



The effect of gender on leadership styles: the case of UAE public sector

Tamer F. Elewa*, Amira Nasr

Faculty of Business, British University in Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

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ABSTRACT

The business life has been generally perceived as a male activity because of its energy-exhaustive nature. Consequently, organizations have been expecting a work quality that reflects male standards of living in terms of availability and assertiveness, which led organizations to shape their leadership model by masculine principles and values. The present study examines whether female leadership is seen as effective as male leadership in a Middle Eastern context. A survey has been distributed to a random sample of employees working in the public sector and based in the United Arab Emirates, and a group of informal interviews were held to investigate the quantitative findings. The results obtained from 117 participants revealed that an average of 66.7% ($p < 0.0001$) of the population see that Male leaders can gain more control over employees than female leaders, and 10.3% ($p = 0.005$) see that male leaders are better than female leaders in making decisions versus 0.9% see the opposite. On the other side, 54.7% ($p < 0.0001$) see that female leaders are more inspirational than male leaders, and 31.6% ($p < 0.0001$) viewed female leaders as having better observational abilities than male leaders in the Middle East work environment (Cronbach's alpha 0.740). The paper concludes with a highlight on the role of education in building the social construction of gender and how it forms the individuals' perception of gender roles. As a result, stereotypes emerge, affecting the view of leaders, regardless of their actual current abilities.

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1. Introduction

For a long time organizations have been expecting males to be the standard of work quality in terms of availability and assertiveness, which led organizations to shape their leadership model by masculine principles and values. Women started to be involved in the business environment only in the 70's and that was the beginning of emergence of gender issues in the workplace. The successful leader has been debated as the one who has a wide mission that provides the followers with a valuable shared vision and a clear path to follow. Jagd (2009) claimed that "Leadership is a process involving three elements: influencing others to behave in a certain way; working with people in a group context; and influencing group members in the direction of a goal accomplishment." The whole concept of leadership was perceived as a traditional male vision associated to masculine values and to the male domination because the countries and civilizations' leaders have always been men. This perception faded with time and the traditional image of the leader who obligates, controls, punishes, rewards, transmits

knowledge and orders tasks has changed a lot. Nowadays leaders are closer to their teams as the organizations' structures are flatter than before due to the pressure of economic factors and desire to save on operating cost. The emergence of new organizational concepts like employee engagement and group willingness have also affected the way the "leadership" position is perceived, by giving more focus on the soft skills of people management and emotional intelligence than task control and staff monitoring.

Gender leadership has been one of the controversial topics in the business environment for ages. Previously, Middle Eastern societies did not involve women actively in the social and business life. The role of women did not exceed their responsibilities as mothers and wives in their houses. However, UAE has been a leader among the gulf council countries to encourage women to join the educational institutions in order to prepare themselves for leadership positions and contribute to the country success. Despite the initiatives from the government to support female leaders, the question that several business leaders had was: "Are female leaders as effective as male leaders?"

Culture has been proven to have a great effect on how individuals perceive certain leaders, from a

* Corresponding Author.

Email Address: tamer.elewa@buid.ac.ae (T.F. Elewa)

gender point of view. A big contributor to culture is always the education system, and in this regards Aurélie and Yann (2010) stated that "Defined roles and expectations of males / females are not the same. As a consequence, people are not educated in the same way according to their gender". It could be suggested then that the perceived gender-efficiency is embedded in the culture from young ages. But do those assumptions relate to an actual performance gap?

Kolb (1999) stressed that measures of attitude, experience and self-confidence should continue to be examined for their predictive value in leader emergence, rather than masculinity, and have the advantage of not relying on gender stereotype. These arguments represent a need for change in female leaders' attitude and highlight the need of women to show up long enough to gain the needed experience that will enable them to lead successfully. Otherwise, they will not be up to the level to possess leadership potential.

So if researchers agreed that gender should not be a factor in determining the efficiency of a leader, can the difference in gender leadership be due to the style of leadership?

