

## **Gender Equity and Transformational Leadership Style in Corporate World**

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### **Abstract**

Organizations are realizing that, in order to adequately address human resources concerns, they must develop long-term as well as short term solutions to gender and leadership issues. When it comes to gender and leadership, one thing is clear, women can be successful in leading both private and public sector organizations. With the advent of the new millennium, the range and numbers of women in top positions across fields of endeavour have increased dramatically. Organizations are very interested in assessing leadership competencies for both performance appraisal and leadership development purposes. However, when examining the cases of top women leaders, similar stories do not seem to emerge. This paper specifically considers literature on gender equity and transformational leadership style in the corporate world.

### **Introduction**

Gender refers to the sociological dimension of being male and female (Santock, 2001). In broad terms, gender defines what men and women are expected to be and to do, in terms of roles, rights, responsibilities and obligations within an organizational context. Many scholars perceive gender as primarily a female issue but in reality, the study of gender is about the pull and push of effects created by gender relationships between the masculine and feminine beings in a given society at a given time (Ani, 2012).

Gender equity has to do with the equal valuing of males and females and giving everyone equal opportunities for life and work regardless of gender. Equity is essential to achieving equality because while equality refers to equal access to resources and equal opportunities, equity involves been given the means of benefitting from equality.

In Nigeria, as in most African countries where patriarchy is practiced, inequality of power based on gender enables men to dominate women, limit women's choices and abilities to stand up for themselves. Since 1948, when the United Nations made the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, gender equity has been accepted as a fundamental rule of human rights.

Women the world over share a common feature; they are marginalized in the sphere of public life. Although they account for roughly one half of every country's population, women are yet to be proportionately represented in public life anywhere in the world (Nwankwo, 1996). Awareness of gender as a central feature of all aspects of everyday life and society has become more and more widespread. Every leader has a different style and a different approach to the job, but what about gender and leadership? Do men and women have different leadership styles? Gender and leadership is a subject that is concerned with two main questions: (1) what are the determinants of male/female differences in who assumes leadership positions and in leadership behaviour? (2) How is leadership a gendered concept? The idea of gender was for the first time brought about in the 1970s by a group of feminists. The underlying factor was to use the notion of gender as a parameter for appreciating the fact that women do not relate to men in much the same way in all circumstances in every culture; and more importantly, that the position of women in society varies considerably. The concept of gender presupposes a social construct as against biological circumstance of men and women. Sometimes the phrase—sex gender relations is used; this reminds us that there is a link between biological differences between men and women and the social assumption about masculinity and femininity (Rowbotham, 1992).

Sociologically, gender is basic to the foundation of every existing social order. It is constructed through situational and institutional processes. In other words, gender is not a mere comparison of males and females but of maleness and femaleness which are socially constructed. The perception of gender in an organization varies from one organization to another and from one individual to another. In some organizations, there are some vital positions that are not given to the female gender. There are some meant only for the female gender as a result of the demand and criteria for that position. In Nigeria, there has been a gross inequality between men and women, especially in political representation, economic management and general leadership. The male gender dominates in government and socioeconomic spheres, thereby holding the reins of power relations, exerting sole authority over resource allocation and control (Akinboye, 2004).

Effective leadership qualities and skills are imperative in order to have discipline and decorum at the work place. Leaders carry out the important tasks of chalking out strategies for the growth of the organization. Without the presence of leaders, there would not be any specific aim before the organization and this will naturally hamper its progress. Positive leadership has been identified as critical in effecting organizational change and researchers have long supported that the particular strength of transformational leadership is the ability to bring about successful organizational change (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership is characterized by the leader's ability to empower and entrust followers to create a supportive and motivating environment whereby the followers are allowed the freedom of creativity. Such an environment acts to transfer the goals and objectives of the organization to the employees of the organization. This in turn nurtures a dedicated, enthusiastic workforce motivated to achieve for the benefit of the organization.

### **The Concept of Gender**

Gender, according to Hannan (2001) refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men, girls and boys as well as the interrelations between women and women and those between men and men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization process. They are context/time specific and changeable. According to Hannan, gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or in a man within given context.

Gender refers to the socially-constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). These roles and expectations are learned, changeable over time and variable within and between cultures. Gender analysis has increasingly revealed how women's subordination is socially constructed and therefore able to change, as opposed to being biologically predetermined and therefore static (Akinboye, 2004).

