primarily an assertive, controlling, and confident tendency (for instance, aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, daring, self-confident, and competitive). In employment settings, communal behaviors might include speaking tentatively, not drawing attention to oneself, accepting others' direction, supporting and calming others, and contributing to the solution of relational and interpersonal problems; while, agentic behaviors might include speaking assertively, competing for attention, influencing others, initiating activity directed to assigned tasks, and making problem-focused suggestions (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Women are less likely to be considered for leadership positions because such roles do not fit the female gender stereotype. Moreover, even if women do take on leadership positions their performance is likely to be devalued for several reasons. Since women are perceived to fit the managerial stereotype less than men they are perceived to be less influential agents. Therefore, when women perform valuable work, this may be unacknowledged as their achievements are more likely to be attributed to external factors (Kulich et al., 2007).

According to Radovic Marković (2011), women face obstacles as follows:

- Tradition and patriarchal attitudes;
- Budget restrictions affecting healthcare, educational benefits, right to maternity leave, childcare and retirement benefits;
- Conflict of roles between family and work responsibilities;
- Continued devaluation as women as many companies do not acknowledge that women can perform as well as men;

In addition, there is an opinion that absolute equality is a red herring for women's general dissatisfaction with having to juggle or choose between work and family. It is not necessarily the priority for most working women because equality is not what they want most, but rather fulfillment from both worlds. Relatively speaking (meaning some women more than others), women are faced with choosing between career and family and if they want both they have to learn to juggle both which is not an easy task. Healthier businesses and happier families result from the increased balance introduced by women leaders (McMillian, 2012).

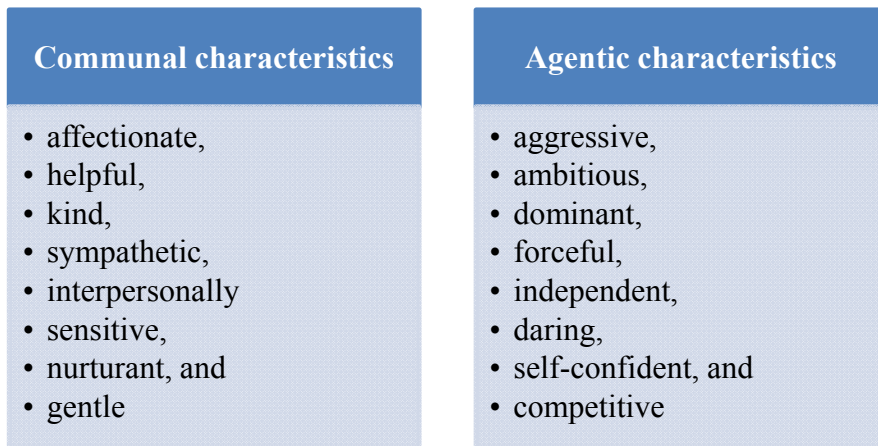


Figure 2. Types of characteristics

Source: Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001)

CONCLUSION

Female inequality in the work force continues to be a concern worldwide, although significant gains have been made in the western world. Women leaders are emerging and can be as successful as their male counterparts. However, in order to move forward in the business world, female leaders need to understand their struggles and make decisions about their management style, which will benefit them. By looking at the history of inequality, by understanding the traits of a charismatic leader and by identifying the profile of a woman leader, one can move towards becoming a successful female leader.

In the present paper, we elaborated some main issues in the literature of female leaders. The main point of focus was the characteristic traits of women leaders who are doing their best to prove their equal opportunities in being successful leaders. Although, studying the literature, we need to take into account the differences which might/might not be effective in being a successful leader among both men and women.

Future studies could investigate these concerns in different contexts, considering differences and similarities. Moreover, the discussed characteristic traits could be clarified in order to gain more knowledge about the approaches and mechanisms which influence the success of women leaders.

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