Transformational Leadership: A Contextual Evaluation Of Gender And Perception

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Abstract

The issue of leadership has attracted a considerable attention for many centuries and still continues to intrigue the researchers today. The success or failure of an organization is often attributed to the prevalent organizational leadership. Leaders have the potential to influence and drive a group of individuals towards the accomplishment of goals. An interesting question that challenges the researchers is this: do the women leaders behave differently than men. In a number of studies it was found that there are hardly any gender differences in the leadership behavior as perceived by their followers. One of the most comprehensive leadership theories of organizational transformation is considered to be the theory of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders motivate followers with the vision of what can be accomplished through extra personal effort, thus inspiring individual followers to achieve more than they thought they would achieve. Past studies suggest transformational leadership behaviour is not related to gender roles. The present paper is an attempt to understand the perceived leadership style of a woman and a male executive working in a department under the Central Government of India. An effort has also been made to assess the probable influence of their upbringing years on the adult behaviour based on in-depth interviews. Extensive interviews were also taken of the subordinates to identify the exhibited leadership style of the executives. It was found from the interview data of the executives that the significant figures in their early life had left a strong impact on their personality and later leadership styles. The interview data of the subordinates suggests there is no perceived gender difference in the leadership style of the executives. More specifically, the interview data of the subordinates seems to suggest both the executives demonstrates transformational leadership behaviour. This seems to have enhanced the overall job performance level of the subordinates.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of leadership is of worldwide interest. Leadership has paramount importance in today's competitive business environment. Though there are number of leadership literatures yet the most intriguing challenge to the researchers' remains to understand the nature of leadership (Basu & Mukherjee, 2018). Leadership is a part and parcel of the societal system. The field of leadership study has always fascinated psychologists, sociologists,

political scientists and certainly management scientists. Beeral (2009) states individuals are dependent on leaders and it is a natural outcome to understand the concept of leadership and which are the sets of skills, traits and criteria that shape a good leader. Leadership may be defined as the process through which individual leaders helps their followers to accomplish pre-decided goals. It is all about investing collective efforts to achieve the objectives of the organization. Yukl (2014) defines leadership as the way of influencing others to realize and abide by about what are the needs of the hour and how to go about it, and the process of initiating individual and unified efforts endeavour to achieve common goals.

The different theories of leadership aim to explore the key components of leadership from a wide range of perspectives. One such theory on leadership that has drawn a considerable attention from management researchers and scholars is that of transformational leadership. It is one of the contemporary theories in the leadership arena. The concept of transformational leadership was initially proposed by Burns (1978) and developed by Bass (1985) to include certain behavioural traits of transformational leaders of being role models for their followers which would ensure in building trust and achieving value congruence between leaders and followers. Transformational leaders tend to involve their followers in an attempt to nurture a relationship of mutual encouragement thereby taking both the parties (leaders and followers) to higher moral grounds. These leaders 'transform' their followers. The process of transforming includes evaluating followers' motives, satisfying their needs and treating them as humans. According to Bryman (1992),

transformational leadership is a part of the 'New Leadership' paradigm which focuses on the charismatic and affective components of leadership. Transformational leaders change the followers' perception by helping them to look at the old problems in new and unique ways. Some of the effective outcomes of transformational leadership as figured out by Yukl (2014) are that such leaders are held in high regard by their followers; they belief in the abilities of leader and remain commitment to them. This leads to increased level of motivation to work more than the original pre-set level. Transformational leaders transform and inspire their followers by making them more acquainted with the significance of task outcomes, motivating them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization along with shaping their higher order needs. Undoubtedly, transformational leadership has emerged to be one of the most sought fields of research in the recent times. Researchers have attempted to understand the facades of transformational leadership from a broad range of aspects like gender role, industries and sectors and so on. It may be said that a large number of studies on transformational leadership will certainly throw much light into the various possible implications of the theory.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE: LEADERSHIP

The issue of leadership has drawn increased attention over the last few decades by both theorists and practitioners, probably due to its notable impact on organizational performance and success (Smith, Carson and Alexander, 1984; Fieldler, 1996; Hennessey, 1998; Yousef, 1998;

Bellou, 2011). Leaders are different in their own ways, but they tend to share many similar qualities. Past studies have shown that leaders are distinguishable from their followers, and effective leaders differ from ineffective leaders, on diverse personality traits, cognitive abilities, skills and values (Stogdill, 1948; Stogdill, 1974; Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994; Lord, DeVader & Allinger, 1986; Kanter, 1985; Baltzell, 1980; Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 2008). According to Beeral (2009), leadership can be interpreted in terms of a relational activity where the leader basically guides or directs followers to establish intended goals. While another definition of leadership as put forward by Northouse (2014) describes leadership to be a process in which an individual fosters initiatives to a group of individuals to accomplish common objectives. It emerges from the descriptive details of leadership that it is a continuous process involving leaders and followers working together to achieve common set of goals.

