

*Full Length Research Paper*

## Do Women Value the Domains of Leadership Differently than Men?

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A comparative study was conducted to determine if women value the various domains of leadership differently than men, and, if they differ, to determine if the differences are consistent across leadership positions. Seventy-two actively employed educators completed a short online leadership survey where they were asked to report their gender and current academic position (teacher leader or administrator). In addition the participants were asked to rate (4-point Likert scale) the importance of the four domains of leadership strength (*relationship building, strategic thinking, executing ideas, and influencing others*) suggested by Rath and Conchie (2008). A two-way MANOVA was conducted to determine if any significant main or interaction effects could be found for gender and academic position for each of the four self-rated domains of leadership strength. A statistically significant ( $\alpha=.05$ ) difference was only found for gender. A significant main effect for gender was found for both strategic thinking,  $F(1, 68) = 4.85, p = .031, \eta^2 = .067$ , and for relationship building,  $F(1, 68) = 9.42, p = .003, \eta^2 = .122$ , with men ( $M = 3.06, SD = 1.14$ ) scoring significantly higher than women ( $M = 2.31, SD = 1.18$ ) on the strategic thinking domain and women ( $M = 2.71, SD = 1.3$ ) scoring significantly higher than men ( $M = 1.65, SD = 1.11$ ) on the relationship building domain. These results suggest that women perceive the *relationship building* domain of leadership as more important than men. If the findings of Rath and Conchie's study are valid, women could become more effective leaders if they adopt a leadership style they prefer, which the present study suggests may differ from that of men. In addition, the results suggest women may be more effective mentors because of the importance they place on *relationship building*.

**Keywords:** gender, leadership domains.

### Introduction

The present study was conducted to determine if women value the various domains of leadership differently than men, and, if they differ, to determine if the differences are consistent across leadership positions. Based on a review of the current literature, it is predicted that females will rate the *relationship building* domain of leadership higher than males, but it is unclear if this difference will be consistent across leadership positions.

The results of a study conducted by Rath and Conchie (2008) suggest people in leadership positions are more productive if they adopt a leadership style consistent with their values. The results of their study suggest effective leaders are highly aware of their own strengths and use their strengths to their advantage. Fullan (2004) found the most effective leaders surround themselves with people who have strengths and talents different from their own in order to develop a leadership team comprised of all four leadership strengths: *relationship building, influencing others, executing ideas, and strategic thinking*.

A study conducted by Merchant (2012) found common leadership distinctions between men and women stem from differing communication styles depending on the purpose of the conversation. Women use communication to build relationships and social connections, while men tend to value communication to achieve tangible outcomes. Women are more expressive and polite in situations of conflict, whereas men are more likely to offer solutions to problems while avoiding what they perceive to be unnecessary discussions of interpersonal problems. Women tend to value the process of communication as a tool for building and strengthening relationships, while men are prone to be more assertive in their speech, and unemotional or detached in conversations.

Tannen (1990) found different communication styles between men and women begin at a young age. Boys tend to build relationships by doing things together, participating in an action toward a common goal. Girls tend to simply talk and create close relationships. Male leaders prefer to have negotiations and women leaders prefer connections. However, some researchers

argue men and women do not differ in communication or leadership styles at all, but rather the differences are merely conditional on various situations (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Foels, Driskell, Mullen, & Salas, 2000).

In a 2008 study examining high-achieving women-leaders Stern found women are more likely to use a leadership style that is relationship-based, collaborative, and team-building. The following quote from a female participant in a study conducted by Eckman (2004) reflects this leadership style, “I spend a lot more time listening than I do pontificating...I use a lot more feeling words...I have a real relationship with my staff” (p. 203). Anderson, Lievens, van Dam, and Born (2006) found women scored significantly higher than men on measurements of oral communication and interaction with others suggesting an interpersonally oriented leadership style. Cheung and Halpern (2010) also found women had a greater tendency to share information with faculty. On the other hand, some researchers contend differences between genders do exist. However, these differences do not imply that either gender makes better leaders, but understanding these distinctions will help leaders better communicate with those of the opposite sex (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Merchant, 2012).

