

# Women and leadership

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Scholars of management, politics, history and psychology have attempted all best to identify the essential part of leadership since classical times. In last decade, the female leadership has attracted increasing attention in academic circles since in business practice there has emerged a new era for female leaders (Sharpe, R., 2000; Eagly, A. H. & Carli, L. L., 2003). Women has much potential to play more important role in firms in particular the leading position (Alvesson, M., & Billing, Y. D., 1992; Hefferman, 2002). A key question for this issue is the reason why one firm hire a woman is that she is a woman or she really has the competitive advantage. Now as a comparatively new endeavor this essay focuses on the study of the relationship between women and leadership.

More Specifically, the essay is to examine the arguments to explain why female leadership received so little attention in the past, to show the difference between male and female power, therefore to demonstrate the female leadership advantage and disadvantage of which the aim is to use the knowledge derived from the study of female leadership to improve our understanding of leadership and our management behavior.

After years of analyzing about the effectiveness of leadership, some managers seem to get the answer to who is the right one to hire as a leader: a female. The first time brought up the idea is in 1990 by Helgesen. He is the writer of feminist trade book. The core idea of the book that women could be effective leaders and play important role in the mainstream culture. There has emerged a new era of female leaders.

Business Week suggests that women do have the potential to turn into respectful and effective leaders (Sharpe, 2000). In addition, Fast Company <https://assignbuster.com/women-and-leadership/>

even published an article arguing that the future will rely much on the women. (Hefferman, 2002) This idea was supported again by Business Week. They point out that men do have advantage in global competitive environment, or rather that men may turn to be the losers since “ the values mental power over might”. (Conlin, 2003).

However, in the perceptive of many academic leadership researchers, these articles about female advantage are not as convincing as their academic conclusion is that gender in fact has little to do with the effectiveness, efficiency and style of leadership (Dobbins & Platz, 1986). However, what should academic researchers do to make the public be aware of what they conclude is to approach the idea with a more sophisticated method and theory to show the implications of gender in organizations. Though the methodology that the business journalists has used appears to be too simple to convince the public, it did uncover a fact that women has a climbing tendency in career especially the proportion of female leader have increased a lot than the past.

The leader traits have been a hot topic in researchers for a long time. First of all, the theory needs to contain what kind of behaviors and characteristics that an effective leader must have. Situational leadership theories have showed that the effectiveness of leadership is closely related to contextual variables (Chemers, 1997). For instance, in general, the leadership style should adjust with the members’ personality, diversity, and the complexity of task they got. Unfortunately, the fact is, historically, leadership has been study based on a masculine enterprise more or less. Female leadership did not get the interest of both executives and academics. Nevertheless, in all

likelihood, female leaders do have the qualities such as a sense of cooperation and collaboration, a sense of showing respect and care, which are important element of leadership. Hence women might have the competitive in some types of workplace and industries.

Before looking into the female disadvantages and advantages as leadership, the essay would rather show the changing business realities for female leadership. In 1972, in America women only held 18 percent of administrative and managerial positions, however, surprisingly, the proportion climbed dramatically, reaching 46 percent in 2002, which means women could play almost same important role in career (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1982, 2002). What is more, in the Fortune500, the percentage of women among officers is 15. 7% and among CEOs is 1. 4% in spite of low penetration (Black, 2003; Catalyst, 2002). The data also shows that the percentages of women in politics are also increased a lot. Although men seem to still play more important roles in all kinds of positions, these changes still show the necessity of research the female leadership.

The rise in female leaders is along with the changes in practices and theories of leadership. Nowadays, the theory of effective leadership emphasizes on the collaboration and teamwork and that leaders should share power more than that in the past days. On some level the modern economy society with the theory of effective leadership gives women advantage in their leadership. Also, the disadvantages in the past prejudicial masculine terms has been eroded.

Although women are playing increasingly important role in career, unfortunately, there ae still some innate discrimination and prejudice against

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female leaders. First, considering the the stereotypical judgments of the group, the methodology used in group evaluation is not just since it ignores the qualifications and behaviors of group members, in all likelihood. Based on the role incongruity theory proposed by stereotype research, it is men who are generally regarded to be more qualified compared to women. Women tend to be more communal than men. In practical terms, the communal qualities, such as selflessness and warmth, which are associated with women, are different with the agentic qualities of men that people consider as characteristic of successful and effective leaders. As a result, men seem to have more qualities required in effective and successful leadership, which is a big prejudice against women as leaders (Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M., 2000; Eagly, 2003).

Here is example showing that the obstacles that women have to overcome provided that they attempt to be effective leaders. A field study revealing judgments of leadership qualities among U. S. Army captains when they attend a training course of leadership. The result shows a bias which gives men advantages in all kinds of judgments while it is unfavorable when women were judged as leaders. In addition, another field study about a university cadet corps presents the same results that the evaluations of capabilities and effectiveness associated with leadership characters were tendentious to female leadership, unfortunately.

According to the meta-analytic evidence and some research, women are a little more likely to effectively lead in some ways of transactional, transformational and laissez-faire leadership. Nevertheless, this research also uncovers the areas and domain that women tend to have disadvantage

compared to male leaders. With both advantage and disadvantage, how should female leaders perform to compete with their male colleagues? This question should be answered with direct effectiveness evaluations which includes the performance and outcome they promoted.

A number of researcher point out that it is woke context that determines the success of women compared to men. In the domain where male leaders paly dominate role, it seems extremely difficult for women to get the access and opportunity to get promoted. Put it another way, women do not have much potential to obtain the leader position is particular workplace (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In order to verify the this hypothesis of role incongruity, Eagly et al. (1995) performed a meta-analysis including 96 studies, the aim of which is to examine the differences and effectiveness of men and women in leader positions. The core requirement of this test is to evaluate the responsiveness to leadership of women and men.

Therefore, the review attempted to stich to the studies that would equate female and male behavior. In these 22 laboratories studies and 74 organizational studies, the female and male leaders held the same leading roles. Obviously the study was restricted in some specific areas. For example, many data come from elementary schools in selective cities. In terms of industry, they focus on the middle managers in specific industries. In addition, the methodly used in most studies were subjective measures to evaluate the outstanding performance of leaders and so is the rating system (objective). Hence clearly, these subjective methodology, in all likelihood were biased.

In spite of some innate limitations, the results of these studies have showed a lot of differences. However, these studies finally successfully predicted the expected effect. The results showed support for the hypothesis of role incongruity: It is more likely that women do not have the potential to take lead position in particular industries and areas where men have advantage which we call it masculine terms while have much potential to get promoted in the roles of less masculine terms. Consistent with these expectations, here are some following findings. Firstly, in the male dominated leading positions, the performance of men is superior to women. Secondly, since that the proportion of male subordinates increased, the disadvantage of women is eroding.

Thirdly, it seems that the effectiveness of women is negatively related to the proportion of men among the leadership. More interestingly, although women do not have advantage in a traditionally masculine environment and military organizations, women could get superior performance in in governmental, educational, and organizations of social service. Finally, relative to men, women performed particularly well and effectively in some middle-level leadership positions, comparing to some supervisory or line positions. These finding gives managers and researchers a lot of positive information about hiring a female as a leader.