

## **The Way Women Leads Educational Industries: An Evaluation of Female Leadership Style**

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Leadership is a topic that comes up in most discussions, yet the focus is mainly on male's leadership as role models, and it has avoided the female leadership style. Thus this qualitative paper focuses on the female leadership effectiveness in Malaysia. The purpose is to gain more understanding about female leadership style as a socially constructed phenomenon at organizational level. Thus, it examines how female leaders interacted with their organization members. The study was conducted across a small number of women leaders in education industry who are policy makers among Malay Muslim origin of their experiences in leadership positions. The data were analyzed accordingly; the result concluded that the monitor, coach, face-to-face communication, bottom line management, and observation are the dominant leadership style in the education sector of Malaysia.

**Keywords:** leadership, women leadership, managing interactions between employees

It is a worldwide phenomenon that women are underrepresented in leadership positions. Working women, who try to climb the leadership ladder face many challenges, including having to navigate the male-normed hierarchical leadership structures (McIntosh, 1995), as well as having to carry the greater burden of home and child-care responsibilities (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Due to stereotyping and discrimination held, researchers have more extensively focused on the differences between men and women's leadership styles (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2007; Spurgeon & Cross, 2006). Just to support the idea that

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women can also be a good leader, as in the case of Malaysian women who out-rank many western countries in their numbers in certain male-dominated fields, such as science, technology, engineering and math fields (NSF, 2010). Thus, an assertive behavior can lessen women leaders' chances for advancing in her career or getting a job also; verbally fearsome others can shake women influences (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

In this context, leaders are the individuals in the organization who set the tone and culture. Whereas, leadership is a process in which one individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2004). There are certain basic qualities or characteristics that most people associate with leadership. And societies would agree that people whom posses such attributes are often labeled as leaders.“ Various leadership theories have evolved to define the characteristics, traits, and styles of various leaders and leadership styles (Bass, 1985). According to Vigoda-Gadot, (2007), leadership style describes the ways in which an individual chooses to manage situations in an organizational setting; it is based on one's beliefs, values, preferences, and, in some cases, gender.

It is not uncommon for one to think that men lead differently than women. Thus, hundreds of studies have assessed the leadership styles of males and females since the 1950s. According to Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, (2007), sex-related differences are present in leadership style, however, these differences take the form of highly overlapping distributions of women and men, in other words, the differences are according to how effective are they. An effective leader is able to influence his or her followers to reach the goals of the organization. Thus building the relationship between a leader and his/her followers requires an appreciation from the leader for the personal values of those who would be willing to give their energy and talents to accomplish shared objectives (Bass, 1985).

## **Method**

Data were gathered through open-ended qualitative interviews with nine participants. The respondents were identified through purposive sampling. The data collection protocols were prepared by drafting interview questions, which provided the platform for data collection and analysis. The one-to-one interview protocol included 10 questions that are focusing on the job responsibilities, interaction with the members in organization,

reaction from their leadership approaches, the ways on how they overcome obstacles, their experiences influenced by culture and religion, and messages to future women leaders. However, the focus on this paper will only be on the participants' profile, and the way they interact with the members in the organization.

## Results

Nine participants were involved in this study. A brief description of the participants is provided below:

Table 1

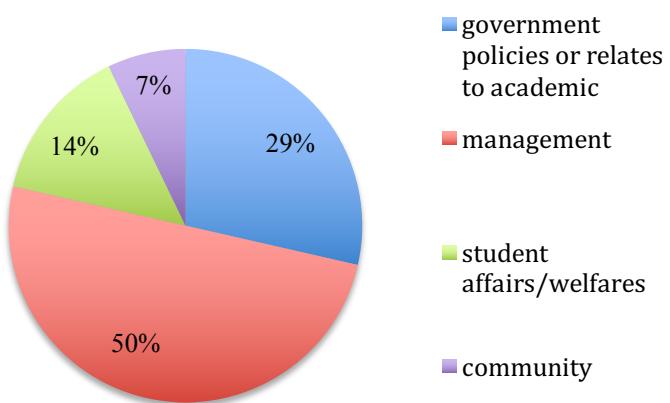
*Profile of Participants*

Participant	Institution	Age	Present Status	Work Experience in related field
1 PS 1.1	Public School	Early 50	Headmistress	25 years
2 PS 1.2	Public School	Mid 40	Head Student Affairs	14 years
3 IPTA 1.1	Public Institute of Higher Education	Early 50	Head College	25 years
4 IPTA 1.2	Public University	Early 50	Deputy Dean	20 years
5 IPTS 1.1	Private University	Late 50	Research Manager	27 years
6 GEA 1.1	Government Education Agency	Early 50	Director	11 years
7 GEA 1.2	Government Education Agency	Mid 50	Director	32 years
8 VS 1.1	Private School	Mid 50	Headmistress	30 years
9 GEA 1.3	Government Education Agency	Early 50	Director	28 years