Leadership & Gender Roles

The social dynamics of the society has undergone massive transformation. In the present day context, female participation in the workforce has witnessed a manifold increase over the decades. A much debated question that baffles researchers is whether men and women lead differently or in the same manner. There exists a general belief that women face more barriers to become leaders than men do for the male dominated leader roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Men are perceived to be hierarchical, independent, dominant, aggressive with high ambition, practical and resistant to change (Eagly, 1987; Williams and Best, 1990; Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb and Corrigall; 2000; Bellou,

2011). Women on the other hand are considered to be amicable, unselfish, caring, sensitive, cooperative, collaborative, and willing to embrace change (Eagly& Wood, 1991; Konarad, Ritchie, Lieb, Corrigall, 2000; Bellou, 2011). According to Eagly and Johnson (1990) men and women leaders behave more alike than different when occupying the same positions at the workplace. Although people expect male and female managers to exhibit different leadership behaviours, the evidence that men and women actually engage in different leadership styles is at best weak (Butterfield & Grinnell, 1999; Dobbins & Platz, 1986; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Klenke, 1993; Van Engen & Willamsen, 2000; Vinkerburg, Jansen, & Koopman, 2000; Van Egen, Leeden & Willsemsen, 2001). Hence the findings of the previous studies seem to be indicative of the fact that gender roles and leadership are not interlinked.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership approach is a wide spread multi-dimensional leadership process. In simple words it describes how individual leaders can initiate, develop and bring about significant changes in organizations for further scope of betterment. Burns (1978) in his book Leadership, introduced the concept of transformational leadership. He defined transformational leaders as individuals who motivate their followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and in the continuous process they develop their own leadership capacity (Burns, 1978). According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership is all about how leaders influence followers, who are prone to trust, admire and respect the transformational leaders. The entire process encompasses of exceptional form of influence that

inspires the followers to achieve more than what is usually expected of them. Transformational leadership is a combination of both visionary and charismatic leadership (Northhouse, 2014). Transformational leaders are bestowed with visionary skills, rhetoric, and impression management skills and they utilize such expertise to nurture strong emotional bonds with the followers. The focus of the aforesaid leadership style is concerned with enhancing the performance levels of the followers to their fullest potential (Avolio, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Northouse, 2014). Transformational leaders motivate and nurture their followers to be more innovative and creative in their approach (Jung, Chow, Wu, 2003; Jung, 2001; Shin and Zhou, 2003). Such leaders shape the moral values of the followers in an endeavour to raise their level of consciousness about ethical issues and to channelize their energy and resources to reform organizations for larger good.

Bass and Riggio (2006) in their book *Transformational Leadership* identified four significant components of transformational leadership. They are as follows:

Idealized Influence: Followers of transformational leaders look up to them as their role models. Transformational leaders are admired, respected and trusted by their followers. So much so that followers attempts to emulate the qualities of their leaders. Beeral (2009) noted transformational leaders are able to construct an ideal mutual vision; they also exhibit perseverance, determination and practices bench mark standard of ethical and moral behaviour.

Inspiration & Motivation: Transformational leaders encourage their followers by guiding them. These leaders articulate an enthralling vision of the future that triggers enthusiasm and optimism among the followers.

Intellectual Stimulation: Transformational leaders inspire their followers' to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and devising new techniques to solve old problems. At the same time followers are given the opportunity to address problems and offer solutions.

Individualized Consideration:

Transformational leaders give attention to each and every need of their individual followers' to ensure progress. More specifically, Transformational leaders behave like the mentors and coaches to the followers (Beeral, 2009). Followers are treated as individuals with different needs and different sets of strengths. As an outcome followers are able to experience the personal touch and are able to realise that they are not treated as mere employees.

3. TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP & GENDER ROLES

Transformational leaders are perceived to be more successful at initiating organizational change due to followers' proactive emotional levels and their eagerness to work toward the accomplishment of the vision/s set by the leader. Eagly, Joannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen (2003), conducted a study on the meta-analysis of transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles among women. They found women leaders were more transformational than their male counterparts and also absorbed in more contingent reward behaviours that are a component of transactional leadership. Male leaders are usually perceived to

exhibit transactional leadership behaviour and laissez-faire leadership style (Chin & Trimble, 2015). The finding of a number of studies is indicative of the growing evidence that women prefer to adopt a more transformational and less transactional style as and when compared to men (Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Van Engen & Willsemsen, 2004). Interestingly, Vecchio (2002) ruled out the possibility of perceived gender differences that might emerge from studies related to transformational and transactional leadership behaviour. Thus, the varied findings emerging from the previous studies leaves the matter open for further research.

