AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE ARAB WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study is to explore and assess the rise of female leaders in the Arab World and their strategies for success. Several scholars in the area of leadership have projected the beginning of a new leadership paradigm with increasing numbers of female leaders. The premise is that female leaders are more in tune with the transformational leadership paradigm. In addition, they have the most effective dimensions of the transactional style. The study sample included 101 female leaders from Kuwait, Egypt and Tunisia. Data were collected using a questionnaire and interviews. The study results suggest a paradigm shift in the Arab World is occurring. Furthermore the results are consistent with the current literature regarding female leaders as very competent. Specifically female leaders were perceived as superior as male leaders with respect to the following characteristics: cooperation, aggressiveness, competitiveness and concern about interpersonal relationships. Some differences were found between Arab countries. Conceptual implications relate to leadership paradigm and empirical implications are relate to training and development programs, organizational practices and organization culture.

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of literature that indicates the potential superiority of female leaders over male leaders (see e.g. Eagly and Carli,2003). Even more some studies reported that female leaders outperform males in terms of bottom line results defined as profitability (Kotiranta et. Al. 2007). The current study examines the state of the Arab female leaders. The major theme is the issue of females potential superiority with respect to Arab leaders.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section the relevant literature is discussed. Then the data and methodology are presented. The paper continues wiath a presentation of the empirical results. The paper closes with some concluding comments and suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Basic differences between male and female managers has been debatable for some time. Traditional gender role stereotypes indicate that males are masculine, self-reliant, aggressive, competitive and decisive. Females are feminine, sympathetic, gentle, shy, and sensitive to the needs of others. The critical issue is the extent that these differences are manifested by male and female managers. Three distinct perspectives have emerged (Powell,1990). The first perspective is that there is no difference. Feminine stereotypes are rejected by females pursuing managerial careers. Females mangers have needs, values and leadership styles similar to males who pursue the same career. The second perspective is that there are stereotypical differences. Female and male managers differ in ways consistent with the stereotypes. Life experience and traditions reinforce masculinity in males and femininity in females. The third perspective is there are non-stereotypical differences. Female and male managers differ in ways that are not consistent with stereotypes. Female managers my exhibit unique managerial styles in the sense they include

masculine and feminine stereotypes. There is substantial evidence to suggest the third perspective is a more accurate presentation of reality (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Erkurt, 2009; Grant, 1988; Gupton and Slick,1966; Heglesen,1990; Kotiranta et al, 2007).

The year 2000 witnessed a joint study by the Change Foundation and the Center for Research on Woman at Wellesley College (Erkut, 2009). This study sought to learn from the experiences of successful female leaders, in order to help other females rise to top leadership positions. The study included 60 eminent and prominent female leaders. The interviewed leaders were elected politicians, college presidents, independent authors and scientists, university professors, leaders in industry, medicine, law and other professions. The study results indicated that leaders achieved prominence by leading in a variety of ways, depending on their work environment context. Leadership styles reflect differences in racial and ethnic backgrounds, career paths, and their fields among other things. This study showed some general characteristics of female leaders as follows: they were tenacious and paid little attention to obstacles in their work life, they were optimistic with a sense of mission that propelled their actions. The female leaders in the current study adopted a general philosophy of "know and value yourself and let others know." They capitalized on their strengths and emphasized the need to be assertive in gaining visibility.

Some leaders identified a framework for understanding the roots and practices of leadership as emerging from mothering (Erkut, 2009). The mothering metaphor serves as a foundation for training and describing leadership behavior. In a study jointly conducted by Caliper, a Princeton based management consulting firm and Aurora, a London based firm, female leaders were found to have a tendency to be more assertive, persuasive, willing to take risks and have a stronger need to get things done than their male counterparts (http://www.hr.com, 2005). In addition this study found that top female executives are more empathic, flexible and possessed stronger interpersonal skills than their male counterparts. The differences in leadership styles between males and females in the above study starts with active listening that is accompanied by learning , reflecting, then implementing a plan that incorporates the best ideas.

Some studies suggest that females make better managers (eg. Chernesky, 1988; 1996; and Krotz,2002). Chernesky (1988) indicated that females tend to find sameness and commonalities with people. Males ten to command and control. Females tend to build consensus and unique perspective of caring to management positions.

Chernesky (1996) reported results of a study that identified nine categories in which females excel as managers :concern for people, sensitivity to the needs of female workers, investment in workers, a cooperative orientation, a global perspective, openness in communication, recognition of inequalities, concern for environmental quality, and use of intuition.

