Research Article   **Open Access**

Management Attributes that Contribute to the Success of Women in Management Positions

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the management attributes that contribute to the success of women in management positions in Northern Kwazulu Natal. This investigation stems from the fact that women are still under represented in managerial positions within South Africa, both in the public and private sector. In order to gain insight into what differentiate successful female managers from the rest of the female workforce, a closer look will be taken at the female managers within Northern KwaZulu Natal and how they have managed to achieve success. The aim of this study is to identify a preferred managerial style used by females, and the traits they exhibit to enhance their careers. The research had been done as a qualitative study using inductive Thematic Analysis. The findings of the study were that the female managers of Northern KwaZulu Natal showed attributes that lead contributed to their success. The attributes identified was their managerial style which is transformational in nature leaning on traits such as being caring, motherly, empathetic, collaborative, motivated, driven, empowering, acknowledging, recognizing, being an example and a good listener.

Introduction

To stay competitive in an ever changing global economy, diversity needs to be embraced and organizations must capitalize on all forms of skilled labour, regardless of gender. The absence of women at leadership level is perplexing, considering the body of research showing that companies perform better when they have diverse leadership [1]. In spite of all efforts made by government through the formulation of policies and legislature to elevate women into top managerial positions, equity is still not achieved. Government and business organizations have made it their top priority to elevate women in and give woman equal rights, but women still only occupy the lower management levels in the private and government sectors. This studies main aim is to investigate which traits female managers, who have managed to achieve success, display. This will be argued by using secondary data in the form of articles, journals, handbooks, statistics, etc. The secondary data will be supplemented by primary data through conducting semi-structured interviews with both middle and senior managers who have managed to ascend into a managerial position. The purpose of the research will be to identify common managerial styles followed by contrasting female and male managerial styles. Managerial traits will then be explored and lastly, barriers female managers had to overcome in order to achieve career successes will be identified. Thereafter, recommendations will be made to guide aspiring females who wish to move in the management echelons.

The Historical Role of Women in Business

The rest of the world, in particular America, has made giant leaps in promoting women and escalating them into higher hierarchies [2] However, the phenomenon of women not occupying as many top managerial positions in South Africa as men continues to stay cumbersome. The setting of this problem can be described against the back drop of the current statistics relating to females in management. According to [3] in 2012, less than one in ten businesses were led by female representatives, an indication that it remains difficult for them to reach the very top of the business world. At an average, South

Africa has more than a quarter of companies led by women, against Australia's three out of every ten [3]. More recently the 2013 Grant Thornton International Business Report on women in business reveals that just over one quarter of top decision-making roles in SA businesses are filled by women. This is a long way off government's ambition to ensure that 50% of senior management positions are filled by women. Over the last decade, an increasingly global competitive labour market has seen organizations make genuine efforts to promote and retain women. South Africa's definition of, and goals towards achieving gender equality are guided by a vision of human rights which incorporates acceptance of equal and inalienable rights of all women and men. This ideal is a fundamental tenet under the Bill of Rights of The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996). It emerged from a long period of struggle for a democratic society that respects and promotes the rights of all its citizens, irrespective of race, gender, class, age, disability, etc. (Bill of Rights, Sections 9.1 to 9.4). One contextual factor that contributes to the underrepresentation of women in managerial positions is the unique South African history of apartheid. South Africa has a history of two powerful antagonistic colonial rulers operating concurrently, followed by the apartheid governments of independent South Africa. Apartheid was a system of racial categorization and separation dividing the population into various groups. This separation governed every sphere of life; from education to employment. According to Littrell and Nkomo [4] this separation was accompanied by patriarchy of women from all races' subordinates of males. Women were seen as 'minors' and were confined to being 'homemakers'. Women who worked were expected to be