Eagly and Johannesen (2001) reported that in 1950, Robert Bales has introduced the first two leadership styles that were classified as "interpersonally oriented style" and "task oriented style" based on the behaviors of the leaders. This categorization was considered to be a gender stereotypic one. Later on, transformational and transactional leadership styles were introduced by James Burns in 1978. So are those concepts equally applied in both genders?

Many researchers have conducted studies about gender leadership and they found out that women leaders tend to use transformational leadership style more than men. Bass et al. (1996) have conducted a study among a sample of middle and top managers saying that "female managers were rated as more transformational than male managers by both male and female subordinates." On the other hand, authors found out that the transactional leadership style represents the males' leadership style as it reflects the masculine characteristics. Bass et al. (1996) reported the subordinates' point of view that the transactional leadership style reflects the values of male leaders such as assertiveness, independence aggressiveness, ambitious, controlling and self-sufficient. The question could be "Will organizations benefit from one leadership style more than the other? Or a mix of styles is better?"

It is suggested that gender diversity in top management impacts the organization performance and market valuation positively (Carter et al., 2003; Krishnan and Park, 2005). Importantly, when it comes to appointing senior level directors, considering women enables the organization to draw from a broader pool of talent. Adams and Ferreira (2009) examined the impact of women being board members on the organization performance, they found out that female board

members put effort into monitoring. Also, their results further indicate that women in executive positions are more diligent in attending board meetings than men. Adams and Funk (2012) claimed that genders behavioral differences play a significant role in the executive levels. Their results suggest that organizations with female directors act in a more stakeholder friendly way. A different aspect of gender diversity relating to task has been discussed by Horwitz and Horwitz (2007). The authors conducted 35 studies of team diversity between 1985 and 2006. Their findings suggest that task related diversity such as function and education positively influences the team performance, while bio demographic diversity like gender and ethnicity does not.

DDI's Global Leadership Forecast 2011 (Boatman and Wellins, 2011) reported that the performance of an organization is directly proportional to the quality of leadership talent. There are two reasons why gender diversity is important in top positions. First, women represent half of the talent pool so it is critical to have the best brains of both men and women at the time of talent shortage. Secondly, there is a big question being asked, does it really matter for corporations to have women at the top? Does it matter for the performance and competitiveness? Ralph Norris, former CEO of Commonwealth Bank of Australia claim that "Women in leadership. It's just good business. There's no difference in leadership potential between women and men; making sure you can capture a better share of high-performing women is better for the organization" (Desvaux et al., 2007).

In a recent research, Dezso and Ross (2012) evolved a theoretical structure for the relationship between women in executive positions and the organization performance. Their model illustrates many aspects about social and informational diversity, effects of women in top management and differences in management behavior. Marie-Christine Laible (2013) developed a broader approach that includes some moderating effects that form the diversity-performance link in top management.

Singh et al. (2008) claim that skills, experience and knowledge differ between men and women, and these differences lead to a competitive advantage through diversity. Gender diversity can emerge in educational and work related experiences (Ahern and Dittmar, 2012; Simpson et al., 2010) and also in management and risk taking behaviors (Aspestegui et al., 2012).

2. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to study the gender effect on leadership styles and organizations in UAE. Since the aim was to develop the readers' awareness and knowledge about the importance of women's role in organization specifically in top positions, a survey was conducted among 117 employees in different organizations from various industries in

UAE. The research has used a mixed methodology of qualitative-quantitative approach. For quantitative data, a survey was distributed using a binary (Yes/No) response questions and a likert (1-5) response set of questions, aiming to identify the degree of agreement / disagreement with the research questions. As for the qualitative data, informal interviews were held aiming to understand the context of respondents' answers, and why they thought of the results provided.

Di Pofi (2001) and Weisburg et al. (1989) have supported the use of mixed methodologies and highlighted that when combining methods in a survey design, qualitative methods are recommended for letting respondents determine their own frame of reference for answers, whereas quantitative methods are recommended when quick tabulation or empirical generalizability is desired. Mixing quantitative (closed-ended items) and qualitative (open-ended items) data collection approaches within the same method (i.e., in the questionnaire) has also been labeled "intra-method mixing" (Johnson and Turner, 2003).

