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## WOMEN LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE ON LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

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**Abstract :** This study tries to explore the opinion of women leaders about their most preferred leadership attributes. The sample selected for this study includes women leaders from corporate sector and successful women entrepreneurs. A sample size of 30 women was selected randomly and the questionnaire was administered to them. The selected sample belongs to different hierarchy and different age group of women. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. First part focus on the demographic profile of the respondents such as type of organization, marital status, age, experience etc. the second part consists of statements related to the competencies required for a successful leader. The results shows that the most important competency preferred by majority of the women leaders is transformational leadership, followed by confidence. The competencies identified in this study indicate that women leaders to be successful, need to evaluate the traditional leadership behavior exhibited by the male leaders. They can excel by adopting the contemporary competencies like resilience, empathy and emotional intelligence coupled with confidence in self and confidence in others.

**Index Terms - Women leaders, competency, leadership, transformational leadership, resilience**

### I. INTRODUCTION

“There is nothing as we, women cannot accomplish”- Michelle Obama

Women empowerment is a much celebrated word of this century. Women are expected to be empowered, educated, career oriented and financially independent. But still a tacit rule which limits further career advancement of women is still prevailing in Indian society. The worth of women's contribution and work has been unrecognized and neglected since time immemorial. India's rich pool of educated female talent is one of the factors which catalyzed our development to world's fastest growing economy. Recent research shows a gradual strain in this meticulous exertion to thrive. According to a recent Nielsen survey, "Women of Tomorrow" comprising of 6,500 women across 21 different nations, Indian women are the most stressed in the world today. With just 2.9% of women in the CEO positions of the Fortune 500 companies, our culture and mindset still has to be adapted to tap the women talent pool effectively. This study investigates the intentional psychological efforts made by the women in demonstrating the expected leadership traits to reach the zenith of their career in this patriarchal and male dominated society.

### Review of literature and research gap

Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman (2019) stated that the women in leadership positions are more effective than men in almost every 84 competencies which we usually measure. They identified that the women in top position have high integrity and honesty, can act with resilience, have a desire for self development and to achieve their preset goals. The study shows that the women will rate themselves low in leadership assessment surveys; not because they are underrating themselves, but because they are being more realistic about their capabilities. The confidence level of women is observed to be increasing by age in the above study.

Wei Zheng, Ronit Kark, Alyson L. Meister, (2018), investigated the conflict that the women leaders are experiencing between the dual demand of agency and communion. They explained that the women tend to develop a paradox mindset that adopts agency and communion together or a dilemma mindset that separates agency and communion. The authors concluded that the women who develop a paradoxical mindset are more likely to be successful leaders.

Griffiths, Oren, Roberts, Lynette (2019) surveyed 1885 employees from 25 organisations to identify the leadership traits preferred. Men were more strongly associated with some agentic traits, whereas women were more strongly associated with a diverse range of both agentic and communal traits. They concluded that the desired leadership qualities included both agentic and communal qualities, but generally favoured traits are associated with women.

Olanrewaju. O. O. Victor (2019) studied the qualities required for a leader using principal component analysis. 127 questionnaires were administered among the top leaders from different sectors and the results revealed that thirteen top most qualities required in a leader are accessibility and dedication, neutrality and modesty, aspiration and attentiveness, believe and aptitude, dignity and amiability, insight and confidence, vitality and concentration, originality and honesty, responsibility and team spirit, decency and self-assurance, charitable, comical and maintenance culture, and reliability

Thomas -Cindy study in (2020) states seven characteristics which make the women effective leaders. It includes transformational leadership, empathy, nurturing behavior, high emotional intelligence, knowing one's own limitation etc.

Ashleigh Shelby Rosette and Leigh Plunkett Tost (2010) considered whether the perceived role incongruence between the female gender role and the leader role led to a female leader disadvantage (as predicted by role congruity theory) or whether instead a female leader advantage would emerge (as predicted by double standards and stereotype content research). It was found out that only when success was internally attributed that women top leaders were evaluated as more agentic and more communal than men top leaders. It also showed that the favorable ratings were unique to top-level positions and further showed that the effect on agentic traits was mediated by perceptions of double standards, while the effect on communal traits was mediated by expectations of feminized management skills. Finally, the study showed that top women leaders were evaluated most favorably on overall leader effectiveness.

Herminia (2013) explored the ways to handle double standards by female leaders. The researchers said that women are always compared against the masculine leadership traits of their male counterparts. The women have to compete more to be successful in the world of men and many times they are forced to learn the skills their male counterparts have acquired naturally.

Rachel Muller-Heyndyk (2019), identifies that women face more challenges and gendered double standards in the path of their career progression. The women workers are judged more negatively than the men employees for the same behavior. Bossy attitude and aggressive nature are considered to be traits of a male leader, but people cannot handle the same traits from a woman leader. The research found out that the attribute commonly preferred in potential leaders are associated with men and the communal traits which are frequently found in women led them being perceived as good managers, not as potential leaders.

T. Christina and H. Anthony (2005) mentioned in their study that women leaders always prefer to follow democratic and transformational leadership styles than men, which are developed through the socialization process of women.