### **Leadership Styles and Domains**

#### **Transformational and Transactional Leadership**

Over several decades an enormous amount of research has been conducted based on Burns’ (1978) transformational and transactional leadership theory. Transformational leadership is characterized by a charismatic leader with a visionary, inspirational, and trusting rapport with followers (Merchant, 2012). Transformational leaders gain the confidence of others in order to achieve organizational goals, by encouraging and helping develop their followers’ full potential (Val & Kemp, 2012). Kastenmuller et al., (2014) suggested women tend to take on a more transformational approach to leadership than do men. Transformational leaders inspire others to go beyond the expectation. They pay attention to the differences among team members, inspire others through modeling, provide mentoring, coaching and continuous feedback, and challenge others with new ideas (Bass, 1985). Based on self-reporting teachers, Zeinabadi (2013) indicated females prefer more transformational leadership styles whereas males are more prone to a transactional leadership style.

Merchant (2012) explained transactional leaders offer incentives in exchange for obedience and punishments for failures. Transactional leaders have a take charge authoritarian attitude, although the transactional leader uses a leader-follower exchange when performance and goals are in agreement. Furthermore, transactional leaders focus on finding mistakes and intervene when necessary (Almansour, 2012; Kastenmuller, et al., 2014; Val & Kemp, 2012). Men are considered to be more goal oriented, task completers, and strategic problem solvers. They want to *fix* problems and achieve results (Merchant, 2012).

Women in the workplace continue to increase in proportion to men, although women remain vastly underrepresented at the highest administrative levels (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011) regardless of positive leadership effectiveness (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014). However, Ayman and Korabik (2010) suggested women may be more suited to leadership positions in contemporary organizations because of a woman’s interpersonal and sociocultural attributes. Women have an advantage stemming from the belief they are more likely to adopt collaborative and empowering leadership styles leaving men at a disadvantage because men may exhibit more assertion of power (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014).

#### **Relationship Building**

Relationship building is a strong component of transformational leadership by taking care of followers’ needs, concerns, and providing individualized consideration (Braun, Peus, & Frey, 2012). Rath and Conchie (2008) explained relationship builders are leaders holding a group of people together with a collective energy to transform individuals into a team. Relationship builders minimize distractions and relate to people as strong mentors and steer others to improved achievements. Hensley and Burmeister (2008) explained building relationships share a common theme of relationship connectors: communication, trust, support, competence, continuous renewal, and safety. Hensley and Burmeister (2008) clarified “Effective leaders recognize quickly and clearly that people are the most important asset in any organization” (p. 126). Finzel (2000) agreed and shared how leaders must make people a priority with “people work before paper work” (p.40), and Whitaker (2003) suggested the most effective leaders concentrate on people, not on programs. Reig and Marcoline (2008) concurred, stating relationships should be on the priority list of all leaders. Finnigan and Daly (2014) offered what they referred to as *relationship reform* by taking a relational approach to education improvement with collaborative and trusting cultures. Bleich (2014) suggested relationships should not stand alone, but with action, leaders should take full responsibility for establishing and nurturing relationships, even when those relationships are challenging.

#### **Influencing Others**

Rath and Conchie (2008) defined effective influential leaders as those who can sell their ideas to others. These leaders take charge and speak up to make sure the group is heard. They help the team reach a much larger audience and help team members feel comfortable and connected to the objectives at hand. Merchant (2012) described influence “as a leader’s ability to motivate their followers to change their behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes” (p.23). Researchers who studied influential tactics found males use personal appeal, assertiveness, and inspiration. Females also use inspirational appeal, along with consultation and ingratiation. Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, and Fetters (2012) explained how a leader’s influence can affect multiple layers within education. “At the center of the ripple effect is a principals’ practice, which includes principal knowledge, dispositions, and actions” (p.7) to provide direct and indirect

influence to community...“school conditions, teacher quality and placement, and instructional quality” (p.8).

