

An Exploration Of Differences Of Leadership Perceptions Related To A Student's Gender Within The College Of Business At A Small Liberal Arts Institution

Karen K. Yarrish, Ph.D, SPHR, Keystone College, USA
Ken Zula, Ph.D, SPHR, Keystone College, USA
Erin Davis, Keystone College, USA

ABSTRACT

In preparing the next generation of business professionals, educators need to take seriously the responsibility of empowering students with tools to assist them in their pursuits. One area of interest is leadership. There is an increase in demand for colleges and universities to develop leadership skills in students. Organizations value leadership skills in the workplace and they expect that colleges and universities will educate students in the area of leadership and provide them with necessary leadership skills. Despite the broad horizon of leadership for helping to develop future leaders, it may be crucial for educators to explore the idea of student gender differences within leadership. The purpose of this study is two-fold with respect to leadership. First the researches will explore the differences of leadership perceptions related to a student's gender. Secondly, the researchers will discuss the implications for educators, administrators, and researchers. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be presented.

Keywords: Leadership, Gender, Students

INTRODUCTION

In preparing the next generation of business professionals, educators need to take seriously the responsibility of empowering students with tools to assist them in their pursuits. One area of interest is leadership. The development of students' leadership skills has consistently been the focus among colleges and universities (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). Leadership is an important aspect of college education (Shertzer, Wall, Frandsen, Whalen, Shelley & Guo, 2005).

Corporations seek to hire those with leadership ability because they believe leaders will bring special assets to the organization and ultimately increase the profitability of the organization (Northouse, 2010). Organizations will continue to encounter compelling challenges into the future. As they look to colleges and universities to provide new employees with leadership skills, it is important for researchers to continue to examine differences in male and female leadership skills in an effort to better prepare students for leadership roles in organizations.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to explore the differences of leadership perceptions related to a student's gender in students in the school of business at a small liberal arts college. The students (n = 214) completed the Short-Form of the Leadership Survey adopted from Clark (2008) and based upon the five leadership dimensions from Campbell, Dardis, and Campbell (2003).

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Leadership is about persuading other people to stop with their personal concerns and pursue a common goal that is imperative for the groups' welfare (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan (1994) identify fourteen different categories of leader behavior: planning and organizing, problem solving, clarifying, informing, monitoring, motivating, consulting, recognizing, supporting, managing conflict, and team building, networking, delegating, developing and mentoring, and rewarding.

Northouse (2010) describes leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individual to achieve a common goal. By defining leadership as a process he concurs that it is not a trait or characteristic, but rather an event that occurs between the leader and the followers.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LEADERSHIP

Historically, a "good" leader has always been conveyed with the impression of masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women (Stelter, 2002). In 1972, women who held a managerial and/or administrative position were only 18% in the United States; in 2002 the percentage had risen to 46% (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Currently women occupy more than half of management and professional positions (Catalyst, 2009). Despite the underrepresentation of females throughout the upper levels of the workforce, this standard has more or less contributed to the increase of females in a managerial position and a remedy for segregation within the professional ladder.

As a result of higher percentages of females in supervisory roles today, than in the past, it is important to understand leadership behavior and the role that gender plays. According to Vinnicombe and Singh (2003), men and women have individual value orientations, with this, men and women must require different leadership development approaches. A consequential meta-analysis of the development of leaders in 58 studies of groups initially without leaders showed that men frequently emerge as leaders more often than women (Eagly & Karau, 1991). Although more often, women at times have been found to emerge as the facilitator which contributes to interpersonal relations and morale (Barbuto, Fritz, Matkin & Marx, 2007).

According to an analysis of gender and leadership performed by Eagly and Johnson (1990), there are three main types of gender differences in organizational settings: experimental, assessment, and formal. Women were found to have more interpersonal styles in experimental and assessment studies where men were more likely to use autocratic or direct controlling styles. The meta-analysis also reported that when males and females were examined on task-oriented versus interpersonal-oriented styles, they did not differ in organizational studies. As stated in an article by Wolfram, Gisela and Schyns (2006), women who show more aggressive behavior and men who show passive behavior tend to be affected by a decrease in popularity with subordinates.

As stated in a meta-analysis of 82 studies measuring leadership effectiveness (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995) and a study of leadership effectiveness and gender (Thompson, 2000) it has been found that despite any differences in leadership style, male and female leaders do not differ in overall leadership effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness is favored more often in a male dominated setting where a high percentage of the subordinates are male; otherwise women managers have been found to be less effective (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995, & Won, 2009). In a recent Gallup Poll survey, the question was asked "If you were taking a new job and had your choice of a boss, would you prefer to work for a man or a woman?" the results shown that forty-five percent of men and fifty percent of women chose a male boss (Connerley, Mecham, & Strauss. 2008).

