

## **Towards the Transformational Leader: Addressing Women's Leadership Style in Modern Business Management**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The rising proportion of women in employment in recent decades has been one of the major changes affecting business management. The purpose of this project is to theoretically explore how women in the modern workforce have advanced themselves. In this respect, the present paper will focus on the leadership styles used by both male and female managers. The relationship between gender, adherence to notions of gender role stereotypes, motivational orientation (intrinsic and extrinsic), and career choice are investigated. Literature has shown that there are gender stereotypes associated with certain leadership styles.

**Approach:** Literature Review. A wide range of secondary sources of information such as Internet sources (EBSCO, Proquest, Emerald, Keepmedia, Bitpipe, Yahoo and Google), books, academic journals, magazines, professional associations, trade publications were used.

**Findings:** The findings endorse the existence of gender differences in work campus, but, at the same time, demonstrate the important inroads made by women into higher managerial occupations.

**Type:** Literature Review

**Key-words:** *management style, transformational leadership, female and male managers, new management theories, literature review*

### **Introduction**

Leadership research has grown and expanded and an even broader focus has emerged which encompasses women's limited advancement in management. As a result, leadership styles have been studied extensively in various contexts and with various theoretical foundations. Research has indicated that, although many women hold management positions, few have made the breakthrough to top management positions. Most studies associated with the issues that hinder career advancement of women, have focused on either the intrinsic variables within the female herself or the extrinsic variables, such as economic, cultural and sociological complexities. But the attainment of top management positions for females is complex and involves many variables.

Moreover, the research about leadership styles and gender has often conflicting results, which do or do not support the assumption that there are stereotypical masculine and feminine styles. However, major findings show an integrative women's leadership model characterized by task commitment, personal sacrifice, goal orientation, commitment to personal relationships with employees and an emphasis on teamwork. This leadership style lays a foundation for future studies of women's leadership in all types of industries as well as

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in other fields. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to theoretically investigate females' leadership style and their potential role as transformational business leaders. In this respect, the present paper is structured in six sections. The first section briefly explores the feminist management research in organizations. The second one examines the female's perspective of management positions. The third section analyses the importance of the transformational leadership for modern businesses, whilst the fourth one reviews the literature related to females' and males' leadership styles. Finally, the last section attempts to summarise the main points of the literature as well as to give future directions for future research on the field.

### **Feminist Management Research**

There have been two major streams of research into feminist theories of organizations. The first has been called the "*women-in-management*" literature. It has dealt with how women can function within organizational boundaries. There are many "*how-to*" books telling women how they can adapt and fit into organizations, as they now exist. Many studies now include gender as an independent variable. These activities do not change organization theory; rather it is an adaptation to the arrival of women into the workplace.

The second, more recent, stream of research focuses on gender relations (Jacques, 1992). Smircich (1985) outlines three epistemological assumptions that underlie feminist theory. First, what is considered knowledge is socially constructed. It is a reflection of the social conditions and positions of those who produced it. Second, gender is a socially constructed category. Research and theorizing are embedded with particular ways of framing and valuing aspects of the social world. Third, feminist theorizing also assumes a particular form of gender relations-patriarchy (male dominance) and looks for changes from this form.

Feminist research can be seen as a paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense. To adopt a woman's perspective means to look at things not looked at before and to look at the familiar differently (Nielson, 1990). Feminist research has discovered data or observations that do not fit current theories. Kuhn (1970) describes the tendencies of researchers to ignore anomalies and to maintain current theories as long as possible. In this way, organizational theorists resist

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feminist research. As Arnault (1989) argues Kuhn supports the view that it will be easier to obtain a paradigm shift by exposing the problems generated by the old paradigms and creating the realization that something may have gone wrong with it, rather than trying to get researchers to see the light. Therefore, before feminist theory can develop alternative theories of organizations, they must show the problems with our accepted theories and how they are based on a patriarchal basis of knowledge.

It is important to note that feminist theory does not just apply to women. It is an attempt to help all dominated groups have input into organizational theories. It is also an attempt to get researchers to come out from behind their facade of value-free research and explicitly put forth values that are implied in their research. Feminist research methods allow the researcher to become involved with the subjects. It has been described as contextual, inclusive, experiential, involved, socially relevant, multi-methodological, complete but not necessarily replicable, open to the environment, and inclusive of emotions and events as experienced (Reinharz, 1992).