### Executing Ideas

Rath and Conchie (2008) identified the strength of executing ideas by accomplishing tasks, providing coaching and feedback, and monitoring projects to make sure goals are met. Those that excel at executing ideas work tirelessly to complete a task and take ideas and turn them into realities. Some executive leaders may ignore other strengths when bogged down in challenging tasks. Executive leaders may tend to focus more on task-oriented goals without a network of relationships to support them. However, Theodore Roosevelt commented “The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it” (as cited in Finzel, 2000).

### Strategic Thinking

Rath and Conchie (2008) described strategic thinkers as problem solvers and constantly pulling team members into the future. Strategic thinkers navigate the team through the most effective route. Beatty (2010) distinguished strategic thinkers as those that can identify patterns, connections and key concerns. Furthermore, they can move forward with decisive action based on a plan. They also have a balance of direction and autonomy, reward appropriate risk taking, and build commitment within the team. Beatty (2010) furthered explained strategic thinking is a structural and individual process. Merchant (2012) added strategic thinkers are task oriented, autocratic, and direct. Mellon and Kroth (2013) stated strategic thinking is “a particular way of thinking” (p.70). It is not the same as strategic planning, “one is analysis, and the other is synthesis” (Mintzberg, 1994, p.107).

## Methods

### Participants

A total of 72 actively employed educators, 55 females and 17 males, from a public school district in southeast Alabama completed the survey during the 2014-2015 school year. Teaching faculty, assistant principals and principals were contacted. Participant demographics are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

*Participant Frequencies by Gender and Academic Role*

		Academic Role		
		Administrator	Teacher Leader	Total
Gender	Female	11	44	55
	Male	8	9	17
Total		19	53	72

In the interest of protecting potential respondents, the Institutional Review Board at the affiliated university reviewed and gave approval prior to conducting the study. Participants were contacted via the local school district IT department. The IT department emailed the survey to all district central office faculty, assistant principals, and principals. The IT department requested the principals to forward the survey by email to the individual school faculty members.

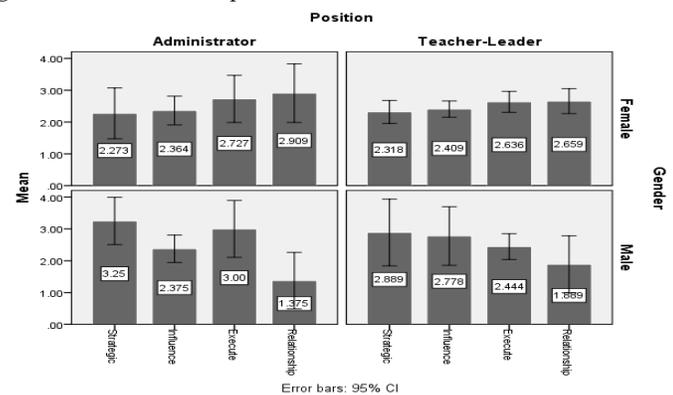
The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes for the average respondent to complete. The survey was developed using Google Forms® and was sent via email to 674 potential participants. Only 10% or 72 surveys were completed and returned which is a key limitation of the study.

Participants were asked to identify themselves as male or female and whether they were serving in either a teaching role or an administrative role. Participants were then asked to read a brief description of each of the four domains of leadership strength as described by Rath and Conchie (2008). After reading the descriptions of each domain, the participants were asked to rate how important they perceived each domain to be in order to be an effective leader. Using a 4-point Likert-type scale, respondents were asked to rate each domain using the following scale: (4) *Very Important*, (3) *Important*, (2) *Somewhat Important*, or (1) *Not Important*.