On the other hand, according to Eagly and Johnson's (1990) findings during a meta-analysis of task-oriented style and interpersonal oriented style, the findings were mixed. On one hand they found that men and women did not differ in task-oriented and interpersonal oriented styles. On the other hand, they found significant gender differences in the use of democratic leadership styles. Men were more likely to use a directive, controlling style, while women used a more participative and inclusive style of leadership.

Given the findings throughout research, women may benefit from transformational leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Carless (1998) found that superior's evaluated female managers as more transformational than male managers. This was consistent with female managers rating themselves as more transformational than males. Transformational leadership incorporates behaviors that have been found to be consistent with many female gender roles such as women having considerate behaviors and supportiveness (Dugan, 2006).

PERSPECTIVES ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CONTENT

Campbell, Dardis, & Campbell (2003) examined five areas of leadership development, which are essential to becoming a leader: 1) intrapersonal attributes; 2) interpersonal qualities; 3) cognitive abilities; 4) communication skills; and 5) task-specific skills. These areas of leadership development are important for colleges and universities to acknowledge in preparing students to be future leaders.

Intra-personal development engages in aiding the individual in creating a precise and healthy self-model, and consists of actions intended to amplify self-awareness, increase self-regulation, and enhance self-motivation. This assists an individual in accomplishing a variety of social roles and the leadership role, more successfully (Campbell, Dardis, & Campbell, 2003).

Interpersonal qualities are needed to help motivate the followers. Seeing leadership as a social power method, human relation skills are part of the main focus on leadership development. Interpersonal skills include: showing sensitivity to others, team building, listening benevolently, offering helpful feedback, diffusing conflict, delegation, analytical ability, planning and organizing, and action oriented, etc. (Campbell, Dardis, & Campbell, 2003).

Cognitive abilities include the development of creativity, generating alternative problem solutions, discovering and determining vagueness, questioning assumptions, etc. The emphasis is not just limited to cognitive skills, but also on developing adaptability, self-confidence, and insight. (Campbell, Dardis, & Campbell, 2003).

Communication skills are necessary to convey the content of their vision and to connect it to the goals of other individuals. This is the basis for leadership, although it is not the sheer amount of communication, but the type of communication, that impacts leadership (Dobosh 2005). It is through skilled communication, that one has the ability to perceive these qualities such as creative thinker, self-assurance, proficiency, self-belief in followers' trust, and approbation and recognition (Campbell, Dardis, & Campbell, 2003) . "Spitzberg and Cupach's relational model, used to measure interpersonal communication competence, incorporates personal components: knowledge, motivation, and skill; and contextual components like patterns of interaction, norms and rules, relationships types, setting, and activities" (Payne, 2005, p.65).

Task-specific skills are crucial to an individual's ability to assist the work of others (e.g., by supplying information, research proposals, or supervision) (Campbell, Dardis, & Campbell, 2003).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND VARIABLES

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between gender differences and the dimension of interpersonal/intrapersonal leadership skills?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between gender differences and the dimension of task specific leadership skills?

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between gender differences and the dimension of cognitive leadership skills?

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between gender differences and the dimension of communication leadership skills?

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this survey were college aged students (18 to 22 years of age) enrolled in a small liberal arts college with a declared major in business or business administration. Students were enrolled in both two-year (Associate Degree) and four-year (Bachelor Degree) programs. There were two-hundred fourteen participants in this study ($n = 214$). In addition, students were categorically classified as male and female, as well as full-time and part-time students. It should be noted that all students were traditional students. There were no distance education or adult (non-traditional) students included in this study.

Table 1
Student Classifications

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	86	40
Female	128	60
Total	214	100
Degree		
Associate	21	10
Bachelor	187	88
Other	6	2
Total	214	100
Status		
Full-Time	145	68
Part-Time	69	32
Total	214	100

INSTRUMENT

The instrument used to measure student perception of leadership was The Student Perceptions of Leadership Survey (SPLI) containing a Likert-scale consisting of 18 items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Student Perceptions of Leadership Survey (SPLI) is based upon the dimensions from Campbell, Dardis & Campbell's (2003) five areas of leadership development. The instrument is divided into four dimensions – Interpersonal/Intrapersonal Skills, Task Specific Skills, Cognitive Skills, and Communication Skills. Internal reliability of the scale, the internal consistency is .94 ($\alpha = .94$) and with the subscales between .72-.85. (Zula, Yarrish, & Christensen, 2009).

PROCEDURE

Independent t tests were utilized to examine whether students' leadership perceptions differ depending on gender within a small liberal arts college school of business. There was a significant difference found between gender and Interpersonal/Intrapersonal Skills, and Cognitive Skills. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS for Windows (17.0).