The term sex is used to refer to the classification of individuals as female or male based on their genetic makeup, anatomy and reproductive functions. It also refers to a natural division derived from the most basic physiological differences between males and females, in which these differences are genetically determined, largely universal and genetically constant. Gender on the other hand is used to refer to the meanings that societies and individuals give to male and female categories (Becker & Eagly, 2004).

Oakley (1972) clearly explicates the difference between sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological features that go with being male or female. Gender refers to the social, cultural and psychological features that identify someone as a man or a woman, which are highly variable across cultures and are continually subject to change. Gender is not only about women; it refers to a structural relationship between the sexes, which are not accidental or facts of nature, but are reproduced institutionally through political processes and economic structure.

A gender dichotomous society is where women's experience is assumed to be different from that of their male counterparts. The society's cultural perception of women generally has been that they are of the weaker sex, inferior, contemptible, the scum of the earth and in a highly unenviable position (The Guardian, 1999). A woman's lot in life could be seen as being extremely pitiable and pathetic when viewed against the backdrop of the statement above. They are seen as only providing moral support and nurture for their family. This assertion was supported by Obasanjo (1989), when he avers that women by virtue of their physiology are givers and nurturers of life. The social responsibilities, which come with these biological responsibilities (functions), make women a peculiar force in the overall national development. Their condition in the society therefore, would definitely affect the overall development of the country.

### **The Concept of Leadership**

The concept of leadership has much to do with human collectivity, a society, group or organization without which the concept is useless. Leadership is defined as part of the organization

that concerns itself with people. Leadership is the act or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly towards the achievement of group goals. Leadership, according to Ajayi (1998) is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically. It is the human factor that binds a group together and motivates group member's towards set goals. Leadership transforms potential to reality. It is the ultimate instrument that brings to the centre the potentials of an organization and those of its people.

Leadership is a means of directing. A leader's actions are devoted to helping a group to attain its objectives. Leadership is the ability of management to induce subordinates to work towards group goals with confidence and keenness. Leadership also implies that the leader accepts responsibility for the achievement of the group objectives. It is therefore essential for trust and co-operation from both sides to be in evidence all the time. According to Appleby (1994), leadership influences a process by effectively changing the behaviour of others. Leadership effectiveness is the acknowledged ability of a manager to guide a group towards goal accomplishment.

### **Differences and Similarities Between Female and Male Managers**

Powell (1993) brings forward a modern approach to management theory and claims that there are three perspectives on the difference between female and male managers. (1) There are no differences between men and women as managers; women managers try to become like men and reject the gender stereotype. (2) Men make better managers because their early socialization experiences differ; they are playing more team sports than girls do (Hennig and Jardim, 1977). (3) Stereotypical differences between the sexes, where women in managerial roles bring out their feminine characteristics that tend to be stereotypical.

Feminist researchers, such as Rosener (1990) argue that female and male leaders differ in accordance with gender stereotypes. She argues that femininity is particularly needed in today's work life. Rosener claims along the same lines as Powell (1993), Gardiner and Tiggemann (1999) that there are profound differences between male and female leaders; female leaders concentrate on the relationships between people whereas men tend to concentrate on the issues or tasks. Women use more personal power, i.e. power based on charisma and personal contacts, whereas men tend to use structural power, i.e. power based on the organizational hierarchy and position. Lundberg and Frankenhaeuser (1999) in turn argue that there is no difference between men and women in interpersonal style of leadership, but that men are more task-oriented than women.

Schein's (1973) classic study concluded that both female and male executives believed that managers possessed characteristics that were more associated with men than with women. In later studies that examined the perceptions of executive women, women no longer described successful managers as having only masculine characteristics. More recent management theories, such as the Managerial Grid Theory, claim that both masculine and feminine characteristics are important in a good manager. The Theory suggests that the best managers are androgynous: they combine both (masculine) high task and (feminine) high interpersonal styles (Powell 1993).

Although the concept of androgyny has received mixed support, one aspect has been agreed upon: leadership is generally conceived in masculine terms, but also feminine features are needed.