### Results

To analyze the data collected from the 72 participants, the researchers chose the statistical data analysis software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 22). The means for each of the domains for gender and academic role can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *This graph displays the means and 95% confidence bands for each of the four domains measured as a function of gender and academic position.*



After determining if the data met the requirements of having a homogenous covariance matrix and having multivariate normality, a two-way MANOVA was conducted to determine if any significant main or interaction effects could be found for gender and academic position for each of the four dependent measures.

A significant main effect for gender was found for both *strategic thinking*,  $F(1, 68) = 4.85, p = .031$ ; Wilk's  $\Lambda = .849$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .067$ , and for *relationship building*,  $F(1, 68) = 9.42, p = .003$ , Wilk's  $\Lambda = .849$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .122$ , with men ( $M = 3.06, SD = 1.14$ ) scoring significantly higher than women ( $M = 2.31, SD = 1.18$ ) on the *strategic thinking* dimension and women ( $M = 2.71, SD = 1.3$ ) scoring significantly higher than men ( $M = 1.65, SD = 1.11$ ) on the *relationship building* dimension. No significant main effect for gender was found for either *influencing others*,  $F(1, 68) = .578, p = .45$ ; Wilk's  $\Lambda = .849$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .008$ , or *executing ideas*,  $F(1, 68) = .017, p = .895$ ; Wilk's  $\Lambda = .849$ , partial  $\eta^2 < .001$ .

No significant multivariate main effect for academic position was found, Wilk's  $\Lambda(4, 65) = .572, p = .684$  partial  $\eta^2 = .034$ , nor was a significant multivariate interaction effect between gender and academic position found, Wilk's  $\Lambda(4, 65) = .570, p = .685$  partial  $\eta^2 = .034$ .

### Implications, Future Research, and Limitations

As predicted, females rated the *relationship building* domain of leadership higher than males. Although no priori prediction was made regarding the *strategic thinking* domain, the fact that males in the current study rated this domain higher than the females is consistent with the literature (e.g., Merchant, 2012). The current study differs from previous studies in that it did not use a formal instrument to classify participants. Instead, the current study simply asked participants to rate how important they perceived each dimension of leadership after reading a brief description of each component. The results of the study do not suggest that the domain perceived as being most important by a person necessarily reflects the leadership style that the person actually utilizes, nor do they suggest that women uniformly value one domain and men another. The results of the current study do suggest women in general value the domains of leadership differently than men, and, as such, may benefit from adopting a leadership style they find most comfortable. Research (e.g., Rath & Conchie, 2008) supports the idea that many effective leaders employ a leadership style they find comfortable rather than adopting a leadership style that is expected of them or is prevalent within a particular organization. Therefore, simply being aware of the various domains of leadership and how you value each of them may help leaders become more effective by noticing discrepancies between what is valued and what is actually employed. If women do value certain dimensions of leadership more highly than men, which the current research suggests, modeling the leadership styles of men may not be an effective strategy for many women.

In addition, because women rated *relationship building* higher than men, the women may be more effective mentors than men. Effective mentoring relies heavily on building a sound, trusting relationship between the mentor and mentee (Kutilek & Earnest, 2001; Mincemoyer & Thomson, 1998; Zachary & Fischler, 2014). Realizing the full potential for mentoring success, the mentor and mentee must lay the groundwork during the

beginning of the essential partnership. The researchers suggest the following for future research:

- Do women seek the role of mentor more often than men?
- Do women mentor men differently than women in the work place?
- Are women more effective mentors than men?

Although the results of the current study are consistent with the literature, it has several limitations that should be noted. The response rate was only 10%, which was lower than expected 20-30%. The poor return rate negatively impacted the size of our sample ( $N=72$ ), which was smaller than desired. Both of these factors could negatively impact the generalizability of the findings and the statistical power of the analysis. As such, the reader should interpret the findings of this study with these limitations in mind.

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