Understanding the Battle of the Sexes

The Effects of Gender on Leadership Style

By Hannah Lee

Abstract

In 2010, we drew data from 100 Barrett Values Centre Leadership Values Assessments, a 360-degree leadership development tool, to examine the perceived differences among leaders based on their personal entropy (degree of dysfunction). We recently revisited that data to compare the overall results by gender. In this study, we looked at the top values, strengths and areas for improvement that were chosen most frequently by leaders' assessors. Note that strengths and areas for improvement are submitted as free responses. We found that there are significant differences among male and female leaders that follow gender stereotypes.

The Data

To carry out this research, we examined the results of 100 Leadership Values Assessments (LVA) conducted during 2008-2010 in 19 countries. An LVA is a values-based, 360-degree leadership development tool which examines and compares a leader's perception of his or her operating style with the perception of their superiors, peers and subordinates (assessors). The 100 LVA results were divided by gender, with 81 males and 19 females among the group.

At the end of this article, there are three tables that show the top values, top strengths and top areas of improvement as chosen by assessors for each gender.

The countries represented in this study include: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, The Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, Trinidad & Tobago, Turkey, UK, USA, and Venezuela.

Comparison of Top Values

The most common value associated with both male and female leaders is *commitment*. In fact, male and female leaders share 12 out of 16 of their top values. However, among the values that are different, there are significant distinctions among the genders.

Male leaders are seen to show a tendency to be focused on successfully reaching their objectives, with *goals orientation* and *achievement*. They are recognised for using their *experience* to do so, and they make space for others by being *accessible*.

Female leaders are seen as promoting strong working relationships with others through *open communication, teamwork* and *cooperation*.

These differences among male and female leaders fall in line with what is commonly characterised as masculine or feminine behaviour conditioned by differences in treatment and expectations during upbringing. "According to social role theory, behavioural gender differences are caused by socialisation where at a young age, males are encouraged and rewarded for being outgoing, and achievement oriented. Conversely, females are taught to be emotionally oriented, and reserved in their interactions with others." [1]

However, there is also a greater tendency for female leaders to demonstrate *controlling* and *demanding* behaviours, with these potentially limiting values being recognised in 32% of women and only 20% of men. These traits seem to contradict the collaborative approach noted above. Female leaders also have a propensity to overwork, with *long hours.*

The contradiction among the values of female leaders is further blurred when considering the dichotomy of gender roles for female leaders. There continues to be a belief in some circles that women must act like men by exhibiting traditionally masculine traits to get ahead. However, "because women have been socialized to believe that they will experience more positive outcomes regarding their accomplishments when they are seen by others as non-competitive, they downplay their accomplishments in the presence of others to avoid being judged unfeminine. In contrast, men consistently self-promote their successes, in order to present a successful self-image to others." [2]

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[1] Budworth, Marie-Helene and Sara L. Mann, "Becoming a Leader: The Challenge of Modesty for Women," Journal of Management Development, 2010, pg 181.
[2] Budworth, pg 179.

Comparison of Strengths

Male and female leaders share eight of the top 15 displayed strengths among our research pool.

Similar to the top values, female leaders continue to be perceived as demonstrating a more people-centred approach with the strengths *teamwork*, *caring* and *listener/receptivity*.

Female leaders' strengths also seem to convey a strong theme around follow-through in the areas of *solutions oriented*, *delivery*, *hard worker*, and *reliability*. Furthermore, women are more likely than men to be recognised as having *drive and determination*. "[Women] tend to have a greater need to get things done than male leaders and are less likely to hesitate or focus on the small details."[3] This desire to get things done may account for the *long hours* recognised among female leaders' top values, as well as the increased perception of *controlling* and *demanding*.

Among the top strengths unique to male leaders, a theme around forward-thinking emerges with *continuous improvement/innovation*, *strategic thinking/direction/vision* and *developing people*. In 2009, a study was conducted using thousands of results from 360-degree assessments by INSEAD's executive education program. They found: "As a group, women outshone men in most of the leadership dimensions measured. There was one exception, and it was a big one: Women scored lower on 'envisioning' – the ability to recognise new opportunities and trends in the environment and develop a new strategic direction for an enterprise." [4] Based on these differences in the strengths, it may be that women leaders are too busy 'doing' rather than planning and preparing for the future.

Comparison of Areas for Improvement

Seven areas for improvement are shared among male and female leaders.