Some researchers suggest that women should adopt a masculine style to become accepted as leaders (Sapp, Harrod, and Zhao, 1996). Women in leading positions have shown to be more masculine (Fagenson, 1990). However, Watson (1988) has indicated that masculine women's performance level is low, and women choosing such a strategy often experience role conflicts (Geis, 1993). Baril, Elbert, Mahar-Potter and Reavy (1989) claim that adopting one's masculine and feminine behaviour to suit each situation separately might be the best approach. Powell (1993) argues that both feminine managers and androgynous managers seem to fit in today's work environment. This is true even if the managerial, masculine favorable subtext still exists. However, management and leadership are dependent on the local context and culture where they are practiced. This makes drawing universal theories difficult. When overall conclusions are drawn, the outcome looks to be that masculine is dominant. This is because people hold sex stereotypical beliefs and attitudes about women and men, and do not tend to see that women as leaders can be as competent as their male colleagues.

### **Leadership Theories**

Interest in leadership increased during the early part of the twentieth century. Early theory development in the 1930s and 1940s used a trait theory approach based on the premise that successful leaders would possess distinguishable characteristics not found in their followers (Weiss, 1996). While many different leadership theories have emerged, most can be classified as one of eight major types:

#### **1. "Great Man" Theories:**

Great Man theories assume that the capacity for leadership is inherent – that great leaders are born not made. These theories often portray great leaders as heroic, mythic and destined to rise to leadership when needed. The term "Great Man" was used because, at the time, leadership was thought of primarily as a male quality, especially in terms of military leadership. This theory was developed from an early research which included the study of great leaders. The early leaders came from the privileged class and held hereditary titles. Very few people from the lower class had the opportunity to take a lead. The Great Man theory was based on the idea that whenever there is a need of leadership, a Great Man would arise and solve the problems. When the Great Man theory was proposed, most of the leaders were males and therefore, the gender issues were not considered. Even the researchers were male, which was the reason for the name of the theory being 'Great Man Theory'.

#### **2. Trait Theories**

Similar in some ways to "Great Man" theories, trait theories assume that people inherit certain qualities and traits that make them better suited for leadership. Trait theories often identify particular personality or behavioural characteristics shared by leaders. If particular traits are key features of leadership, then how do we explain people who possess those qualities

but are not leaders? This question is one of the difficulties in using trait theories to explain leadership. When this theory was introduced, it was based on the study of the characteristics of successful leaders. The researchers also made an assumption that if people are found with these leadership traits, they would also become leaders. So while researching, certain traits and characteristics were identified and listed. John Gardner researched many leaders of North America and listed the attributes and characteristics of leaders. These traits are as follows:

- ◆ Intelligence and judgments based on actions
- ◆ Physical stamina and a vital driving force
- ◆ Task competency
- ◆ Better understanding of the followers and their demands
- ◆ Readiness to accept responsibilities
- ◆ Ability to deal with people
- ◆ Capability to motivate people
- ◆ Trustworthiness
- ◆ Conclusiveness
- ◆ Flexibility

These are some of the few qualities and attributes of leadership. When this theory was researched earlier, researchers believed that a leader has all the listed traits in him/her. The meaning of this theory is that the same leadership attributes are applicable for leadership on a battlefield and the leadership in a school. However, if a person has some of these traits and not all, then it is not possible for him to be a leader. Apart from this question, there was again the problem of gender in leadership. Even if you make an exhaustive list of leadership traits, these attributes are defined taking into consideration a male leader.

### **3. Contingency Theories**

Contingency theories focus on organizational contexts that make some leadership behaviours or features more effective than the others. There are some studies that give emphasis on the situation and its gendered consequences on leadership behaviour. Men and women work differently, like women communicate in a way that exchanges feelings and creates personal relationships, whereas men communicate to establish their status and show independence. In addition, men are socialized to believe that they have the right to influence and the historical evidence with male dominantly managed organizations supports this.

### **4. Situational Theories**

Situational theories propose that leaders choose the best course of action based upon situational variables. Different styles of leadership may be more appropriate for certain types of decision-making. One of the relatively lesser known leadership theories is the situational leadership theory. The researchers found that leaders emerged as a result of different situations. Therefore, the researchers assumed that leadership qualities were developed depending on the situation.