Smircich (1985) states that a feminist perspective will include greater tolerance for deviant modes of discourse. In organizational theory deviant modes of study are not encouraged either in graduate schools or in journals. Only tenured faculty members take the chance of studying feminist theory. Women in research are faced with the dilemma of how one can be a researcher and honour one's commitment to feminism. Feminist theories of organizations may be a way of doing this.

By looking at organizational theories from females' viewpoints and changing them accordingly, they can attempt to make a contribution to society and not just help to maintain the status quo. If new female management theories can help organizations be founded in forms that are not male dominated this could eventually produce a change at the societal level. In this respect, this paper emphasise the role of women in modern management.

## **Women in management**

From a review of the literature, women in management, at first, might appear to be a relatively new phenomenon, a product of the post-war business environment. However, further investigation reveals that this is far from the case. In pre-industrial times women managed, not only the household, but aspects of agricultural work such as the dairy, milking, butter and cheese-making, often disposing of any surplus through trade or commerce (Miles, 1988). In the nineteenth century women could be found running businesses such as lodging houses and shops, often with their husbands, but also alone, when single or widowed (Murray, 1984). By 1911 women constituted 19% of employers and proprietors and 20% of managers and administrators and higher professionals (Hakim, 1979). The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) (2001, 2002 and 2003) found that women now hold 33% of managerial jobs in the UK. It also shows an, not particularly large, increase in the percentage of women in management over the course of the twentieth century.

In the post-war period the number of women in management began to rise from 15% in 1951 to 16% in 1961 (Hakim, 1979, p. 28), and from 21% in 1971, 23% in 1981, 28% in 1990 (Hakim, 1996,) and 33% in 2001 (EOC, 2003). The economic activity rates of women, generally, also rose during this period from 43% in 1951 to 57% in 1971 and 71% in 1991 (Hakim, 1996). While this appears to indicate a major change in women's work, and certainly more women of working age are now to be found in paid employment (McDonald, 2004), during the last 150 years the proportion of women working full-time has remained within the 30-40% range, with the increase in employment since 1951 being in the form of part-time work (Hakim, 1996). As a result almost as many women now work part-time as full-time (Walby, 1997).

Other major changes in women's work in the past 50 years include the increased participation of married women (Beechey, 1986; EOC, 2001) and women with young children (Walby, 1997) with both changes being due in some part to the equalities legislation of the 1970s which abolished the marriage bar and gave women certain rights to maternity leave and the right to return to work after pregnancy. However, some aspects of women's

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employment have not changed. Women continue to be paid less than men. In 2000 female full-time employees earned, on average, 82% of the average hourly earnings of male full-time employees (EOC, 2001). In addition, women's work remains occupationally segregated with 52% of women employed in just three occupational groups, secretarial and clerical, personal and protective services and sales.

During the last two decades, women have entered the field of entrepreneurship in greatly increasing numbers. It is characteristic that according Petraki-Kotis (1996) during the last two decades a continuously increasing number of women have taken up studies in business administration and other related programmes with the purpose of pursuing a managerial career. With the emergence and growth of their businesses they have contributed to the global economy and to their surrounding communities. The routes women have followed to take leadership roles in business are varied; yet, more likely than not, most women business owners have overcome or worked to avoid obstacles and challenges in creating their businesses (Marlow, et al, 1995). The presence of women in the workplace driving small and entrepreneurial organizations has had a tremendous impact on employment and on business environments worldwide.

By the year 2001, women entrepreneurs have entered many industries and sectors. Many of the earlier obstacles to women's business success have been removed, yet some still remain. Many research questions have been posed, and investigators have examined the economic and social impact of women's business ownership. Further, there has been much progress in the training and development of women entrepreneurs within public policy and academic programs. Finally, scholars of entrepreneurship and small business (NWBC, 2004) have studied the influences of and the impact on business ownership by women. The number of research studies has grown since the 1980s, when scholars and policymakers first cast their attention toward women entrepreneurs (NWBC, 2004).

Women entrepreneurs can be found in every sector of the economy. The top growth industries for women-owned firms between 1987 and 1999 were construction, wholesale trade, transportation/communications, agribusiness, and manufacturing (NWBC, 2004).

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Traditionally, women entrepreneurs were more likely to be found in retail and service businesses, but by the end of the 1990s women were entering nontraditional business sectors in greater numbers. For example, the NWBC (2004) found that more Latina entrepreneurs own firms in construction, accounting, engineering, other professional services, and manufacturing than owned businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and bars.