FINDINGS

The results of this study indicate that there is a significant difference between gender and leadership skill perceptions at a small liberal arts college in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Particularly, there was a significant

difference between gender and the interpersonal/intrapersonal dimension, and the cognitive skills dimension of leadership. The independent t test results reveal that female participants ($M = 2.12$, $SE = .08$) rated **Interpersonal/Intrapersonal** Skills as more important than male participants ($M = 1.90$, $SE = .05$). This difference was significant $t(20) = .020$, $p < .05$. There was a small sized effect $r = -.15$. On average, female participants ($M = 2.01$, $SE = .08$) rated **Task Specific** Skills as equally important as male participants ($M = 1.87$, $SE = .06$). This difference was not significant $t(20) = .626$, $p < .05$. There was a small sized effect $r = -.17$. In addition, female participants ($M = 2.18$, $SE = .06$) rated **Cognitive** Skills as more important than male participants ($M = 1.98$, $SE = .07$). This difference was significant $t(20) = .03$, $p < .05$. There was a small sized effect $r = -.14$. In the final dimension, female participants ($M = 1.87$, $SE = .06$) rated **Communication** Skills as equally important as male participants ($M = 1.85$, $SE = .07$). This difference was not significant $t(20) = .08$, $p < .05$. There was a small sized effect $r = -.16$.

Table 2
Independent t test results for gender and leadership skills (SPLI)

Leadership Dimensions	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Interpersonal/Intrapersonal	0.46	20	-2.34	0.02*
Cognitive	0.09	20	-2.09	0.03*
Task Specific	0.23	21	-1.47	0.62
Communication	0.07	20	-1.27	0.08

* $p < .05$

The results of this study reveal that there are significant differences for gender and leadership skills. In particular, female participants in this study rated cognitive and interpersonal/intrapersonal skills as more important than the male participants in this research.

IMPLICATIONS

There are significant differences in the leadership dimensions of interpersonal/intrapersonal and cognitive skills between the female and male participants in this study. The results of the study have implications for college educators and Human Resource Development professionals. College educators should take these results into account when developing and delivering curriculum and coursework. Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals should consider these findings when developing and delivering training modules.

College educators teaching and/or developing leadership curriculum for students must be aware that female and male students perceive significant differences in two of the five dimensions of leadership (Campbell, Dardis, and Campbell, 2003). Thus, educators should adapt curriculum to reflect these differences and emphasize the importance of interpersonal/intrapersonal and cognitive skills to male students. These skill sets are important dimensions of leadership ability according to Northouse (2010) because corporations are seeking to hire those with leadership aptitude.

Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals providing workplace development and training should emphasize and include these results as important factors for employee education and development. Since, male employees entering the workforce perceive interpersonal/intrapersonal and cognitive skills as less important than their female counterparts, HRD professionals must highlight the importance of these skill sets to developing leaders since employers are seeking to develop and hire those with leadership aptitude (Northouse, 2010). In addition, the study conducted by Lotto and Benner (2006) indicated the need for “soft” skill development in employees.

LIMITATIONS

Research conducted with students as the primary sample is a limitation of this study. It is important to study a diverse population; the sample of this study was limited to students attending a private liberal arts college in Northeast Pennsylvania. The sample of this study should be expanded to include additional student populations such as distance education and non-traditional or adult students from this college and other colleges and universities throughout the United States. In addition, the sample could be expanded to include recent graduates within the workforce in order to create a more diverse study sample. A further enhancement to this study would include a global population of students to gain student perspectives on leadership skills from around the globe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The opportunity for educators to develop soft skills with students has never been more critically important. According to a recent study conducted by the Lotto and Benner (2006), the workplace has identified a vast need for institutes of higher education to develop “soft” skills with future employees. Leadership skills have been identified as a soft skill and will become critically important to the success of future graduates. It would be beneficial to expand this survey to recent graduates in order to obtain their perceptions of leadership skill development. Recent graduates will provide a perspective from students as well as workforce members.

Finally, future research would benefit from expansion of this study beyond liberal arts students within the northeast portion of Pennsylvania. Any expansion beyond the current college will provide a great opportunity to continue to develop this survey with confirmatory factor analysis.

This study only began to delve below the surface of leadership and leadership studies. There are numerous opportunities for researchers to continue to build upon this study to determine the differences between gender and leadership perceptions and skills. This study involved the utilization of a first generation instrument to determine the differences between leadership skills and gender. There is an opportunity for future research to confirm these findings and to determine the reasons for the gap between gender and leadership perceptions.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Karen Yarrish, Ph.D., SPHR, is an Associate Professor of Business at Keystone College. She received her Ph.D. in Human Resource Development from the Pennsylvania State University and is a certified Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR). She held the professional position of Director of human Resources at King’s College and SallieMae prior to moving into academia. Her research interests include the areas of performance management, leadership, wellness programs, and emotional intelligence.