Among the differences, there is a sense that women appear to hold themselves back, as seen in the areas of improvement of *visibility in the organisation*, *confidence in own abilities* and *decisiveness*. Again, this appears to be tied to gender roles. "Since they are expected to be feminine, women who display too much 'male' behaviour (such as toughness, decisiveness, and assertiveness) are not well received by their peers at the top. Yet women who display too little of that behaviour are perceived as not suited for

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[3] "The Qualities That Distinguish Women Leaders," Caliper White Paper, http://www.calipercorp.com/articlespapers_text/pp_women.asp
[4] Ibarra, Herminia and Otilia Oboduru, "Women and The Vision Thing," Harvard Business Review, January 2009

the top job." [5] Some researchers believe that this unwillingness of female leaders to tout their own achievements or abilities may hurt them in climbing the corporate ladder even further.

If we interpret the above as a request for women to become more masculine in their behaviour, a theme among the areas for improvement for male leaders could be construed as a request to embrace a more feminine approach by showing concern for others with *cross departmental working*, *feedback*, *patience*, and *build trust*.

Female leaders also appear to have a tendency to over-extend and be too hard on themselves and others with *long hours*, *demanding*, *organisation/time management* and *stress management*.   And, despite their strengths and top values which point to promoting a collaborative working style, female leaders are not adequately handing things over to relieve some of this burden, as they are more likely than men to need to work on *delegating and empowering*. These areas for improvement may be tied to the drive among female leaders to get things done, as mentioned in the strengths. Female leaders, still in the minority, may feel that they have something to prove.

Conclusion

Women now make up 48% of the workforce in the US and 49% in the UK. Record numbers of women are attending business school. However, despite the progress made over the years to chip away at the glass ceiling, "stagnant growth in numbers was found in women corporate officer and top earner positions in the Fortune 500. Women held 15.4 percent of corporate officer positions in 2007, compared to 15.6 percent in 2006. Women in top-paying positions stayed the same at 6.7 percent." [6] In 2011, only 28 of the CEOs of Fortune 1000 businesses were women. [7]

Researchers surmise that women who do find themselves in leadership roles tend to be unjustly measured in their abilities due to the continued presence of gender differences.   "Current models of leadership and leadership development cannot be applied to males and females in the same way. The research in organizational settings should focus on understanding the ways of 'becoming' and 'being' for males and females in order to identify strategies for each gender in terms of understanding what it means to be a successful manager from each perspective." [8] In fact, there is growing

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[5] Vanderbroeck, Paul, "The Trap that Keep Women From Reaching The Top and How to Avoid Them," Journal of Management Development, 2010, pg. 766

[6] Catalyst, "2007 Catalyst Census Finds Women Gaining Ground as Board Committee Chairs" http://www.catalyst.org/press-release/79/2007-catalyst-census-finds-women-gained-ground-as-board-committee-chairs

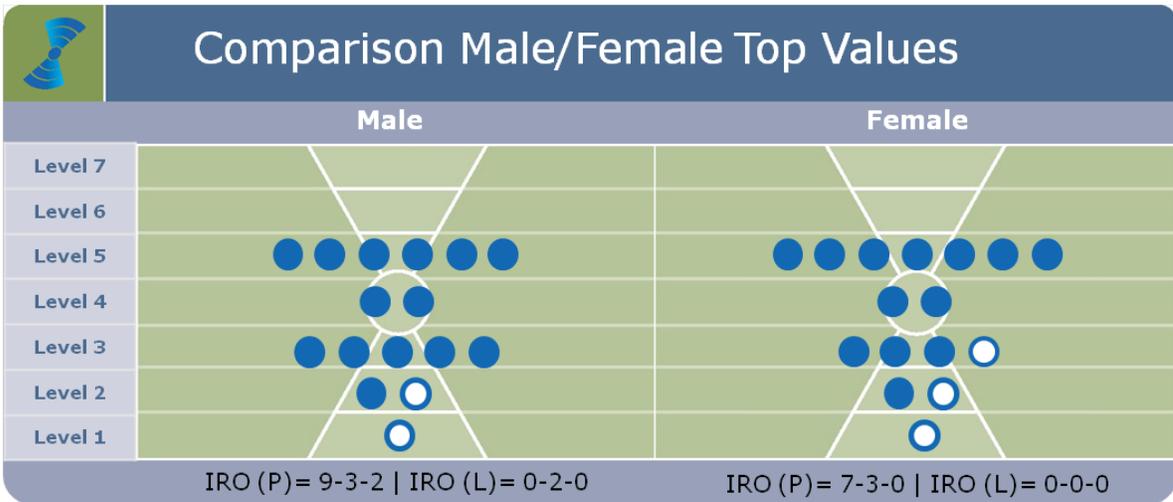[7] http://www.learningpartnership.org/blog/2010/08/fortune1000-women-ceos/

[8] Budworth, pg. 183.

acknowledgement that the more relationship-centred approach commonly displayed by women may be a more effective way to manage others.