Kristyn A. Scott, Douglas J. Brown, 2006, identified in their studies that women leaders exhibit more communal traits than men and agentic traits were not much accessible in women leaders.

Analysis of various available literatures emphasized the fact that more communal leadership traits are demonstrated by women leaders and men leaders exhibit more agentic skills. Even though agency traits are considered as the socially preferred traits of a successful leader, studies proved that certain competencies make the women leaders successful than their male counterparts. But, no literature is available on the perception of women leaders about the above said competencies. Among these traits which are the skills which women leaders think as important to their career? This study tries to explore what women leaders consider as the most important competencies which can make them successful as leaders. The dearth of literature regarding the perception of women leaders regarding the competencies relevant for a leader also forms the basis of this study.

## Objectives

1. To analyse if the demographic characteristics of women leaders have any significance on their perception of leadership traits.
2. To study the perception of women leaders about various leadership traits.
3. To identify the leadership trait which is considered to be most important by women leaders.

## Hypothesis

1. The demographic characteristics of women leaders do not have any significant relationship with the leadership traits

## Research methodology

In this research six leadership traits have been identified from literature review, which helps women leaders to be more successful than male leaders. The identified traits/ factors for this study are transformational leadership, empathy, nurturing behavior, high emotional intelligence, resilience and confidence. A questionnaire is prepared on the above mentioned traits with questions under each factor. For every individual construct, the researcher has developed items using a five-point Likert scale.

Table below shows the selection of competencies from various articles to frame the questionnaire

Sl.No	Author Name	Article	Competencies identified
1	Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman (2019)	Research: Women Score Higher Than Men in Most Leadership Skills	Integrity, resilience, realistic
2	Olanrewaju, Victor (2019)	Exploring the Qualities of a Good Leader Using Principal Component Analysis	aspiration and attentiveness, insight and confidence, originality and honesty
3	Thomas –Cindy (2020)	Leadership Lessons Men Can Learn from Women	Transformation leadership, empathy, nurturing behavior, high emotional intelligence, knowing own limitation

The sample selected for this study includes women leaders from corporate sector and successful women entrepreneurs. A sample size of 30 women was selected randomly and the questionnaire was administered to them. The selected sample belongs to different hierarchy and different age group of women. The data was collected by sending questionnaires using mail – through Google forms and on social networking sites. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. First part focus on the demographic profile of the respondents such as type of organization, marital status, age, experience etc. the second part consists of statements related to the competencies required for a successful leader.

The opinions of respondents were collected on 5 point Likert scale , where responses ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

70% of the respondents are from private sector organizations where competency is a key factor in being successful. 6.7% of respondents are below 30 years and 16.7 % belongs to 30-40 age groups. 23.4% are from Gen Y and rest 53.3% are from Gen X. It is also regarded as more self-sufficient and independent than its successor. When it comes to managerial roles, Gen X takes the mantle better than Gen Y for most individuals.

80% of the respondents are having more than 20 years of experience of nurturing and managing people and organizations successfully.

**Table:I Demographic profile of the respondents**

Respondents characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Type of organization	Entrepreneur	6	20
	Pvt Sector	21	70
	Public Sector	3	10
Marital Status	Married	26	86.7
	Single	4	13.3
Age	Below 30	2	6.7
	30-40	5	16.7
	40-50	16	53.3
	Above 50	7	23.3
Experience	5-10 years	4	13.3
	10-15years	0	0
	15-20 years	2	6.7
	Above 20 years	24	80

(Source: Primary data)

**Table II Descriptive Statistics of various leadership attributes**

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Transformational Leadership	30	18	24	21.30	.284	1.557
Empathy	30	13.00	20.00	17.7667	.28641	1.56873
Nurturing Behaviour	30	12.00	15.00	13.3000	.17387	.95231
Emotional Intelligence	30	15.00	20.00	17.9000	.28101	1.53914
Resilience	30	12.00	20.00	16.9667	.44845	2.45628
Confidence	30	18.00	20.00	18.9667	.14765	.80872
Valid N (listwise)	30					

(Source: Primary data)

To test the hypothesis, the demographic characteristics of women leaders do not have any significant relationship with the leadership traits, Chi square test has been conducted between different demographic characteristics and leadership attributes.

Table III shows the relation between Nature of Organization and leadership attributes. Among the various leadership attributes, the  $p$  values for nurturing behavior and resilience are 0.021 and 0.007 respectively, which are lesser than the standard alpha value (0.05). Hence we would reject the null hypothesis that asserts the two variables are independent of each other. The attributes such as empathy and resilience have significant relation with the nature of the organization in which one works. The public sector leaders are more focused on the rules and process of the work rather than the employees. Motivating the staff without much incentive as in private sector is another challenge for leaders in public sector organizations.

