

Strengths Associated with Female Leadership

Businesses are leaving behind the notion of putting women in leadership positions as a matter of supporting gender equality and instead putting them in those positions because of the particular strengths that have been associated with female leadership. From a global HRM perspective, gender is not only an issue of diversity or equality but also an area of opportunity for maximizing organizational effectiveness. Women have been shown to possess the 'soft powers' typically associated with female leadership behaviors and also 'hard powers' typically associated with male leadership (Emmerik et al, 2008). Capitalizing on diverse global management competencies can enable companies to secure a competitive advantage (Prahalad & Hamel 1990), and female leadership attributes represent an important area of opportunity.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a leadership concept that, like transformational leadership, is characterized by aptitudes in which female leaders are shown to be superior. Women have been shown to score higher than men on assessments of emotional intelligence (Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, 1998). This may be the result of the natural superiority of women in communication and interpersonal situations. Argyle (1990) found that women are more perceptive, empathetic, and adaptable than men, and women are also more expressive, sensitive, and interested in what other people have to say (Eagley, 1987). Reinforcing these observations, Petrides and Furnham (2000) found that women score higher than men in the area of social skills.

Some leadership strengths are typically associated with female leaders while others are associated with males, but empirical research has demonstrated that women in leadership positions can often exhibit the aptitudes most often considered males strengths. A study of business leadership in several different countries showed that female leaders were assessed as more effective than male leaders in twelve of sixteen areas of competency (Zenger & Folkman, 2012). They scored higher not only in dimensions typically associated with female attributes, such as the ability to be sensitive and supportive, but also in other areas commonly associated

with male attributes. Other studies comparing male and female leadership styles showed no significant difference (Manning, 2002), but identifying the ways in which female leaders sometimes achieve better outcomes may depend on the criteria being used to assess and compare them with male leaders. The study by Manning 2002 is becoming attenuated as more recent research focuses on a new set of criteria associated with several improved outcomes: transformational leadership. When the criteria for measuring transformational leadership are used, female leaders tend to come out ahead (Chao & Tian, 2011).

Transformational Leadership

A study by Manning (2002) supports the notion of equality among male and female leaders, but it does not come to any sure conclusion about the important characteristics that distinguish male and female leadership from one another, and some more recent studies have focused on criteria associated with a style of leadership that has become increasingly significant for global HRM: transformational leadership. Women in leadership positions have been shown to be more transformational (Chao & Tian, 2011). This observation is significant because the effectiveness of transformational leadership continues to be supported by research evidence. Takahashi et al (2012) identified transformational leadership as the most effective for improving performance, attitudes, and behaviors within an organization.

The concept of transformational leadership is extremely interesting from the perspective of Global HRM. Takahashi et al were comparing transformational leadership with the four other most popular styles: trait theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory, and leader-member exchange. Likewise, a review and analysis of 45 research studies revealed that females use more transformational behaviors than males (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). To the extent that transformational leadership can have beneficial effects on an international company, such companies can become more successful if they find the best ways to harness the strengths of female leadership.

A specific example of the way female transformational leaders can benefit a company is by enhancing organizational commitment (Vandenberghe & Bentein, 2009). Participative

leadership behaviors and leader consideration behaviors correlate positively with both female leadership (Haber & Komives, 2009) and organizational commitment (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Commitment is one of the HRM topics that are given the most attention by researchers because of its strong relationship to retention, productivity, job satisfaction, the success of planned organizational change efforts, and other important outcomes, any empirical indication that female leadership can enhance organizational commitment makes it urgent to study the ways in which businesses can optimize the utilization of their strengths.

In addition to participative leadership behaviors and leader consideration behavior, Mathieu and Zajac found that leader communication is positively correlated with organizational commitment. Since the strengths generally associated with female leadership include those competencies related to communication such as social and emotional skills, then it is reasonable to expect that certain benefits can be achieved for an organization if these strengths are effectively harnessed. For example, in one research study that was conducted three decades ago – prior to the new paradigm of female leadership gaining momentum – Riggio (1986) observed that females tend to be more skillful than males at encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. Women are better prepared for sending spontaneous and emotional messages with facial expressions while also being astute when interpreting such facial cues from others, and men are less communicative in this regard. In general, subtle and nonverbal communication skills are useful for effective charismatic leadership as well as conveying a visionary message to team members (Conger & Kanungo, 1987).

A relationship between female leadership and organizational commitment alone would be enough to warrant thorough attention to this optimization, but commitment is only one of many areas in which female leadership can enhance outcomes. This paper focuses specifically on female leadership strengths in culturally diverse settings, so the strengths of female leadership are to be discussed in relation to the challenges associated with cross-cultural leadership. To this end, scholars can again consider the superiority of female leaders in using and interpreting nonverbal cues (Riggio, 1986). When language barriers interfere with communication, the ability

to use nonverbal communication effectively becomes all the more important. Research showing that women are better at nonverbal communication can be cited as evidence that the strengths of female leaders are especially applicable in cross-cultural roles.

Relationship Competence

International business involves managing cultural diversity, which is a responsibility that requires leaders to have relationship competence (Aditya & House, 2002). Aditya and House introduce the term 'interpersonal acumen' to refer to a leader's ability to understand the behaviors and motivations of followers. Manning (2003) suggests that strengths for managing cultural diversity, including relationship competence and emotional intelligence all may be related to the attachment styles that were formed during childhood. These attributes may be difficult to develop through professional development, seminars, and so forth, because one's relationship competence derived from attachment style is relatively enduring, and HRM professionals should remain mindful of this when attempting to recruit the most talented cross-cultural leaders

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