Posner & Kouzes (1993) examined a sample of 5,300 leaders and 31,000 observers, with females comprising 30% of the sample. They found that female leaders were rated higher than males in two leadership qualities. The first, which conforms to gender stereotypes is called "encouraging the heart". This concept includes giving feedback and recognizing, rewarding and motivating individuals and teams. The second quality can be called "modeling the way." This element includes acting with integrity, demonstrating competence, organizing and moving projects, meeting commitments and milestones and persevering through problems.

Krotz (2002) suggested that females make better managers because they are usually tolerant to differences and sensitive to diversity. Females are skilled as people pleasers. But the fact remains that females remain largely underrepresented and sometimes unnecessarily uncomfortable in positions of authority. Kotiranta, Kovalainen and Rouvinen (2007) indicate that a company led by a female CEO is on average slightly more than a one percentage point and may reach ten percent more profitable than a corresponding company led by a male CEO. This results hold after taking into consideration factors expected to

influence profits including size differences. Even more the above study found the share of female board members has a similar positive impact. These findings are a significant indication of the rise of female leaders.

Flora (2007) reported the conclusions of 45 leadership studies, which indicated that females on average are more likely than males to enact a transformational leadership style, which motivates, empowers and cares about subordinates. She reported that males are more likely to use a transactional leadership style, which employs punishment for poor performance and rewards for good performance. The preferred transformational leadership style, is more suitable for females because it includes nurturing features, and females are generally socialized to be nurturers.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study has two research questions. First, is there empirical evidence for the rise of the female leaders in the Arab World? The focus of the current study is to explore empirically the evidence for the rise of the female leaders. There are many approaches that can be adopted to accomplish this goal. The approach adopted in the current study is to explore perceptions of the Arab female leaders of their strengths and how do they fare with their male leaders counterparts. The second question is: What are the success strategies adopted by female leaders in the Arab World? The literature reports on multiple strategies for achieving success (Erkurt,2009). The current study explores strategies adopted by Arab female leaders to achieve success. The major criteria for evaluating these strategies are their comprehensiveness and diversity.

Data were collected in two phases: A set of questionnaires was administered to a sample of 101 successful Arab female leaders and in depth interviews were carried out with one third of the sample. The questionnaire items (five point Likert type scale) and interview guidelines were borrowed from Gupton and Slick (1996).   The questionnaires were slightly adopted and translated into Arabic and French. They measure (a) beliefs about female issues in the work place; (b) leadership characteristics; (c) career paths, career motives, beliefs, professional career experiences, career related barriers, and career assessment; and (d) significant life influences affecting career ; (e) demographics and (f) best advice for females aspiring to be leaders. The current study is based on a specific set of the data collected namely the items in elements a and b above.

A sample of 101 females used in the study, all occupied high-ranking positions in their organizations. They were Kuwaiti, Tunisian and Egyptian nationals who were working in their native countries and were regarded in their communities as "successful leaders". Of the total sample 31 respondents were from Kuwait, 36 from Tunisia and 34 from Egypt. The three countries were chosen by design because they provide distinctly different socio-political and working environments for female leaders. All respondents had university or postgraduate degrees and received some training or education in advanced countries. Most of them worked in the public sector and about a fifth held (or were holding at the time of the survey), ministerial, assistant ministerial or top executive positions (especially in Tunisia). Most were in the age group 40-50 years, had good health, married and had two children.

RESULTS

The results reported in this study are based on the full sample of 101 female leaders. Some differences were found with respect to the issues at hand among the three Arab countries, Kuwait, Egypt and Tunisia. However the difference were judged not to affect the findings and conclusions. In addition, the current study focuses on the view of female leaders in the Arab World in general.

The General Situation of Female Arab Leaders

The factor analysis of the general situation facing female leaders (26 items in the questionnaire) produced nine clean factors. The data reported in Table one include the findings with respect to two factors that are more relevant to the current study, human orientation and task orientation. These two factors were selected because they are frequently reported in the leadership literature (Bass,1990).

The descriptive statistics of the two factor items indicate a strong orientation for both human and task orientations. Female leaders were asked to report their level of agreement with the each item of the scales on a five point Likert type scale. The human orientation style has three items as follows: 1)Females in general are more sensitive and handle issues better than males (mean= 4.0, STD=1.2); 2) most females are more competent than males in managing team work (mean=3.77, STD=1.2); 3) Most females are more skilled in motivating others and achieving results (mean=4.0,STD=1.1). Two items of the human orientation style have high means of 4.0., while the third item has a mean of 3.7, indicating that female leaders believe they have strong human oriented style.

