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CONSIDERATION, INITIATING STRUCTURE, AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF GENDER

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***Abstract.** This study looked at the role of gender in consideration, initiating structure, and transformational leadership behaviors in a male-dominated organization. Findings indicate that women perceive themselves to be exhibiting lower levels of consideration and initiating structure than men do. There is however no difference between men and women when it comes to the four factors of transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Gender differences in consideration and initiating structure continue to exist even after controlling for transformational leadership. Importance of the basic two-dimensional leadership model (task versus relations) in reducing gender gap is highlighted.*

No single factor provides greater benefit to an organization than effective leadership. Leadership has been written about, formally researched, and discussed more than any other single topic. There is still however considerable debate as to what leadership exactly is. Leadership could be seen as the art of influencing and directing people in a manner that wins their obedience, confidence, respect and enthusiastic cooperation in achieving a common objective (Bass, 1990). Burns (1978: 19) defined leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of both leaders and followers.”

Behavioral Theories of Leadership

In the 1950s, disillusionment with the trait theory shifted focus of researchers to behavioral theories of leadership. Among the best known behavioral approaches to leadership are the Ohio State leadership studies. A number of researchers developed a list of close to 2000 leadership behaviors. Subsequent analyses reduced the list, which finally became the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire. This questionnaire focuses on two major dimensions of leader behavior—consideration and initiating structure (Yukl, 1998).

Consideration is defined as behavior evidencing concern for members in the group, such as giving recognition, nurturing self esteem, developing mutual trust, inviting participation, etc. Initiating structure includes behaviors that organize the group, define

relationships, specify the task and how it is to be done, emphasize the need to meet deadlines and maintain quality, define lines of responsibility, and clarify roles (House & Aditya, 1997).

Transformational Leadership

Leadership could be classified as transactional or transformational. Transactional leadership is based on an exchange process and takes the existing motives and goals of followers as given and unchanging. Transformational leadership on the other hand has been proposed by several researchers to describe and explain how certain leaders succeed in achieving large-scale change in organizations. First developed by Burns (1978), transformational leadership suggests that certain leaders, through their personal traits and their relationships with followers, go beyond a simple exchange of resources and productivity. Transformational leadership theory proposes that leaders use more complex behaviors than consideration and initiating structure (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). Many current leadership scholars have proposed that organizations need leadership that inspires followers and enables them to enact revolutionary change (Bass, 1985, 1998; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Transformational leadership comprises four factors—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1998).

Idealized influence or charisma is generally defined with respect to follower reactions to the leader as well as the leader's behavior. Followers identify with and emulate the leaders; the leaders are trusted and viewed as articulating an attainable mission and vision. Such leaders are thoroughly respected, have much referent power, maintain high standards and set challenging goals for their followers. Through inspirational motivation, leaders provide symbols and simplified emotional appeals to increase awareness and understanding of mutually desired goals. They elevate follower expectations. Intellectual stimulation involves encouraging followers to question their old ways of doing things. Followers are supported for questioning their own values, beliefs and expectations, as well as those of the leader and organization. Individualized consideration is seen when followers are treated differently but equitably on a one-to-one basis. Not only are their needs recognized and perspectives raised, but also their means of more effectively addressing goals and challenges are dealt with (Bass, 1998).

Burns (1978) considered transactional and transformational leadership as opposite ends of a continuum. Bass (1985) however, suggested that transformational leadership built on and augmented transactional leadership in contributing to follower effort, satisfaction, and effectiveness. Consideration and initiating structure could be seen as transactional leadership behaviors. Transformational leadership adds to consideration and initiating structure in explaining variance in several outcomes (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). Transformational leadership has also been shown to be positively related to both consideration and initiating structure (Bass, 1998). We therefore hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Consideration and initiating structure will be positively related to each of the four factors of transformational leadership.

Studies on Women Leadership

Women are emerging as managers and leaders within contemporary organizations. Several factors, both contextual and personal, have contributed to a rich variety of experiences for these women. Claims have been made that women leaders are unique as compared to their male counterparts in terms of style, orientation, power play, expected behavior and success

(Appelbaum & Shapiro, 1993). There seems to be a tacit assumption that men are better in the administration of the leadership process than women are. Attempts to refute such sex stereotypes have encountered some evidence indicating that men and women differ in personality characteristics, which could affect leadership and effectiveness (Donnell & Hall, 1980).