domestic or unskilled workers or they were placed in administrative positions. The system of patriarchy and the 'women's work' stereotype had to be broken before women, particularly black women, could achieve equal status with men. A particular view of males' perception of the roles of females that had formed though centuries of habit and history had to be broken [2] Women needed to be emancipated from; being denied the opportunity to study in order to advance their career, the gender stereotypes that they were the 'inferior sex', and the traditional view that women belong in the kitchen and should be the child carers. During apartheid, women in general were exploited and discriminated against, but it was especially the black woman who experienced the wrath of apartheid two fold [5]. Not only were they discriminated against because of their racial status, but according to an article published by the ANC it was because of the mere fact that they were females as well [5]. While men constituted the majority of the cheap labour force, women were relegated to a shadowy position, expected to remain in the reserves and to support their families without the help of their men-folk. Females only earned eight percent in wages of what the white males were earning and were denied the opportunity to get a tertiary education. In the white community it was only the females of the very wealthy families that had the opportunity to receive a tertiary education. The rest of the South African females could only study if they used their skills in their own segregated communities and they were mostly confided to professions in the education and nursing sectors [5] The Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998 was formulated to counter the effect of apartheid and achieve equality in the workplace. According to Makuala [6] this Act served two purposes: (1) Promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination and; (2) Implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages experienced by designated groups, ensuring their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce. Although in theory the Equity Act sounds like a soundproof plan, in practice it fails to meet its objective. This can be related to a variable that women do not exhibit managerial styles and traits readily associated with successful business acumen. Leadership, also referred to as management [7], is a topic that comes up mostly in discussions when it comes to leading the organizations in professional lives. This topic has been mainly dealt with in a male perspective, thus leaving behind the developments of competent female leaders to show their abilities. This is confirmed by Piterman [8] who says that the traits and leadership styles of successful organizations are associated with male traits. According to Daniel and Moudic [9] the male leadership style is more transactional in nature, based on masculine values such as assertiveness, command and control. The female leadership style reflects female stereotypes and feminine values such as nurturing, attentiveness, and caring, which is in line with the transformational leadership. A survey done by Folkman and Zenger in [10] showed that women do excel in the stereotypical 'nurturing' competencies such as developing others and building relationships, and many exhibit integrity and engagement in self-development [11]. The advantages, however, are not limited to these competencies. The survey showed that in fact, at every level, more women were rated by their peers, their bosses, their direct reports, and their associates as better overall leaders than their male counterparts – and the higher the level, the wider that gap grows. Females within South Africa foster hope to advance into managerial positions. The interrelationship of the South African history, stereotypical views of female leadership styles and traits, together with the barriers females must overcome has contributed to the under representation of females in management. The actual truth is that, in spite of all the measurements taken to advance women, only a few have managed to do so. Significant change will require a committed leadership focus to the economic and broader performance dividend that can be achieved by attracting and retaining quality women managers and optimising the contribution of women in management [8].

Challenges Faced by Women in Management in South Africa

Women are still underrepresented in top managerial positions in South Africa. This is identified clearly in a recent article in News 24. The article states that 21% of South African businesses, surveyed for 2013, had no women positions in senior management. According to the article it is a trend that has been persisting for the last six years in spite of government measures being put into place. More must still be done to promote equality in the public sector but even more work in the private sector which continues to lag behind. The Commission for Employment Equity Annual report 2013 indicated that white males occupy 80% of top management positions in the private sector. It is thus evident that there is an under representation of women in managerial position in South Africa in both the public and private section. Despite the persisting under representation of women in high ranking positions, some women have managed to break through barriers that keep them in lower level positions. This research seeks to explore the reasons for this phenomenon by getting input from females that are currently occupying managerial positions. This will be done by identifying a preferred managerial style used by females and the traits they exhibit to enhance their career. In addition, the research explores career barriers faced by females. The rationale being that once we can identify traits and styles of females who managed to ascend into top managerial positions and in so doing overcome the barriers, the problem of underrepresentation of females in management can be addressed.

Management versus Leadership

Popivici [7] defines management as 'the process of setting and achieving organizational goals through its functions: forecasting, organization, coordination, training and monitoring-evaluation.' Managers need to embrace process and seek stability and control and therefore, also to instinctively try to resolve problems quickly [11]. Managers are mostly concerned with administration and putting systems in place. Furthermore, they oversee and ensure that tasks are completed and submitted on time. They are left in charge when the "leader" or business owner cannot be at the workplace and have to fulfil the dual function of manager and leader. The level of responsibility of managers, depend on their position in the organizational hierarchy which can be junior, middle or senior management. In contrast, leadership may be defined as 'the ability to influence, to make others follow you, the ability to guide, the human side of business for "teacher"' [7]. Boonyachai [11] states that leadership is said to be a process of influencing others to achieve the long term goals of the organisation. Some leaders believe that they need to lead by being an example, and that they should not ask someone else to do things they are not willing to do themselves. Booyachai [11] is of the opinion that being influential contributes to the credibility of a leader and ensures some measure of respect. According to Boonyachai [11] 'Effective leaders take a personal interest in the long term development of their employees'. They use motivation tactics and many skills or experiences to support their employees to achieve organisational goals. This is about tapping into individual motivations in the interests of furthering an organisation-wide goal. Some researchers confirm that there is a definite difference between a manager and a leader, whereas others use the two concepts