The methodology followed was done aiming to achieve the following benefits:

1. Understand how effective do employees see female leaders.
2. Compare between the leadership aspects among males / females.
3. Understand the reasons behind the employees' perception

Out of our sample of 117 employees, little more than half (55 percent) were male and the remaining 45% were female respondents. In reply of a question who makes a better leader, most of the respondents believed that both men and women equally make successful leaders, with 88%.

To examine the reliability of the data the Cronbach's alpha was also calculated. Most researchers consider alpha at 0.70 to be an

acceptable criterion for adequate scale reliability. In this study the Cronbach's alpha for all the variables was 0.74.

3. Results

The sample analysis indicated that there are common traits between men and women. The respondents stated that men and women are equal in most of traits, with about 92% for ambitious, 88% for intelligence, 89% decision making and 73% critical thinking (Table 1). However, two-third of the respondents agreed that men outperform women in controlling and women are better at inspiration with 55% (Table 1).

Table 1: Perception of respondents about the traits to be truer for men or women

Traits	Men	Women	Equally	Total
Ambitious	6.8	1.7	91.5	100.0
Intelligent	7.7	4.3	88.0	100.0
Decision making	10.3	0.9	88.8	100.0
Observation	6.0	31.6	62.4	100.0
Critical thinking	15.4	12.0	72.6	100.0
Control	66.7	4.3	29.0	100.0
Inspiration	7.7	54.7	37.6	100.0

Many questions are being asked about leadership styles and gender as lots of women started to participate in leadership and handle its executive positions that traditionally used to be held by men. Do women apply different leadership styles than men? We have included this question in our survey to know what the employees' (leaders and followers) feedback about it is. Our findings in Table 2 show that women follow different leadership styles than men with about 90%. Only 10% of them did not agree with it (Table 2).

Table 2: Perception of respondents about the leadership styles

Women leaders follow different leadership styles than men leaders	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	105	89.7
No	12	10.3
Total	117	100.0

Also, referring to Table 1 above, men leaders are more into controlling (67%), while women leaders' style is centered on inspiration (55%). Consequently, women are more likely to be transformational leaders who are able to detect the weak areas and develop them. For example, assist the employees to develop their skills and motivate them. On the other hand, men are more likely to be transactional leaders who are able to set clear goals and achieve them. For example, use punishments and rewards to maintain the control and compliance.

According to our survey and as discussed previously, men lead in a different way than women do. As a result, the effect on organizations will change accordingly. This conclusion has been proved in our survey with 61% of the responders

"completely agree" that different genders do influence the organization and leadership styles, followed by "somewhat agree" with 26%. The result is represented in Table 3. Managers who apply transformational leadership style, mostly women, are more likely to exercise developing the employees' motivational level, enhancing their value system and improving their skills. This approach basically helps the followers to be expressive, adaptive to the new tasks and work environment changes. However, managers who practice transactional leadership style that is also known as managerial leadership, mostly men, have an exchange relationship with their subordinates. This relationship identifies the punishment-rewards concept. The subordinates give something for

another thing in return. When subordinates perform well, they receive some type of reward. When they perform poorly, they will be punished in some way. This is how gender influence leadership styles and organization performance as they shape the institutional strategies including their execution and effectiveness (Table 3).

Table 3: Gender influence on leadership styles and organizations

	Number	Percentage
Completely disagree	7	6.0
Somewhat disagree	6	5.1
Neutral	3	2.6
Somewhat agree	30	25.6
Completely agree	71	60.7
Total	117	100.0

When participants were asked about their organizational supports for the development of women leaders, nearly half of the responded reported that their organization is doing to a moderate extent for the development of women leaders whereas one-third of them stated to a great extent (Table 4).