Ken Zula, Ph.D., SPHR, is Assistant Professor of Business and Chairperson of the Department of Business, Management, and Technology at Keystone College. He received his Ph.D. in Human Resource Development from the Pennsylvania State University and is a certified Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR). He held the professional position of Vice-President of Human Resources prior to entering academia. His research interests include the areas of leadership, human capital planning, and strategic human resource management.

Erin Davis graduated from Keystone College in May, 2010. She interned in the Human Resources Department at Endless Mountain Health System in Montrose, Pennsylvania during the spring 2010 semester. Her research interests include gender and leadership.

REFERENCES

1. Barbuto, J.E., Fritz, S.M., Matkin, G.S., & Marx, D.B. (2007). Effects of gender, education, and age upon leaders’ use of influence tactics and full range leadership behavior. *Sex Roles, 56*, 71-83.
2. Campbell, D. J., Dardis, G., & Campbell, K. M. (2003). Enhancing incremental influence: A focused approach to leadership development. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 10*(1), 29-44.

3. Carless, S. A. (1998). Gender differences in transformational leadership: An examination of superior, leader, and subordinate perspectives. *Sex Roles, 39*, 887-902.
4. Catalyst. (2009). Statistical overview of women in the workplace. Retrieved April 8, 2010, from <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/219/statistical-overview-of-women-in-the-workplace>.
5. Connerley, M.L., Mecham, R.L., Strauss, J.P. (2008). Gender differences in leadership competencies, expatriate readiness, and performance. *Gender in Management: An International Journal, 23*(5), 300-316.
6. Dobosh, M. A. (2005). The impact of cognitive complexity and self-monitoring on leadership emergence. Retrieved Apr. 15, 2008, from <http://www.udel.edu>
7. Dugan, J.P. (2006). Explorations using the social change model: Leadership development among college men and women. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(2), 217-225.
8. Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L.L. (2003). The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. *The Leadership Quarterly, 14*, 807-34.
9. Eagly, A. H., & Johnson, B. T. (1990). Gender and leadership style: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 108*, 233–256.
10. Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (1991). Gender and the emergence of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*, 685–710.
11. Eagly, A.H., Karau, S.J., & Makhijani, M.G. (1995). Gender and the effectiveness of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 117* (1), 125-45.
12. Hogan, R., Curphy, G.J., & Hogan, J. (1994) What we know about leadership: Effectiveness and personality. *American Psychologist Association, 49*(6), 493-504.
13. Lotto, J.L., & Benner, M.W. (2006). Are they really ready to work: Employers' perspective on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce. The Conference Board, Inc.: New York.
14. Northouse, P. G. (2010). *Leadership theory and practice*. (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
15. Payne, H. J. (2005). Reconceptualizing social skills in organizations: Exploring the relationship between communication competence, job performance, and supervisory roles. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 11*(2), 63-77.
16. Shertzer, J. E. & Schuh, J. H. (2004). College student perceptions of leadership: Empowering and constraining beliefs. *NASPA Journal, 42*(1), 111-131.
17. Shertzer, J., Wall, V., Frandsen, A., Whalen, D. F., Shelley, W. M., & Guo, Y. (2005). Four dimensions of student leadership: What predicts students' attitudes toward leadership development. *College Student Affairs Journal, 25*(1), 85-108.
18. Stelter, N.Z. (2002). Gender Differences in Leadership: Current Social Issues and Future Organizational Implications. *The Journal of Leadership Studies, 8*(4), 88-99.
19. Thompson, M.D. (2000). Gender, Leadership Orientation, and Effectiveness: Testing the Theoretical Models of Bolman & Deal and Quinn. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 25*(8), 678-690.
20. Vinnicombe, S., & Singh, V. (2003). Women-only management training: An essential part of women's leadership development. *Journal of Change Management, 3*(4), 294-306.
21. Wolfram, H.J., Mohr, G., Schyns, B. (2006). Professional respect for female and male leaders: Influential gender-relevant factors. *Women in Management Review, 22*(1), 19-32.
22. Won, S.Y.(2009). Does Gender Combination Matter? Differentiated Perceptions towards Managerial Effectiveness of Women. *Asian Journal of Women Studies*.
23. Zula, K.J., Yarrish, K.K., & Christensen, S.D. (2009). The initial assessment and validation of an instrument to measure student perceptions of leadership skills. Proceedings from The Ninth Annual International Business and Economics Research Conference, Las Vegas, NV.

NOTES