

Are Women Better Leaders than Men

Author: Sharon De Mascia . August 2020

Research into leadership styles suggests that we are moving towards a more ‘Transformational’ style which emphasis emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. Some studies have found that women have an advantage over men when it comes to the emotional aspects of leadership. Does this mean that women are naturally good at Transformational leadership? If so, then “why are women still underrepresented in leadership?”

The Evidence

A more ‘Transformational’ style of leadership which can harness the energy/motivation of teams/stakeholders and unite them behind a common vision, has proven to be very effective in organisations (Judge et al, 2004). Research carried out by Cartwright and Gale (1995), found that women have significantly more of a team management style than men. The researchers described this style as being characterized by a high regard for people and a high regard for task. They also found women were more visionary. A study by Eagly et al (2003) found that female leaders were more transformational than male leaders. A recent study found that women leaders were intellectually stimulating, encouraged employees to take ownership of company goals, and provided inspirational motivation (Caliper ,2014).

These are some of the existing studies that have explored leadership styles in women but there is also research suggesting that there are no gender differences in leadership and that leadership effectiveness occurs as a result of a combination of: personality factors, experience, contingency factors, organisational culture etc. This suggests that the issue of whether male or females are better at leadership may turn out to be something of a red herring e.g. Evans (2013) commented that “It is far from clear how gender impacts on our capability and performance at work”.

It may just be the case that women have a preference for the more transformational styles of leadership. The older traditional leadership models valued masculine characteristics e.g. competition, confidence, aggression, self-direction. Women’s’ skills were stereotypically viewed as more ‘Communal’ in nature e.g. such as kindness, concern for others, etc. This means that men appeared to match the role of leader better than women, which probably accounts for their greater success in obtaining high-level posts. Women who tried to demonstrate the ‘masculine’ skills, required for more traditional leadership were viewed less favourably. Interestingly, Transformational leadership has some elements which are traditionally viewed as more female in nature e.g. building supportive relationships (individualised consideration) which means that this leadership style may be more appealing to women as it is in keeping with stereotypes about female skills and therefore allows women to behave in a more congruent way.

It would seem then that there is now a good match between the type of leadership that women

demonstrate well and the leadership requirements of modern day organisations so women should be very much in demand as leaders. Sadly, the statistics suggest that this is not the case and that women remain under-represented in leadership. My own experience of selecting and developing leaders makes me believe that good leadership is not about gender but about having the right skills and attitude. This means that women have as much potential to be great leaders as their male counterparts, so why do so few women get to the top of organisations, compared with their male counterparts?

What do you think?

Authored by Sharon De Mascia, Director of Cognoscenti Business Psychologists Ltd. Contact her at: Sharon@cognoscenti.uk.com This is a summary of the full article which was published in the 'European Human Resource Digest' (2015).

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/Are-Women-Better-Leaders-Than-Men>