The task oriented style has three items as follows: 1) the majority of female leaders are as competent as their male counterparts (mean=4.2, STD=1.0), 2) females compared to males are more skilled in organizing work (mean=4.3,STD=.8), 3) the majority of females care equally about specifying the work processes as well as the end results (mean=4.2,STD=.8). The means of all three task oriented style variables have high means of 4.2 or higher. This indicates that female leaders believe they have strong task oriented style. The data reported in Table 1, indicate that female leaders perceive themselves to be more human and more task oriented compared to male leaders.

Table 1: Female Leaders Perception of the Human and Task Oriented Styles of Female Leadership

Dimensions of **L**eadership	Mean	STD.
Human oriented style		
Females in general are more sensitive and handle issues better than males	4.0	1.2
Most females are more competent than males in managing team work	3.7	1.2
Most females are more skilled in motivating others and achieving results	4.0	1.1
Task oriented style		
The majority of female leaders are as competent as their male counterparts	4.2	1.0
Females compared to males are more skilled in organizing work	4.3	.8
The majority of females care equally about specifying the work processes as well as the end results	4.2	.8

This table shows the descriptive statistics of the human and task oriented styles of leadership of female leaders.

Leadership Characteristics of Female and Male Leaders

Female leaders were asked to compare female and male leaders along a number of leadership characteristics. The results are reported in Table 2. The larger the value the more superior the female leaders are compared to male leaders. A' 3' value indicates that female leaders are better than male leaders. A '2' value indicates that the female and male leaders are the same. A '1' value indicates that female leaders are inferior to male leaders. The self-reported perceptions of female leaders indicate female superiority in all leadership characteristics except motivated by power. Female leaders perceive themselves be superior to male leaders with respect to cooperation (mean 2.70), caring about family (mean=2.65), caring about job (mean= 2.62), control but having a human orientation (mean=2.57), careful in selecting words (mean= 2.54), competitive (mean=2.51), caring about how the office looks (mean=2.46), aggressiveness (mean=2.38), and caring about human relations (mean=2.37). Female leaders perceive themselves to be more cooperative, care more about family, care more about job, more in control but human oriented, more careful in selecting words , more competitive, more aggressive and

cares more about human relations. The self-reported perceptions do not constitute conclusive evidence. It is however an indication of the very positive mood of thinking and the spirit among the female leaders.

Further analysis was done through factor analysis. The above mentioned ten leadership characteristics reported in Table 2 were factor analyzed., using varaimax rotation. The results of the leadership characteristics analysis produced four clean factors. The first factor was" social orientation". The second factor "masculine orientation." The third factor was "power orientation" and the fourth was "feminine orientation." These factors collectively explain 64% of the variance. The factor analysis results suggest that female leaders can exhibit feminine and masculine behaviors as well as combine social and power orientations. If these results are supported in future research, then one can conclude that female leaders exhibit a complex style of leadership, which is conducive to effective leadership in different situations.

Table 2: Comparing the Leadership Characteristics of Female Leaders with Their Male Leaders Counterparts

The leadership characteristics	Mean	STD.
Cooperation	2.70	.5
Cared about the family	2.65	.6
Cares about job	2.62	.5
In control but human oriented	2.57	.7
Careful in selecting words	2.54	.7
Competitive	2.51	.6
Care about how the office looks	2.46	.7
Aggressive	2.38	.7
Care about human relations	2.37	.8
Motivated by power	1.55	.7

This table shows that female leaders perceive themselves as superior to their male counterparts in all leadership characteristics except motivation by power.

Success Strategies Adopted by Female Leaders

In this section we examine success strategies adopted by female leaders. The data collected from the interviews showed that the Arab female leaders adopted a wide range of varied success strategies. These strategies are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Success Strategies of Arab Female Leaders

Self-development and reading	Training programs
Effective Communication Skills	Work Commitments
Decision Making Skills	Team Work Skills
Honesty	Self Confidence
Being Responsible and Dependable	Good Working Relationships
Job Knowledge	Benefiting from Colleagues
Desire to Excel	Outstanding Performance
Being Ambitious	Desire to Make Changes
Having Mentors	Securing the Support of Family
Securing Support of Colleagues and Bosses	

This table shows factors associated with success identified by Arab Female Leaders.

As a final data examination, we complete a factor analysis on the comparative characteristics of female and male leaders. The results are presented in Table 4. The results show that female leaders exhibit a leadership style that contains four major factors representing social, masculine, power and feminine orientations.