interchangeably. According to Popivici [7] management is a career, while leadership is a calling; managers are obeyed whereas leaders are naturally followed; and a leader may have no organizational skills, but his vision unites people behind him. It goes without saying that to be competitive in a global economy, both managerial and leadership qualities are essential in all organizations and an effective integration of the two leads to better performance. Thus, leadership cannot replace management and should be seen as an addition to management [12]. Popivici [7] echoes this by stating 'a manager cannot just be a leader, he also needs authority to be effective'. It can thus be assumed that a manager can be a leader and vice versa. For the purpose of this research study the concepts of manager and leader will be used interchangeably.

Male versus female leadership styles

For organizations to be effective in today's day and age, they need to embrace diversity [12]. A company may be missing many insights and opportunities that would be easier to identify if managers were to come from wider backgrounds, embracing diversity [13]. One aspect of diversity is the particular interest in the way which women's style of leadership may differ from men's. As more women begin occupying positions of leadership, questions as to whether they lead in a different manner from men, and whether women or men are more effective leaders, have garnered greater attention. This section seeks to explore leadership styles that are more commonly associated with men and women. However, before we can investigate preferred leadership styles by both sexes, we need to understand gender differences.

Gender Differences

In the 1970s, a literature study on gender differences set out to explore the extent of differences in men and women's behaviour. This research into gender differences was based on a desire to understand whether males and females differed on a variety of traits and behaviours because of their biological determination; the implication being that differences in behaviour between men and women are innate or acquired from very early socialization [14]. The process through which an individual learns and accepts roles is called socialization [13]. Socialization works by encouraging wanted and discouraging unwanted behaviour. As such, women and men's socialization are influenced by gender roles and stereotypes. Gender socialization prepares men and women for types of activities likely to be required of them in order to fulfil their prescribed roles for positive outcomes and to be afforded opportunities as deemed necessary. Once someone has accepted certain gender roles and gender differences as an expected socialized behavioural norm, this behavioural trait becomes part of the individual's responsibilities [13]. Noor et al. [15] asserts that there are indeed some small psychological differences between women and men on traits that are often seen as related to effective leadership, such as men showing more assertiveness than women and women showing more integrity than men. However, the French anthropologists, Francois Heritier, emphasized that a female leader does not possess fundamentally different attributes than a male leader and that the gender hierarchy is not biological, but a cultural phenomenon that over history, civilizations throughout the world have perpetuated with undiminished force [15].

Noor et al. [15] agree with Jogulu and Wood that socialization from an early age determines how both sexes perceive how their traits and behaviour should be. Childhood socialization by parents, schools, peers, and/or the media encourages girls to be cooperative, expressive, flexible and attuned to their interpersonal world, whereas boys are led to be openly competitive, independent, and instrumental [16]. Some psychologists are of the opinion that women may be more

relationship orientated than men because of their psychological needs stemming from early experiences [12]. However, due to the flexible nature of women they adapt more easily to circumstances and have managed to develop certain male characteristics. This is confirmed by the 'Bemtest'.A test, more commonly referred to as the 'Bem test' is the standard psychological tool used to rate people on how they conform to a variety of measures considered stereotypically male or female: "self-reliant," "yielding," "helpful," "ambitious," "tender," "dominant." Since the test started in the early 1970's, women have been encroaching into the test rates as male territory, stereotypically defining themselves as "assertive," "independent," "willing to take a stand," [2]. Men have not been able to adapt to stereotypical feminine traits as women have adapted to male traits. The 'Bem test' thus coincides with Heritier's view that gender socialization is a result of cultural reinforcement of certain behaviours and contextual factors and not because of 'inborn qualities.' We can thus conclude that women learn to value nurturance and interpersonal connectedness more highly than men [6] and that there is a definite difference between the male and female gender because of early socializations and the behaviour they are expected to portray. However, that these stereotypes are not set in stone and can change through cultural reinforcement and contextual factors. In fact, women are becoming more aggressive in nature, this is evident in the rising of a class of young female 'killers' on Wall Street [2] indicating that genders can take on each other's stereo typical roles.