With the rising number of women entrepreneurs starting businesses in nontraditional fields, researchers are now able to make comparisons between sectors. In this way, we can begin to determine whether differences in such areas as performance, firm structure, and strategic orientation, are attributable to the sector in which the entrepreneur operates. Engelbrech, (1997) found that the level of sales and perceived performance is higher for women in nontraditional industries, although the women in traditional industries perceived higher levels of financial support.

All the above confirm the argument that women play an increasingly significant role in managing businesses. The question that now rises is associated with their particular contribution in business leadership.

### **The Changing Context of Leadership: Towards a Transformational Leader**

The business world has changed dramatically in the ensuing twenty-five years. Faced with the challenge of global competition, as stated by Smith (2005), business world has restructured and re-engineered itself totally. The assumptions about what it takes to be a leader in today's business environment are changing. These changes have transformed what constitutes a good business leader. Leadership in organizations is no longer clearly defined: they may be vertical, horizontal, diagonal. It may move across functional boundaries as well as across companies and industries, according to larger needs and opportunities. Thus, organizational leadership now is even more complex and requires much more individual responsibility to manage employees rather than to control them. Moreover, networks and alliance are of paramount importance, not only for individual leaders as they manage their employees but also for firms as they attempt retain the loyalty of their customers.

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In this respect, a new kind of leadership has been emerged; the transformational leadership (Bass, 1985 and 1990), which seems to be gender-related (Maher, 1997). This type of leader does not only guide and motivate her employees, but also inspires them. She gives the opportunity to transcend their self-interests for the good of the organization. This kind of leader has a profound and extraordinary effect on her employees (Wofford, et al, 1998). Therefore, the question that emerges is what makes someone a transformational leader. Or, to pose it in a more specific way, are there any factors influencing the transformational leadership charisma? This paper attempts to explore whether gender is such a factor. In fact, what this study is interested in is related to what extent the leadership style of female managers is more closely associated with transformational leadership.

### **Exploring the Transformational Role of Women**

For about 30 years, literature on women and management stressed females' managerial abilities as equivalent to those of males (Chapman, 1975). But in the mid-1980s, general discussions about the place of women in management (the equality discussion) took a turn. Besides this, a case was being made that women's unique "feminine skills" could make important contributions to organizational management (the difference discussion), on which the feminine-in-management rhetoric is based. Moreover, as the hierarchically bounded middle management job is replaced by the boundary less project-management job, parity between males and females may be greater. Differences between male and female pay and participation rates may diminish as the traditional first-line supervisor's job is supplanted by the boundary-spanning team leader role. There is also some suggestion (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Ferguson, 1984; Gilligan, 1982) that women may also benefit from the fact that managing and organizing in the new context favours the female style over the male.

Traits and competences needed in this more fluid context are not those culturally ascribed to men such as rationality, toughness, self-interest, domination, but rather are those traditionally held to be feminine. What is required in less bounded jobs and organizations may be a person who gets things done by co-operation and a shared influence, by building

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relationships and connections with others, both inside and outside the boundaries of jobs, departmental lines and chains of command. Hierarchical relationships may need to be supplanted by egalitarian partnerships to enhance personal and organisational effectiveness. In a business world of flatter structures, and self-managed project teams, the individual is less likely to be at centre stage, directing others and making decisions, but instead needs to share both responsibility and the limelight. This requires them to be open, egalitarian focused on and responsive to others, supporting and empowering, influencing without dominating. All these are traditionally identified in western culture as feminine traits (Ferguson, 1984). The traditional feminine role is said to emphasise a focus on process more than on outcomes or simply winning and losing. Having historically had fewer opportunities to advance in traditional hierarchical settings, it is suggested that women may feel a sense of familiarity with, and thrive in, ladder less, boundary less careers.

The women's difference on management style found their initial support in research on the psychology of women (Gilligan 1982; Chodorow 1978; Miller 1976). These works show that traditional views of gender differences have not been culturally neutral; rather, qualities associated with males have been prized and those associated with females have been devalued. Yet, because value systems are social and cultural constructions, it is possible to reconceptualize female characteristics as positive-even though different-rather than as inferior to male characteristics.

Clearly, the appeal of these ideas stems from their implications for revaluing women and feminine qualities in various kinds of activities, including approaches to management. For instance, Loden (1985) is the first one arguing, that under the female's difference umbrella, womens' managerial styles could be what was needed for solving American productivity problems. Similar arguments followed by other academic scholars (Bowen and Hisrich, 1986; Grant, 1988; Helgeson, 1990; Bass and Stogdill, 1991). In these writings, what was once disparaged as female patterns in need of overcoming for success in management is now positioned as special and useful for organizations.