Table 4: The Factor Analysis Results of the Comparative Leadership Characteristics of Female Leaders and Their Male Leaders Counterparts

Leadership Characteristics	Factor 1 Social Orientation	Factor 2 Masculine Orientation	Factor 3 Power orientation	Factor 4 Feminine Orientation
Cooperation				.70
Cares about family	.73			
Cares about job		.54		
In control but human oriented			.77	
Careful in selecting words	.66			
Competitive		.72		
Cares about how the office looks				.64
Aggressive		.78		
Cares about human relations	.70			
Motivated by power			.63	
Variance Explained	.17	.16	.13	.12

This table reports the factor analysis results which indicate that female leaders exhibit leadership style that contains four major factors representing social, masculine , power and feminine orientations.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The study explores the potential superiority of female leaders in the Arab world. The results reported are based on data collected through a questionnaire administered to female leaders in three Arab countries; Kuwait, Egypt and Tunisia. In addition interviews were conducted for about 30% of the sample.

The study results revealed high levels of confidence by the female leaders in their superiority as leader compared to their male leader counterparts. The results also show the self-perceived superiority of female leaders in almost all of leadership characteristics examined. Female leaders perceived themselves to be superior to male leaders in cooperation, caring about family, caring about job, being in control, human orientation, competitiveness aggressiveness and caring about human relations. The results indicate the superiority of female leaders not only with respect to traditionally feminine characteristics (eg. human orientation), but also masculine characteristics (eg. Competitiveness and aggressiveness).

Despite the reported successes of female leaders the rise of female leaders is hindered by numerous organizational barriers. However, it is important to note the most significant barriers are self imposed. In addition there exist internal barriers , such as gender socialization, fear of success, inadequate mentoring and avoidance toward confrontation (Haynes,1989 as reported in Dewane,2008).

The work of Carli (2006) in which she indicated that female leaders face a labyrinth, demonstrates that there is a long way for Arab females to have a fair opportunity to assume leadership positions. Obstacles faced by females are many, including organizational and cultural obstacles. Being aware of these obstacles is the starting point to eliminate them.

Many traditional ways of thinking of leadership ignore the strengths female bring to leadership. Females can accomplish extraordinary achievements in their respective fields. Apparently female leader tenacity, optimism, caring and nurturing have and can play an important role in their accomplishments. These qualities collectively create a leadership style that is inclusive, open, consensus building and collegial.

The nature of the information economy favors teamwork and requires a leadership style that is more understanding and accepting, rather than controlling. Female leaders have shown us that influence and persuasion have taken the place of giving orders and delegating tasks. The top-down, hierarchical leadership approach might not be effective in today's economy. With the wide accessibility of information, leadership depends less on information control and more on information sharing and

interpretation. The issue now is not who has the most information, but rather who has the best understanding and interpretation of the available information.

The reported superiority of female leaders in some studies (ex. Kotiranta, Kovalainen and Rouvinen , 2007) has multiple potential explanations. The first is that females may in fact be better leaders than males. The second it is more likely that due to a more thorough selection process, female leaders experience a more strict selection procedure and thus are a more competent group than their male peers. The third explanation is that the female leader phenomenon may be associated with overall cultural diversity and good governance and management practices.

To follow the notion of potential superiority of female leaders, one can suggest that organizations may achieve a competitive advantage over competitors, by eliminating obstacles to female advancement to top management and by providing mentoring programs for females. The empirical results indicate that ascendance of Arab female leaders can happen because of the confidence and positive attitudes these leaders have about themselves. Arab female leaders reported superiority not only in traditionally feminine characteristics , but also in traditionally masculine characteristics. They report superiority not only in human orientation but also in power orientation. In addition it seems they adopt a well selected and wide range of success strategies which may be conducive to success.

The major limitations of the current study include using perceptual data and relying on self-reported perceptions. It is likely that females were not objective in their evaluations of their leadership characteristics compared to their male counterparts. The results of this study however represent a starting point for assessing advantages and disadvantages the female leadership styles and driving forces for their success. Obstacles facing Arab females quest to top organizational positions remain strong. The reported superiority of female leaders in this and other studies, does not lead us to suggest replacing male leaders by female leaders. Rather it does suggest that organizations as well as scholars should focus on understanding mechanisms, practices and networks that favor males and hinder females from getting to the top of the organization hierarchy.

Future research should use hard data rather than self reported perceptual data, It should also explore the views of male leaders and male and female subordinates in order to substantiate the tentative findings of this study. Future studies should use larger samples, to improve external validity of the findings.

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