Gender and leadership styles

According to Daft [12] the gendered traits of men include aggressiveness or assertiveness, rational analysis and a take-charge attitude. Men tend to be directive and emotionally detached from their subordinates. They are competitive and individualistic and prefer working in vertical hierarchies. They rely on formal authority and position in their dealings with their subordinates. Furthermore, they are more result driven and task orientated than fostering good interpersonal human relations. These characteristics are commonly associated with the transactional leadership style. This is confirmed by Jogulu and Wood [14] who says that the transactional leadership style appears to characterize leadership in a strong masculine way, as it is distinguished by 'competitiveness, hierarchical authority and high control for the leader and analytical problem solving' [14]. The gendered leadership qualities women tend to portray are: women prefer less competitive environments than men do; they are more collaborative and are more concerned with relationship building, inclusiveness, participation and caring [12]. They foster a feeling of "family" in the workplace and get emotionally involved. They try to create a platform where employees can speak openly about their problems in an effort to increase their productiveness. These are all characteristics of the transformational leadership style. Noor et al. [15] confirm that women indeed tend to be transformational and charismatic leaders. This is confirmed by Klenke who says that women fit more generally into a 'feminine model of leadership build around cooperation, collaboration, lower control for the leader and problem solving based on intuition and rationality' [14]. According to Rosin [2] men derive their advantage largely from size and strength, but the post-industrial economy is indifferent to brawn. Rosin states that our current service and information economy rewards precisely the opposite qualities, the ones that can be easily replaced by machines. Men are no longer doing physical hard labour of the traditional kind, but they are confined to four walls of an office. This has had the effect that most men have lost their jobs as they are competing directly against females who tend to be traditionally stronger in administration skills. Furthermore, Rosin states that social intelligence, open communication, the ability to sit still and focus are

all, at minimum, not the province of men [2]. They are characteristics more readily associated with women. Men may cling to themselves as providers, but they are further than ever from being able to embody those ideals. Their "inborn nature" and gender stereotyping primarily contribute to the fact that they are replaced by women and seen as less effective or at most equally effective [2]. We can thus conclude that male and female leadership styles are underpinned, but not limited to, their socialized gendered traits and behaviour. The preferred male leadership style seems to be transactional, in line with masculine traits and behaviour, whereas the preferred female style seems to be more transformational, in line with feminine traits and behaviour. By no means are men perceived as more efficient. According to [2] the post industrial economy prefers a more consultative and collaborative approach and the staunch 'get to the point' approach is rejected. This leaves women with the upper hand and a chance for women being more successful and effective in their career aspirations.

Leadership traits of women

In 2005, a year-long study conducted by Caliper, a Princeton, New Jersey-based management consulting firm, and Aurora, a London-based organization that advances women, identified a number of characteristics that distinguish women leaders from men when it comes to leadership qualities [17], these are:

- Women leaders are more persuasive than their male counterparts

- When feeling the sting of rejection, women leaders learn from adversity and carry on with an "I'll show you" attitude

- Women leaders demonstrate an inclusive, team-building leadership style of problem solving and decision making

- Women leaders are more likely to ignore rules and take risks.

Torres [17] is of the opinion that these innate characteristics are normally attributed to women based on what is commonly accepted as their traditional familial role. They may also be fundamental in gender studies that have yielded results demonstrating that women leaders are often more effective than male leaders. These studies support the premise that the behaviour of women leaders who possess definite leadership characteristics is not simply unique, but very possibly at odds with what men practice [17]. They include: confidence, vision, integrity, magnanimity, humility, communication, tenacity, visibility, empowerment and serendipity.

Key finding one: resistance to change: The primary study found that to be competitive in global environment organizations must embrace change; however, they are heavily resistant to change. They acknowledge that personnel are an indispensable asset to the company, but still they only embrace transformation superficially. This is in large part due to the fact that they have always used westernized models where doing work was created by and for men. The females in the study realize the importance of staff and treat them accordingly. The study found that resistance to change is twofold, firstly caused by society and secondly by personal views of the female managers.

Subtheme one: resistance to change –societal: It was found that despite this, females still feel that they are discriminated against. They perceive themselves in a male dominated world where politics keeps on existing, now differently, such as reverse racism. Whilst it was not the aim of the study it was interesting to note that white females feel that are female only, but the fact that they are white causes two fold discrimination.

The study found that culture plays a role in female career progression. There seems to be a notion of how females "should operate" which stems from various culture's tradition and gender stereotypes. It was found that expectations of a woman stretch over various cultures.