However, there are people who believe that there are different styles of leadership which changes the situation. There are three basic things in a situational leadership; the **foremost** thing is that the relationship between the followers and the leader must be healthy. The followers must like the leader and support him/her in his/her goals. The **second** thing is that the task which is to be accomplished must be known, and the leader should set the goals as per the task to be done. Along with the tasks to be accomplished, the methods and standards to accomplish the task must also be specified in details, as this will make an impact on the followers. The **third** thing that is important is that the organization must confer the responsibilities of the task upon the leader, as this will strengthen the position of the leader.

### 5. Behavioural Theories

Behavioural theories focus on managers' behavior. There are three main types of behavioral theories. One distinguishes between two types of behaviour; task-oriented style and interpersonal oriented style. Another distinguishes between two types of leadership; autocratic and democratic. The third type, situational theory, regards different types of behaviour appropriate for various situations. The behavioural theories implicitly suggest that better managers are either masculine (i. e. high task/low interpersonal style, autocratic decision making) or feminine (i. e. low task/high interpersonal style, democratic decision making) (Powell, 1993), and are gendered as well as trait theories and great-man theories are.

Behavioural theories are seemingly more gender-neutral in that they study effective leadership in terms of how leaders help their sub-ordinates to achieve their goals. Usually, the samples consisted of male managers, seeing gender not relevant at all (Mills, 1988). If gender sometimes was focused, there were found interesting differences like that identical leadership style may be seen differently depending on the gender of the manager (Eagly & Johnson 1990), or the idea of sex-role spillover that refers to gender-based expectations for behaviour that are irrelevant or inappropriate to work (discussed in Metcalfe & Altman, 2000, 108-109).

### 6. Participative Theories

Participative leadership theories suggest that the ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others into account. These leaders encourage participation and contributions from group members and help group members feel more relevant and committed to the decision-making process. In participative theories, however, the leader retains the right to allow the input of others.

### 7. Management Theories

Management theories (also known as "Transactional theories") focus on the role of supervision, organization and group performance. These theories base leadership on a system of rewards and punishments. Managerial theories are often used in business; when employees are successful, they are rewarded; when they fail, they are reprimanded or punished.

## 8. Relationship Theories

Relationship theories (also known as “Transformational theories”) focus upon the connections formed between leaders and followers. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task. These leaders focus on the performance of group members, but also want each person to fulfill his or her potential. Leaders with this style often have high ethical and moral standards.

### *Transformational Leadership Behavior*

Transformational leadership is a process whereby leaders are able to transform their own goals into those of the organization for the good of the organization and the members within that organization. Transformational leaders are able to engender higher levels of motivation and commitment among followers by creating feelings of trust and loyalty by empowering, consulting and delegating (Mullins, 2005). Burns (1978) was the first to conceptualise and develop leadership theory as either transformational or transactional. Transformational leadership is often viewed in comparison and polarity to transactional leadership which is seen as autocratic and is based on the bureaucratic organizational structure and the legitimate authority that this creates. A transactional leader tells employees what to do and uses the organizational rewards and punishment system to achieve objectives (Mullins, 2005). Transformational leadership however, goes beyond this task-oriented rewards exchange and takes leadership to the next level. Bass and Riggio (2006) argue that transformational leaders do much more with colleagues and followers than arrange a series of rewards for tasks:

‘The leadership inspires followers with challenges and persuasion, providing both meaning and understanding. The leadership is intellectually stimulating, expanding the followers’ use of their ability. Finally, the leadership is individually considerate, providing the follower with support, mentoring, and coaching.’

Transformational-transactional leadership theory according to Lai (2011) is one way in which the behaviors of leaders can be described and evaluated. Transformational leaders exhibit charisma and shared vision with their followers, stimulating others to produce exceptional work. Transactional leadership describes more of a “give and take” working relationship – rapport between leader and follower is established through exchange, such as a reward system for meeting particular objectives. Meta-analyses reveal that transformational leadership is correlated to more positive outcomes than any other leadership style, and it also predicts better contextual performance, describing follower performance above and beyond what is delineated by job requirements alone.

Transformational leadership embodies positive leadership traits emphasizing empowerment of followers. This concept fits well with contemporary organizational change and management theory which highlights the need for organizations to become less bureaucratic and hierarchical in favour of participation, team orientation and flexibility (Kark, 2004). Transformational leadership is defined by qualities of participation, empowerment, consultation and inclusion and transcends the autocratic style of transactional leadership, although Bass (1985) does point out that



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