**Table III- Significance of Nature of organization to Leadership Attributes**

Attribute	Chi-Square Tests			
		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Transformational Leadership	Pearson Chi-Square	14.970 <sup>a</sup>	12	.243
Empathy	Pearson Chi-Square	17.917 <sup>a</sup>	12	.118
Nurturing Behaviour	Pearson Chi-Square	14.908 <sup>a</sup>	6	.021
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Chi-Square	12.245 <sup>a</sup>	10	.269
Resilience	Pearson Chi-Square	27.119 <sup>a</sup>	12	.007
Confidence	Pearson Chi-Square	5.827 <sup>a</sup>	4	.212

(Source: Primary data)

Table IV shows the relation between Age and leadership attributes. It shows that confidence is not associated with the age of person. It is evident that, the  $p$  values for transformational leadership, empathy, nurturing behavior, emotional intelligence and resilience are 0.034, 0.020, 0.041, 0.049 and 0.043 respectively, which are lesser than the standard alpha value (0.05). Hence the attributes such as transformational leadership, empathy, nurturing behavior, emotional intelligence and resilience may be said to have significant relation with age of the respondents.

The confidence level of a person takes a bell shaped curve as compared with the age. It begins to elevate in the late teens, acquires its maximum in middle age and will start dropping after 60 years of age. The education and qualification can make a young person confident and the experience and exposure can elevate the confidence level of an older adult also.

Table IV- Significance of Age to Leadership Attributes

Chi-Square Tests				
Attribute		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Transformational Leadership	Pearson Chi-Square	30.335 <sup>a</sup>	18	.034
Empathy	Pearson Chi-Square	32.411 <sup>a</sup>	18	.020
Nurturing Behaviour	Pearson Chi-Square	17.561 <sup>a</sup>	9	.041
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Chi-Square	25.043 <sup>a</sup>	15	.049
Resilience	Pearson Chi-Square	29.438 <sup>a</sup>	18	.043
Confidence	Pearson Chi-Square	10.604 <sup>a</sup>	6	.101

(Source: Primary data)

Table V shows the relation between experience and leadership attributes. Among the various leadership attributes, the  $p$  values for transformational leadership and resilience are lesser than the standard alpha value (0.05). Hence we would reject the null hypothesis that asserts the two variables are independent of each other. The attributes such as transformational leadership and resilience are associated with the experience of a person. Transformational leadership is a leadership style which radiates a lot of positivity and creates a favorable change in the followers. That kind of skill can be sharpened only with the experience.

Table V- Significance of Experience to Leadership Attributes

Chi-Square Tests				
Attribute		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Transformational Leadership	Pearson Chi-Square	36.302 <sup>a</sup>	12	.000
Empathy	Pearson Chi-Square	8.958 <sup>a</sup>	12	.706
Nurturing Behaviour	Pearson Chi-Square	6.250 <sup>a</sup>	6	.396
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Chi-Square	10.286 <sup>a</sup>	10	.416
Resilience	Pearson Chi-Square	39.583 <sup>a</sup>	12	.000
Confidence	Pearson Chi-Square	5.307 <sup>a</sup>	4	.257

(Source: Primary data)

Table VI: Women Leader's perceptions on Leadership

Competency	Percentage	Rank
Transformational Leadership	20.0565	1
Empathy	16.7294	4
Nurturing Behavior	12.5235	6
Emotional Intelligence	16.8550	3
Resilience	15.9762	5
Confidence	17.8594	2

(Source: Primary data)

The above table demonstrates the level of importance of each competency as perceived by the women leaders interviewed. The competency of Transformational Leadership is considered as most important by the respondents with a score of 20%, followed by Confidence (17.85%) and Emotional Intelligence (16.85%). The respondents strongly believe that confidence and high emotional intelligence are also an important factor to be a successful leader. The least preferred competency is found out to be the nurturing behavior with 12.5%.

The findings of this research point out that transformational leadership skill of a person is associated with the experience of a person. 80% of our respondents are with more than 20 years of experience and hence majority of them considers that it is the most important competency for a successful leader.

### Findings and Discussions

This research is an attempt to explore what the women leaders consider as the most important leadership attribute which can lead them to success. The most important competency preferred by majority of the women leaders is transformational leadership, followed by confidence. These findings elucidate the literature review that transformational leadership is the most preferred leadership style of women leaders. Many great leaders in history followed transformational leadership style. Mary Barra- CEO of General Motors, Indra Nooyi- CEO of Pepsi Co are examples of successful women leaders who practiced transformational leadership.

This research also concludes that the nature of organization has an impact on the nurturing behavior and resilience of a leader. Likewise, Transformational Leadership, empathy, nurturing behavior, Emotional Intelligence and resilience are associated with the age of a person as well. This study also proves that Transformational leadership and resilience are associated with the experience.

The women leaders' perception about preferred leadership attributes may help the young aspirants to mould themselves for a successful career. In broader perspective, these findings may help the organizations to redesign their selection, training and career development practices. This study will also help the academicians to conduct further studies to generate new models that can be implemented among the students especially business management students to equip them with the preferred competencies.

The competencies identified in this study indicate that women leaders to be successful, need to evaluate the traditional leadership behavior exhibited by the male leaders. They can excel by adopting the contemporary competencies like resilience, empathy and emotional intelligence coupled with confidence in self and confidence in others.

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