Subtheme two: resistance to change –personal: Females have an internal image of how they perceive successful management. To them successful management leadership entails direction, guidance, influence and being an example. There seems to be consensus that there is a difference between a manager and a leader, but some females feel that the concept can be used interchangeably and in aid of each other. An interesting finding was that females see themselves as managers and not leaders. It was found that their internal image causes inner conflict. One of the main reasons for this is external stereotypes. It was found that most females believed there is a difference between management and leadership. Some females did feel that the concepts can be used interchangeably and in aid of each other. It was proved that female leadership is transformational, including traits such as: caring, being motherly, empathetic, collaborative, empowering, acknowledging, recognizing, being an example and a good listener. Transformational leadership is in direct contrast to transactional leadership and only two of the respondents showed transactional leadership qualities inclusive of the "telling style" trait. It was found that the transformational leadership type correspond to the archetype of a woman, being a nurturer, carer, mother and this was caused by gender socialization. In this study it showed that female leaders see themselves as successful, because they are efficient. They measure themselves, however, by the male archetype, strengthening their conflicting ideas of their own definition leadership and what they believe leadership 'should be'. There are females that saw themselves as less effective and it was identified that the cause of this was lack of self-confidence. Females felt that they were too emotional and that they need to become emotionally mature. The fact that they perceive themselves as too emotional and measure their success in line with the stereotype of men being more successful strengthens their lack of confidence. Therefore a self-fulfilling prophesy is happening. It was found that males being more successful business leaders were a recurring perception. This stems from the fact that the qualities associated with successful business leaders are synonymous with success. These qualities/traits were identified as assertiveness, being an example, being an untiring worker and devoted to their family. Females measuring themselves with male dominated views, find a certain amount of inner conflict exists, because even though they don't perceive themselves as less effective by implementing a transformational (more female orientated role) leadership style, their own internal stereotype is of such that they believe that females are the mother of the household and they are supposed to take up the female responsibilities of being a mother and that females can't be seen as leaders in the workplace. This highlights the next finding. It was found that females can't maintain a healthy balance because they believe they have to play multiple roles and work excessively hard to be a successful leader. This causes a great deal of inner conflict which stems from the fact that work takes up the bulk of their day and this causes them to see their family less causing a feeling of guilt. It was found that females are very motivated and do things with passion. Females felt that men are given a position because they are a man and not necessarily motivated for that position. Females are motivated by prejudice and life circumstances where you are forced to survive such as divorce and death.

Key finding two: disempowerment

Empowerment is very important to females. Most females feel

the need to empower, because they realise the benefits thereof. Not only do females want to empower other females, but they want to be empowered themselves to advance in their career. In line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs females feel fulfilled when they empower, reaching self-actualization. One of the reasons identified for females feeling disempowered is because they have no finances and even though there are initiatives by government to provide funds and resources, they do not advocate the initiatives and relay the information. It was found that because females battle financially they are forced to take on multiple roles causing excessive amounts of stress. Female leaders believe that organizations have male bias. This measures what good leadership looks like, stereotypically associated with men. Females believe this stereotype because when they talk about managers they use the word 'he'. This point is furthered proven by the fact that good leadership is less emotional, a factor readily associated with men. A problem identified was that females do not perceive themselves as bold. This emanated from the fact that they fear, don't have any self-confidence and don't take risks. The stereotypical characteristics associated with successful leadership are being bold. This once again is in line with the characteristics of the male archetype. Females thus keep on feeling inadequate and thus disempowered. The last reason found for females feeling disempowered is the fact that they feel they do not have the skill required to be successful leaders. This is by and large because skill and competency is regarded as a prerequisite to being successful in the business world. This forms a direct contrast with proven studies that show that experience is as important as the necessary skills, if not more.

Key finding three: undermining of achievements: The female leadership style is transformational in nature. This style is characterised by traits such as: caring; empathy; acting as a mother, nurturing; emotion; collaboration; empowerment; recognition; acknowledgement; leading by example and being a good listener. It was found that female leadership style forms a direct contrast with male leadership styles. The male leadership style is transactional in nature. The traits associated with transactional leaders are: achieving goals, foster compliance, being directive, demands obedience and if not obeyed they punish. It was found that even though female leadership is in direct contrast to male leadership, and successful leadership is measured by stereotypical societal norms where males are seen as superior, they did not see their style as unsuccessful. Some females felt they were equal to men and others even felt they are more effective than men. Still, they do not acknowledge their successes. Female leaders felt that confidence is necessary for success they displayed not confidence in themselves. It was found that they do not believe in their ability even though the facts show they are more than able to lead successfully. They thus undermine their own ability strengthening the ongoing self-fulfilling prophesy.

Conclusion

The conclusions reached in this study was to address the main aim which was to identify a preferred managerial style used by females and to identify the traits they exhibit to enhance their careers.

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