4. OBJECTIVE

The present paper is an attempt to understand the perceived leadership style of a woman and a male executive working in a department under the central government of India. An effort has also been made to assess the probable influence of their upbringing years on the adult behaviour based on in-depth interviews. Extensive interviews were also taken of the subordinates to identify the exhibited leadership style of the executives.

5. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based qualitative research and case study research methodology (Errikson and Kovalainan, 2014; Thomas, 2011). The data for the present study was collected through structured interview guideline for both the executives and their subordinates.

6. FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Age	Educational Qualification	Age When Joined The Present Organization	Duration Of Service With The Present Organization	Job Description
50 years	M.A, B.Ed, Diploma In French	28 years	22 years	Administration

Exhibit 1: Demographic Profile of the Woman Executive

7.PROFILE OF THE WOMAN EXECUTIVE

The lady introduced herself to the researcher as a 'simple person with simple likes and dislikes'. She hails from the northern fringes of India. Her profile suggests he is a well-educated lady. The executive happens to be an alumna of an elite college in Delhi. She joined the present organization at the age of 28. The lady works with the administrative department of the organization and has 22 years of work experience till date. She called herself to be a dynamic person and went on to explain the dynamic factor to the researcher, 'I am a compassionate person but I become tough when it comes to meeting deadlines and when the work needs to get done'. She further pointed out her strengths as being cool headed, patient, hardworking and a good decision maker. The executive in a content manner boosted of the fact that she has no weakness as far as her professional life is concerned.

8.EARLY LIFE

The lady aged around fifty was born and brought up in a nuclear family set up located in Delhi, India. She lived with her parents along with her two sisters. The lady was raised in a progressive environment and this according to her has helped her confidence grow over the years. She also acknowledged to have never faced any sort of

gender stereotypes in her home environment as well as her professional life.

9. PROFILE OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS

The lady hails from a family of professionals. Both her parents were professionals and associated with private organizations. In the present day context she stated both her sisters are working professionals. She acknowledged the fact that becoming a professional was her natural choice.

10. EDUCATION

The lady profusely spoke of a particular school teacher who in her perception could make even the most boring subject an interesting one. She also mentioned of her professors at college and university who instilled the strength to take up challenges and look forward in life. At the same time the executive admitted that her college and university environment played a critical role in shaping her vision for her future.

11. CAREER CHOICE

The lady told the researcher in an exuberant tone that she drew immense inspiration from the former lady IPS officer Kiran Bedi during her growing up years. She admitted to the fact that there was no family pressure when it came to career choice. The executive further added that her professors at college and university along with her peer group played a vital role when it came to taking the final call on her career choice.

By analysing the interview data of the woman executive it seems to suggest her liberal and progressive upbringing has helped her confidence grow. The lady in the present case seems to have instilled the personal qualities of transformational

leaders from the significant figures from her growing up years.

The analysis of the interview data of the woman executive appears to show that liberal and progressive home environment has helped her confidence and self-belief grow over the period of time. Additionally, it seems to emerge from the narrative details as shared by the executive that she may have imbibed the personal qualities of transformational leaders from the significant figures from her early life. This seems to have made a permanent imprint on her personality and demonstrated leadership style.

Exhibit 2: Profile of the Subordinates

Mean Age Of The Subordinates	Mean Duration Of Service With The Present Organization	Mean Duration Of Service Under The Woman Executive
57.27 Years	30.45 Years	4.77 Years

Exhibit 2 depicts the profile of the subordinates. The mean age of the subordinates is 57.27 years. Their mean duration of service with the present organization is 30.45 years. The mean duration of service of the employees under the woman executive is 4.77 years.

Educational Qualification	School Dropouts	Graduates	Postgraduates
Subordinates	9.09%	72.72%	18.18%

Exhibit 3: Educational Qualification of the Subordinates

Exhibit 3 suggests 9.09% of the subordinates are school dropouts. 72.72% subordinates are graduates while the remaining 18.18% of the subordinates are postgraduates.

12. NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS AS SHARED BY THE SUBORDINATES

HUMANITARIAN APPROACH

A subordinate shared a personal experience with the researcher as to why the lady is perceived to be a kind hearted soul. The subordinate is posted

in a city while his family resides in a nearby town. He attends office from Monday to Friday; he spends the weekend with his family at his home town. He joins his office on Monday morning. The subordinate gave full credit to the lady's flexible working style which made his life go smooth. He told the researcher the lady delegates the assignments in such a manner that it will be completed within the stipulated time. The executive makes it sure that he does not need to attend office on Saturdays. The subordinate described this particular incident to be his turning point in his professional life. He told the researcher that at time he willingly works over time during the weekdays as a gesture of gratitude to the lady. He is happy with both his personal and professional life. Additionally, he pointed out his work efficiency has also increased while working under the lady.

13. COMPASSIONATE SOUL

One of the lady's subordinate had once informally shared a case of delayed medical reimbursement with her. The subordinate told the researcher that her father was an ex-employee of the organization. The subordinate's mother had a medical emergency. When she applied for medical reimbursement she had to go through a lot of trouble. But ultimately her claims were denied. According to the subordinate the executive was furious with the inhuman approach of the officials. She personally persuaded the matter with the concerned department. Within a short span time the old day received the entire medical reimbursement without any deduction. The subordinate told the researcher the woman executive has a generous heart as she always thinks of her subordinates' wellbeing before thinking of

herself. Alongside always takes an honest approach in her working style.

14. INNATE PROTECTOR

All the subordinates described the lady to be an innate protector. Quite a significant number of her subordinates admitted to the fact that the lady always protects them from the higher authorities if they ever gets pin pointed for some issues. While the employees always acknowledged that trust and respect for the lady comes from within.

15. SUBORDINATES EMPOWERMENT

Most of the subordinates in one voice told the researcher the executive follows unbiased approach while delegating assignments. She allocates assignments based on their skills and competence. This in a way has boosted the confidence level of the employees. They make sure to give their level best at the workplace.

16. PERCEPTION AS A LEADER

A significant majority of the subordinates univocally told the researcher they perceive the lady as a leader in the truest sense. Some of the leadership qualities of the lady as perceived by the members of the workforce are honesty, good listening skill, problem solving attitude, knowledge, compassion and encourages employee empowerment. The employees unanimously told the researcher that they perceive no gender difference in the leadership style of the executive to that of her male counterparts. The narrative accounts shared by the subordinates seem to suggest the executive's exhibited leadership style has made significant positive impact on their way of working. This seems to have increased their overall job performance level.

17. PROFILE OF THE MALE EXECUTIVE

Exhibit 4: Demographic Profile of the Male Executive

Age	Educational Qualification	Age When Joined The Present Organization	Duration Of Service With The Present Organization	Job Description
60 years	M.Sc, Diploma in Industrial Relation and Personnel Management	25 years	35 years	Administration

The male executive introduced himself to the researcher as a man who maintains a balanced approach to life. The executive hails from the eastern part of India. His profile is indicative of the fact that he is a well learned man. He happens to be an alumnus of one of the best colleges in India. He joined the organization at the age of 25. The male executive works in the administrative department of the organization and has over 35 years of work experience till date. According to the executive his strength lies in his never give up attitude and while his weaknesses are unfair play and irrational approach towards life.

18. EARLY LIFE

The male executive was born and born up in a joint family located in Kolkata, India. He lived with his parents and his younger female sibling. He revealed his home environment shaped his value system and world outlook to a large extent.

19. PROFILE OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS

The executive belongs to family of traditional professionals. His father was a civil engineer and earned his engineering degree from one of the premier engineering institution in India. His mother was a home maker. While his only younger female sibling is a post doctorate in the field of biochemistry and presently working as a college professor. He profusely narrated various accounts of his upbringing years and how his parents played an invaluable role in shaping his adult behaviour.

20. EDUCATION

The male executive acknowledged the fact that his school teachers and professors at the college and university level had influenced his life in various ways. He specifically spoke of around fifteen individuals that include his school teachers and professors at college and at the university who had played a critical role in his life journey.

21. CAREER CHOICE

The male executive told the researcher that a significant number of his well-wishers advised him to select his present profession. The chronological order of such individuals as mentioned by the executive is his guardians at home and professors. He also pointed out that his peer group played a decisive role in his career selection. As stated by the executive, most of his peers from the college and university days are also working in the same field. Hence it may be said the male executive in the present study seems to have inculcated the qualities of the significant figures of his growing up years in his life philosophy. This appears to have made a strong impact on his personality and present leadership style.

