

Maximizing the Benefits of Female Cross-Cultural Leadership

International firms are exploring the advantages of putting females in leadership positions as a matter of Strategic Human Resource Management, because several elements of effective cross-cultural leadership are also prominent in literature about the characteristics of female leadership (Manning, 2002). In this paper, female leadership is discussed as a way to meet the challenges associated with a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce. By identifying the best practices for utilizing those strengths and mitigating weaknesses, it may be possible for businesses to secure a competitive advantage through the optimization of female cross-cultural leadership.

The prospect of capitalizing on the leadership strengths of women is especially significant in international settings, where cross-cultural leadership is an important concern (Aditya & House, 2002). First, the leadership styles of women have been shown to be more aligned with the elements of transformational leadership (Chao & Tian, 2011), and some researchers consider this style of leadership to be one of the most effective approaches for improving organizational outcomes in general (Takahashi, Ishikawa, and Kanai, 2012). In turn, transformational leadership has been shown to be an effective approach to use in cross-cultural settings. For this reason, it is essential to focus research efforts on the best ways to utilize female leadership in international and culturally diverse business operations.

Moreover, in several specific areas of competency relevant to cross-cultural leadership females have proven to be generally superior to males (Zenger & Folkman, 2012); for example, the fact that women have been shown to be more effective at using and interpreting nonverbal messages in body language and facial expression Riggio (1986) gives female cross-cultural leaders an advantage in the presence of language barriers. This example reflects only one of many concepts linked to the advantages to be gained from putting women in cross-cultural leadership roles, and these concepts are discussed in the sections below...

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.

[continued....]

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