The current corporate environment is male dominated and entry for a woman into this “male domain” has always been difficult. Women are seen to rise within the organization only until they reach the proverbial “glass ceiling” (Morrison, 1992). It is for this reason that females are less inclined than males to accept a leadership role, even when their personality is high in dominance. Megargee (1969) conducted a study on the influence of sex roles on leadership behaviors. The research investigated how sex role perceptions influence the expression of leadership behaviors by high-dominance men and women. It was found that when high-dominance men and women were paired with group members of the same sex, 75% of the high-dominance men and 70% of the high-dominance women assumed leadership role. When high-dominance men were paired with low-dominance women, 90 % of the men assumed the leadership role. However, when high-dominance women were paired with low-dominance men, only 20 % of the women assumed leadership roles. In other words, women may exhibit different leadership behaviors with other women than with men (Merargee, 1969). The leadership styles of women depend greatly on the gender of their subordinates and on the gender ratio in the organization (Eagly & Karau, 1991; Fagenson, 1990; Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Kent & Moss, 1994).

The primary determinants of any person’s (male or female) ability to influence group performance consist of the leader himself or herself, the group being led, and the situation. However, from the female point of view, the interaction of these leadership variables poses a dilemma (Stead, 1978). If she adopts accommodative leadership behavior patterns, which may be more congruent with her basic personality, she will be subjected to the common male criticism of being too intuitive, undependable, and passive. However, if she adopts autocratic or task-oriented leadership behavior, there is a self-perception of losing her femininity (Appelbaum & Shapiro, 1993).

Women have been characterized as being non-rational in their social encounters, submissive, and passive and are thought to possess “feminine traits” like warmth, kindness, selflessness, and compassion. Therefore, women are believed to be disadvantaged in terms of their traits and behaviors. They are believed to possess personalities that are in conflict with those for necessary functioning as successful leaders in the organizational world. (Smith & Smits, 1994).

Women feel that they have to behave like men in order to be successful leaders. That is the reason many women use the authoritarian leadership style to overcompensate for the sex-stereotypes to which they are subjected. Women have been conditioned to believe that any other “softer” style is dysfunctional and thus even though they are not aggressive, harsh and difficult by nature, they feel they need to use these styles in order to succeed. To be successful in a male-dominated organization, women will therefore end up using less of consideration as compared to their male colleagues. Hence, we have our next hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Women will rate themselves lower on consideration than men will.

Women have been brought up to feel that they are different from men. The early lessons learnt by them are that they are weak, and are incapable of doing everything that a man does. These sex stereotypes have also trickled down into the organizational context. The concept of management has been portrayed as masculine and characterized as being competitive, strategic, unemotional, and analytical. Organizations emphasize rational problem

solving and managerial effectiveness in terms of financial gains instead of employee satisfaction (Smith & Smits, 1994). The problem however arises when women who do exhibit these styles are considered too aggressive, difficult to work with and not being lady-like. Researchers have also found that women who use masculine influence techniques such as issuing threats, offering rewards or claiming expert power are viewed as less effective and have less satisfied subordinates than men who behave in the same way. Therefore, “acting more like a man” undermines a woman’s effectiveness as a leader instead of increasing it (Appelbaum & Shapiro, 1993).

One of the reasons that have led men to believe that they are superior in terms of leadership styles is women’s ambivalence or distaste towards power. From all the contemporary definitions of leadership, it is evident that the art of leadership involves influencing the followers in order to fulfill the follower’s, the leader’s and the organization’s goals. Lack of power or “political competence” therefore has proved an obstacle in the path of women leadership. It has also been seen that organizational climates do not support women leaders. A woman leader is made to feel inferior and inadequate in a leadership role. The leadership influence system—made up of the leader, the group, and the situation—does not appear to be very favorable to women (Fagenson, 1990).