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For example, Grant (1988) argues that women seem to be the most radical force available in bringing about organizational change, thanks to qualities gained in experiences with their families and communities. In Grant's view, women's skills at communication and cooperation, their interests in affiliation and attachment, and their orientation toward power as a transforming and liberating force to be used for public purposes rather than for personal ambition and power over others are critically needed human resource skills in contemporary organizations. Moreover, Rosener (1990) described "interactive leadership" as characteristic of some of the female executives that she studied. Patterns unique to women's socialization made them comfortable with encouraging participation and facilitating inclusion, sharing power and information, enhancing the self worth of others, and energizing and exciting others about their work.

Perhaps the best representative of these ideas in the business literature has been posited by Helgeson (1990) in a close-up study of four female executives, whose images of organizational structure were more similar to a web or circle than a hierarchy or pyramid. From this, she articulates a notion of authority not at the head of an organization, but at its heart, as authority comes from communication with the people around rather than distance from those below. Helgeson, like others, argues that the integration of the feminine principles into the modern life, full of feelings of pointlessness, sterility and the separation from nature, offers hope for changing these conditions.

Furthermore, Bass (1991) has founded that women show more evidence of transformational leadership than men, supporting the view that women have more highly developed interpersonal skills than men. However, the evidence suggests that there are fewer differences than expected, especially when studies control for the effects of age, work role and achievement. In addition, Maddock (2002) emphasises the need for transformational as opposed to transactional leadership, focusing on the critical roles of transforming managers and the gender cultures they work within. She suggests that gender balance is a euphemism for actually what is required, which is the transformation of both traditional male and female identities.

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Moreover, Eagly and Johnson (1990) found evidence for the presence and absence of differences in leadership of men and women. They conducted a meta analysis on studies of gender and leadership style and found no evidence in organisational studies for the gendered stereotypic expectation that women lead in an interpersonally oriented style whereas men lead by adopting a task oriented style. However, they did find evidence for such differences in laboratory studies. Also, they found evidence in other studies, which involved people who did not occupy leadership roles. Sex differences were found in all types of studies when the focus of attention was autocratic and democratic management styles.

Under conditions of globalization, the feminine-in-management rhetoric can contribute several images that eventually naturalize the further exploitation of labor rather than improving managerial opportunities for women. Think, for example, of the following clichés associated with women: “a woman's work is never done”, which is equivalent to extended hours for the same pay; “she did it as a labor of love”, which is equivalent to unpaid work.

As it has been well-documented, occupations that become *feminized* – including managerial and professional positions – experience declines in salaries and wages. Whereas explanations for this fact vary, the condition remains. Such a situation, however, provides the ideal context for the globalized firm, which would encounter equally ready and willing “affordable labor” on any side of the border. Moreover, because the feminine-in-management rhetoric is based on the possibility of abstracting some “essential human traits” that can be observed in many people (and that may even be sex-neutral), *feminized* jobs may end up mostly occupied by men as unemployment, provoked by globalization, soars. For example, Jelinek and Adler (1988) note that women can be role models and coaches for men. They believe that the best of male managers will be working to acquire and hone important skills formerly seen as ‘female’ those centering on relationships, communication, and social sensitivity.

It may be that the world of business today has much to learn from the female experience, in that women have always been more likely than men to build an identity around

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both work and non-work activities. Mirvis and Hall (1994) claim that the era of the boundary less career calls for men in particular to reassess the value of personal non-employment activities to their lives and goals. What is required is for people to build an identity through career achievement, as well as through their life's work - work as spouse, parent, mentor, volunteer, community member and neighbour. Much as women have always done, it is claimed that, men now more than ever need to balance their personal and employment commitments if they are to avoid crises when outmoded assumptions collide with reality (Mirvis and Hall, 1994).