Additionally, researchers believe that embracing gender differences among leaders may be the path to success for many organisations. "Companies that are able to harness the strengths of both sexes may be said to be gender 'bilingual' rather than gender neutral. Organizations with gender diversity at the top are more successful than others and will find their way out of the current economic crisis into sustainable profitability." [9]

Our investigation of leadership behaviours based on gender concludes that, while there are similarities among male and female leaders, the differences demonstrated are significant and appear to be tied to biology and the socialisation males and females receive during upbringing. As a result, it seems paramount to support leaders of both genders in ways that legitimately take into account both their similarities and their differences.

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[9] Vanderbroeck, pg. 768.

Comparison Male/Female Top Values

	Male	Female
Level 7		
Level 6		
Level 5		
Level 4		
Level 3		
Level 2		
Level 1		
	IRO (P)= 9-3-2 | IRO (L)= 0-2-0	IRO (P)= 7-3-0 | IRO (L)= 0-0-0

Matches 12

Male			Female		
1. commitment	65%	5(I)	1. commitment	79%	5(I)
2. ambitious	47%	3(I)	2. positive attitude	42%	5(I)
3. results orientation	47%	3(O)	3. results orientation	42%	3(O)
4. positive attitude	45%	5(I)	4. accountability	37%	4(R)
5. goals orientation	42%	4(O)	5. ambitious	37%	3(I)
6. accessible	38%	2(R)	6. humour/fun	37%	5(I)
7. accountability	32%	4(R)	7. integrity	37%	5(I)
8. enthusiasm	28%	5(I)	8. controlling (L)	32%	1(R)
9. experience	28%	3(I)	9. demanding (L)	32%	2(R)
10. humour/fun	28%	5(I)	10. enthusiasm	32%	5(I)
11. achievement	26%	3(I)	11. open communication	32%	2(R)
12. reliable	22%	3(R)	12. teamwork	32%	4(R)
13. integrity	21%	5(I)	13. cooperation	26%	5(R)
14. controlling (L)	20%	1(R)	14. honesty	26%	5(I)
15. demanding (L)	20%	2(R)	15. long hours (L)	26%	3(L)
16. honesty	20%	5(I)	16. reliable	26%	3(R)

Orange = Values match	P = Positive L = Potentially Limiting (white circle)	I = Individual R = Relationship O = Organizational

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The above diagram displays the top values, in order of number of votes, chosen by assessors for each gender. These are then plotted on the Seven Levels of Consciousness.

Because of the vast difference in the number of men and women among the results, percentages are used instead of total number of votes to demonstrate the degree to which each value was found in the populations.

Values in orange are those shared by both men and women.

The number next to each percentage refers to the value's corresponding Level on the Seven Level of Consciousness model. The letter refers to the Balance Index, whether the value is an Individual, Relationship or Organisational type value.

Comparison of Strengths

Men		Women	
Strength	**Percentage of Leaders**	**Strength**	**Percentage of Leaders**
Knowledge	47%	**Commitment**	58%
Commitment	46%	**Drive and determination**	53%
Accessibility	38%	**Experience**	37%
Experience	37%	**Knowledge**	37%
Results/achievement focus	36%	**Positive attitude**	37%
Drive and determination	35%	**Accessibility**	32%
Communication skills	28%	**Communication skills**	32%
Continuous improvement/ innovation	27%	Solutions oriented	32%
Honesty	27%	Teamwork	32%
Supportive	27%	Caring	26%
Strategic thinking/direction/vision	26%	Delivery	26%
Positive attitude	26%	Hard worker	26%
Developing people	23%	Listener/receptivity	26%
Enthusiasm	23%	Reliability	26%
Passion	23%	**Supportive**	26%

Comparison of Areas for Improvement

Men		Women	
Area for Improvement	Percentage of Leaders	Area for Improvement	Percentage of Leaders
Listen and be open to others opinions	43%	**Delegating and empowering**	42%
Communicating ideas/information/ direction	32%	**Listen and be open to others opinions**	37%
Delegating and empowering	26%	**Direction for the organisation (strategic, plans, priorities)**	32%
Developing people	25%	Visibility within the organisation	32%
Clarity	21%	**Communicating ideas/information/ direction**	26%
Cross departmental working	21%	**Finish what you start/ taking on too much/over-promising**	26%
Build internal community	21%	Long hours	26%
Finish what you start/ taking on too much/over-promising	20%	Confidence in own abilities	21%
Feedback – more, consistent, balanced	20%	Decisiveness	16%
Patience	19%	Demanding	16%
Rushing to conclusions/ reactive	19%	Organisation/time management	16%
Communication skills – target audience	17%	**Rushing to conclusions/ reactive**	16%
Direction for the organisation (strategic, plans, priorities)	17%	Stress management	16%
Build trust	16%	**Build internal community**	16%

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