### **Job Responsibilities of the Participants**

Since these women are experienced in leading people, naturally they are comfortable and confident in their present position (refer table 1). Their current position is bound to government policies as well academic, operations, administration, student affairs, and community involvement at organizational level. The figure below shows that, the respondents' responsibilities involved more in management of their organization (50%) followed by implementing the government policies (25%). Other than that their job responsibilities included student affairs or welfare (17%) and community awareness (8%).

Figure 1: Job Responsibilities



### **(e) Interaction between group members in organization**

The respondents described how they interacted with their organization members and several themes emerged such monitor, coach, face-to-face communication, bottom line management, and observation. The themes and quotes by the nine women are tabulated below:

Table 2

*Interaction with group members*

Coding	Quotes	Theme
PS 1.1	Walking around	Monitor
GEA 1.2	I monitor my students, and my staff, but not to the point that they feel constricted, but I do my monitoring.	
PS 1.1	I'm the one who gives the idea and they need to enlarge on the idea given. For some of them, I just need to lead a bit because they are well experienced.	Coach
PS 1.1	Assist with ideas and visualize a vision together	
PS 1.1	I like the roles of mentor and coach	
IPTA 1.2	Face to face is better Communicate face to face	Face-to-face communication
IPTS 1.1	Same level-open discussion	
PS 1.2	Normally, my door is open and they can come to see me regardless of whether they are the cleaner or my technical people, or my deputy, or my clerks	
GEA 1.2	For lower staff, they have to understand the hierarchy	Bottom line Management
GEA 1.1	Make observations of staff to know their style	Observation

**Discussion**

In the past, successful leaders have been associated with stereotypical masculine attributes, recent studies, however, showed that female no longer equate successful leadership with masculine attributes. Experienced female managers show no differences in leadership ability from their experienced male counterparts. Both groups possess a high need

for achievement and behaviors associated with effective leadership style. Once men and women have established themselves as leaders in organizations, women do not behave differently from men (Powell, 1990). As this study focuses on the women leadership style at education industries, it is important to take women policymakers' qualities, behaviors, and attitudes into consideration. Because organizations have paid attention to leadership styles of people (either male or female) who occupy managerial positions, holding the belief that leadership is an important factor in achieving business success in any organizations (Giritli, and Oraz, 2004).

The discussion of this section mainly focuses on the role of leadership qualities of women in the educational sector. As women have a more prominent presence as managers and executives in organizations, more attention has been devoted to the possible differences between the leadership styles of women and men. Intuitive reasoning suggests that early socialization patterns develop different qualities in women and men that would likely result in variations in leadership styles (Powell, 1993). The growing numbers of women in managerial positions have created interest in the role of women as leaders (Klenke, 1996). And in this context, the concept of leadership in relation to the gender has been discussed in this paper.

The presence of feminine or masculine characteristics in leadership styles is related to the construct of gender (Larson and Freeman, 1997). Gender, race, class, culture, and other elements of social difference are acknowledged to play an important role in the development of leadership styles. However, in Malaysian context, not much difference between male and female leadership style is found in this study. The only difference is the way in which men and women interact with their employees in organization.

Generally, and according to Parry (2000), women are more likely to use behaviors that are associated with transformational leadership, such as communicating vision, reliance on expertise, charisma, and interpersonal skills. Men, on the other hand are more likely to be directive in their approach to leadership within the organization. And Eagly & Johnson (1990) indicated that female leaders tend to be more relationship oriented and male leaders more tasks oriented. Gibson (1995), found that male leaders were more likely to emphasize goal setting than female leaders, who are emphasizing more on facilitation of interaction.

Thus, this is not much difference from the outcome of this research, as it indicates that the female leaders are more likely to use behavior like monitoring, coaching, face-to-face communication, bottom line management, and observation. Interestingly it was also noted in this study that there was no difference between the leadership styles of teachers, lecturers and administrators in the academic industry. It can be concurred that upon reaching organizational leadership position in the education industry, these women have proven their ability to lead. The above leadership styles adopted by women seem to be suitable to apply in educational sectors. Therefore, it is important to educate the respective people with the knowledge of how women leaders will fit within educational sectors and what could be the benefits. In this context, through this paper the authors intend to say that the female leadership qualities identified through various literatures could positively contribute to the leaders of educational sectors.

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The Way Women Leads Educational Industries..... 193

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