Exhibit 5: Profile of the Subordinates

Mean Age Of The Subordinates	Mean Duration Of Service With The Present Organization	Mean Duration Of Service Under The Male Executive
52.2 Years	24 Years	1year 8 months

The exhibit shows the mean age of the subordinates working under male executive is 52.2 years. Their mean duration of service with the present

organization is 24 years. The mean duration of service of the employees under the male executive is 1year 8 months

Educational Qualification	School Dropouts	Graduates	Postgraduates
Subordinates	Nil	80%	20%

Exhibit 6 shows 80% of the subordinates working under the executive are graduates while the remaining 20% are postgraduates. It is to be noted there are no school drop outs working under the male executive

22. NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS AS SHARED BY THE SUBORDINATES EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT

One of the staff shared his personal experience with the researcher as to how the male executive made him realize the value of education and nurtured him to be a better version of himself. The staff's youngest son studies in primary school. Initially he used to hesitate to seek permission from the executive to take half an hour leave so that he could pick up his son from the school. To quote the staff, 'Sir told me you go and pick up your son drop him home; complete your lunch and come back'. He further divulged that the executive's humanitarian approach has transformed his perception towards the management authorities.

23. PROBLEM SOLVER

A large section of the subordinates in one voice acknowledged that the executive has mastery over problem solving skills. This in a way according to the employees has reduced their work related stress level. Never the less majority of the members of the working team stated they did seek advice fromthe executive including both personal and professional matters of concern.

24. SUBORDINATES EMPOWERMENT

More than half of the employees in a unified voice said the executive gives them a free hand to work on their own and never intervenes in their way of working. The subordinates acknowledged the executive's confidence in them said acts an ideal motivator for the team to perform better. On the other hand if any of his employees is struck with any kind of work related issues, the executive takes proactive measure to resolve the matter soon.

25. INCIDENT RELATED TO TRANSFORMATION

Most of the subordinates acknowledged the fact that they look up to the male executive for both his personal qualities and professional proficiency. One of the employee expressed to the researcher that the executive has sharpen his decision making skills. Most of the subordinates claimed the on the job learning experiences while working under the executive has resulted into enhancing their professional skills.

26. PERCEPTION AS A LEADER

The interview data of the subordinates appears to show that an impressive section of the employees perceives the male executive as a leader. Some of the perceived leadership qualities of the male executive as shared by his subordinates are honesty, integrity, decision making skill, and empathetic listener, wealth of knowledge, mentorship qualities, determined problem solver and believer of employee empowerment. A large majority of the employees stated their job performance level has enhanced while working under the male executive as in the present context they perceive themselves as better professionals.

27. DISCUSSION

The present study made an effort to understand the probable influence of upbringing years on adult behaviour based on in-depth interviews. The findings emerging from the interview data of both the executives seems to give the impression that the significant figures in their early life had left a strong impact on their personality and later on their on their leadership styles. The interview data of the subordinates appears to suggest that there is no perceived gender difference in the leadership behaviour of the executives. More specifically, the interview data of the subordinates seems to indicate, both the executives demonstrates transformational leadership style. This seems to have contributed in enhancing the overall job performance and job satisfaction levels of the subordinates. The findings of the present study seems to corroborate to the findings of the previous studies on the positive linkage between transformational leadership and job satisfaction (Bono, Foldes, Vinson, & Muros, 2007; Nielsen, Yarker, Randall, & Munir, 2009; Nielsen, Yarker, Brenner, Randall, & Borg, 2008; Wolfram & Mohr, 2009; Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, & Guzman; 2010).

28. CONCLUSION

In the present times organizational world is witnessing constant challenges to remain afloat in the long run. Leadership as a field of research has undergone immense transformation over the past few decades. Leadership is one of the significant contributors in the process of accomplishing organizational success. It is perceived to be a process of social influence (Basu & Mukherjee, 2018). Transformational leadership has drawn the attention of the researchers in the recent times. It deals with the positive aspects of leadership behaviour. The outcomes of effective leadership behaviours are experienced at the workplace settings. The underlying factors that shape effective and efficient leaders can be attributed to their early life environmental factors and role of significant figures in their lives in moulding their world outlook. The steady rise in the number of women occupying leadership positions across the diverse fields of professions does gives the impression that leadership qualities cannot be ascribed to gender specific norms. Leadership and followership is a correlative relationship. It is the unified efforts of the both the leaders and followers that help in achieving the goals. Therefore, effective and efficient leadership behaviour is an indispensible determinant for creating a positive work environment that will contribute in the betterment of the followers' well-being and organizational performance in the long run.

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