More recent work by Buttner (2001) argues that while research on women's leadership style has shown that men and women lead in similar ways, there are also some demonstrated differences in style by gender. In addition, Ardalan (2003) supports that women executives, no longer looking to "break the glass ceiling" are commanding leadership positions and writing their own rules, creating their own management style and redefining what it takes to get to the top in business. Although women hold almost half of the managerial and professional positions in the workplace, they account for only 3% of the top positions among Fortune 500 companies. But those numbers are bound to increase as more and more women discover they have what it takes to be a leader. Traditional top-down hierarchical organizational structures, generally lead by men, are giving way to a more collaborative, team-oriented approach that emphasizes communication, networking and yes, balance. Ardalan (2003) continues arguing that today, company executives, whether female or male, not only need to keep their eye on bottom-line results, but must also be highly attuned to the needs, abilities and dynamics of employees. Business leaders must have the adaptability to manage a diverse global workforce in an ever-changing business environment.

Companies are recognizing the contributions female executives offer in the workplace, but it seems employers still expect more from women in leadership roles. They need to be strong decision makers, but are valued for their ability to engineer consensus among team members. Women executives must also exhibit "softer" qualities such as a sense of humor and the "personal touch" yet are expected to be clear and effective communicators

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with the ability to motivate personnel and get things done. And, in most cases, women executives still run the home front creating a perpetual balancing act between work and family life (Ardalan, 2003). However, it is still an exciting and challenging time to be a woman in the workforce. The perception of what it takes to be an effective executive is changing as well as the appropriate management skills. Women are no longer focused on the "glass ceiling" (Schneider, 2000), but are creating their own paths to success.

### **Conclusions: Towards a more feminine business leader?**

The present article addressed the topic of women in top management positions starting from the past and getting to the nonce. In conclusion, from the above analysis we can argue that women in management is not a new phenomenon, since we can trace its roots in pre-industrial times. In the post-war period women managers began to rise but major changes are brought only the last 50 years. Moreover, feminist research focuses firstly, on women in management literature and secondly, on gender relations; but it just not apply to women; it is an attempt to help all dominated groups have input into organizational theories. However, as today's business world faces with the challenge of global competition, requires effective managers, who pay regard not only to bottom-line results, but also to internal communication and motivation. This kind of leadership has been called as the transformational leadership (Bass, 1985 and 1990). In this respect and due to the fact that during the last two decades, women have entered the field of management in greatly increasing numbers, the basic difference between male and female managers, is that women, typically, exhibit transformational leadership behaviors, centering on relationships, communication and social sensitivity

Thus, we can support the view that the increasing importance of transformational leadership in organizational performance, confer favor on the position of women in the labor market. As Peter York (1999) argues the future of managing organizations around the globe tends to be a lot more female. His argument reflects clearly the importance of women in today business world. The Taylorist period of management is over. The humanistic period has been well-introduced. The old (Taylorist) style of management required a more autocratic style of

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leadership. This style was most common among male managers, who adopted a more mechanistic character and attitude towards employees. Women were poorly represented in the ranks of management and largely ignored in leadership. The underground assumption of this way of managing people was that because of the mechanistic view of the workforce paternalistic and autocratic personalities were needed in order to control it and to reassure best performance. Thus, male managers were more likely to be confident to monitor and coordinate subordinates. This autocratic style of leadership had resulted many times a dysfunctional way of managing people.

Nowdays the most effective management style seems to be one in which the manager shares authority and power with his/her subordinates. This style increases employees' job satisfaction, promotes their interests and leads them to effective performance. This also resulted a new status for female managers. Arroba and James (1998) point out that women have innate attributes that can be seen as great advantage in the age of human oriented management. These features include intuition, sensitivity, observation and a willingness to engage with feelings. In other words, in the new era of humanistic leadership female manager are keener to delegate power than man. They can share responsibility promoting employees' involvement and participation in decision-making process. Finally, they are much more capable than men in understanding people needs and allowing them to satisfy their expectations and prospects through their jobs.

Therefore, rephrasing York's (1999) argument, we could say that we are moving towards a more female business leadership. Female managers can dominate in the era of human oriented business management. Nevertheless, very little empirical work has been done so far to investigate the situation (Bourantas and Papalexandri, 1991). Most knowledge about the problem is based on casual observation, individual case analyses and haphazard evidence. Therefore, further research is needed in order to identify the extent to which female managers are more capable to perform the role of the transformational leader in comparison to their male counterparts. Moreover, further research should take into account the different contexts under which male and female managers need to exercise their leadership skills. One kind of

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such contexts can be the national business environment that managers work. As Panigyrakis and Veloutsou (1998) point out the issues of environmental uncertainty and role ambiguity among women in public relations requires additional research. Therefore, it is time to remove the blinkers and put the investigation of female's leadership style in context. One aspect of this agenda is the need to put female's leadership style into a national business context.

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