Table 4: Organization’s supports for the development of women leaders

	Number	Percentage
Not at all	9	7.7
To a small extent	10	8.5
To a moderate extent	56	47.9
To a great extent	38	32.5
Don't know	4	3.4

These findings represent the activeness of organizations in UAE in developing their women leaders. These results are considered to be a serious indicator of a well-designed future plans that offer development programs to support the needs of women leaders. On the other hand, some organizations in UAE provide supportive climates for women, with 7.69% of respondents said that their organizations provide no support for women. For those organizations that are highly concerned about building a diverse leadership, they should seize their women capabilities and do more for their leadership development that will eventually affect the organizational performance positively.

According to our survey, UAE is one of the countries that consider the establishment of requirements for women representation in executive positions as part of its diversity plans. The aspects represented in Fig. 1 are taken into account in business performance criteria for executive management in UAE organizations. The organizations participated in our survey provided their answers about their level of concern regarding women in leadership. The most issue that garnered the response of “very concerned” was “Having enough women in executive positions” (56%), followed by the response of “somewhat concerned” “Women in leadership are not advancing at the same rate of men” (49%) (See Fig. 1). According to

Desvaux et al. (2007) organizations that strongly represent women in top executive positions are also the organizations that perform best. Also, the study suggests that preparing women to lead high positions is one of the participation factors for competitiveness.

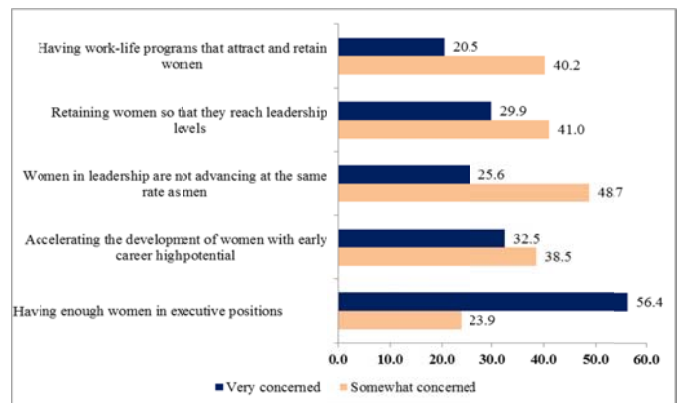


Fig. 1: Organization's level of concern regarding the following aspects of women in leadership

4. Conclusion

Based on our data analysis and the survey responses we collected from employees in various positions in both government and private organizations in the United Arab Emirates, to highlight the issue of gender leadership, the following recommendations are made:

1. A lot of women in UAE are in executive roles and some of them are holding ministerial positions. The UAE Government has to continue supporting and facilitating women leadership roles. His highness, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed Al Makhtoum, The Prince Minister, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai is strongly supporting women rights taking into account women leadership. The Government of Dubai is concerned of the development of women business leaders in the UAE organizations.
2. Motivation is one of the key influencers that can bring out the best of anyone. Organizations should support and empower their women by providing them with intensive development programs in order to enhance their experience and sharpen their business skills. On the other hand, women should also work for self-assessment and development to be capable enough to handle high managerial and leadership positions.
3. Men and women leaders should not be perceived as competitors, but rather as complementary to the success of the organization. In order to raise this awareness, the organizational norms should be examined for gender bias.

To conclude, the research questions above can be briefly answered as follows: question one: yes, women follow different leadership styles than men. But we cannot say that one is more effective than the other. Both can learn from each other to adapt to the business needs. Question two: no, women leadership

styles are not less effective by any means. In fact, they have their own strength points that contribute to the organizations success and that men can learn from. Also, we have to highlight that the notion that women's leadership style is less effective than the men's is driven by socialization and not a fact based. Question three: to a great extent, each gender is more likely to apply different leadership style that contributes to the success of the organization and act as an added value to the overall performance. The writer of this paper suggests that further researches better to be focused on the individuals' effectiveness and how they can contribute and add value to their positions rather than the individual's gender role or sex. So now that we have a clear understanding of gender leadership, how long should we wait for a perfect equality among CEOs?

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