Sex stereotypes affect the leadership styles of women, as does the organizational context (Butz & Lewis, 1996). A conflict for women leaders arises due to sex-role stereotyping. On the one hand, many still believe that leaders should be aggressive, competitive, and tough. Yet, women leaders who behave this way are disliked and they create dissatisfaction among subordinates (Eagly, 1991). Thus, two distinct forces act on women when it comes to initiating structure behaviors. Firstly, women have been made to believe that they cannot be as good as men in initiating structure. They start attributing to themselves less initiating structure than men do. Secondly, a woman acting like a man and exhibiting more initiating structure is not liked by others, more so in a male-dominated organization. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: Women will rate themselves lower on initiating structure than men will.

Gender Differences in Transformational Leadership

Researchers who have studied sex differences in leadership have not restricted them to initiating structure and consideration. There is strong evidence of sex differences in transformational leadership. Anecdotal, survey, and experimental evidence, in all point to the greater tendency for women in leadership to be somewhat more transformational and to display less management by exception than their male counterparts (Bass, 1998).

In 1985, 12 men and 12 women from upper levels of management of a Fortune 50 firm attended an early training workshop on transformational leadership. It was observed that some potentially intriguing sex differences arise in transformational leadership styles of men and women. The study used the MLQ–5R and found that the top four charismatic leadership scores were those of four women (Bass, 1998). In addition to this, MLQ data from four separate investigations conducted between 1986 and 1992 were put together. They support the conclusion that women display more transformational and less transactional leadership than their male counterparts, especially on factors such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration (Bass, 1998). In all these four studies, women leaders attained higher scores for all four components of transformational leadership—charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Druskat (1994) also confirmed the results that indicate that women are more transformational than men are.

At the same time, there is a strong component of developmental behavior in transformational leadership. By definition, transformational leaders focus on developing and raising the awareness of their followers about their importance of satisfying higher order growth needs (Burns, 1978). Eagly and Johnson (1990) described women leaders as being more interested in others than their male counterparts and as being more socially sensitive. Women leaders appear to display qualities more in line with transformational leadership. Beyond this, they are also more likely than their male counterparts to attribute transformational leadership to their relational qualities (Komives, 1991). Male-female differences in transformational leadership may be due to the well known tendency for women to be more nurturing (Eagly, 1991). Women in a male-dominated organization however, will tend to exhibit less of their nurturing behaviors to avoid being subjected to the common male criticism of being too passive. This in turn would reduce the extent of transformational leadership behaviors also. Hence, we have:

Hypothesis 4: Compared to men, women will consider themselves less transformational.

Much of the research on the leadership styles of women has tested the gender-centred notion, which includes gender as the independent variable and behavioral, cognitive, personality and attitudinal measures as the dependent variables. No factors have been incorporated to measure the social and organizational context. Because of this several of the constraints which women managers work against, do not become known (Kanter, 1977). In addition, researches on transformational leadership and gender have generally ignored the role of consideration and initiating structure. It could be argued that consideration and initiating structure are the basic attributes on which women and men differ in male-dominated organizations. Increasing transformational leadership in women may not help reduce gender differences in leadership, since the gender differences may be caused by consideration and initiating structure. The common variance that consideration and initiating structure have with transformational leadership may not account for the gender differences in consideration and initiating structure. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 5: Women will rate themselves lower on consideration and initiating structure than men will, even after controlling for transformational leadership.

METHOD

The study was undertaken in one unit of the Indian defense services. The unit had hardly any female members until a decade ago. Women have started entering the unit in the logistics, administrative, accounts, technical, engineering (electrical and mechanical), and aviation (transports and helicopters) wings. They have yet to enter the field of combat aviation. Considering the small percentage of women as compared to men today, though greater than in the 1980s, the unit continues to be male-dominated.

The organizational culture in the unit studied is one of extreme discipline. There is a hierarchy of formal ranks, which is strictly maintained, not only in the formal, but also in the informal network. We held a preliminary focus group discussion with seven senior officers in the unit. The officers were from the second through the sixth level from the top in the organizational hierarchy, and all of them had more than 25 years of service. The following information obtained from them forms the background for our study.

In 1990, the unit started contemplating in terms of recruiting women, into wings other than medical. This move was due to a severe shortage of officers and because of external

pressure to take in women. A set of terms and conditions of service for women was finalized. Women officers would be offered a short service commission for a period of five years, which could then be extended. The branches in which they would be entering were Air Traffic Control, Logistics, Transport Aviation, Helicopters, Accounts, Engineering, and Technical. Their entry would be after graduation and the selection procedure would include a written test, an interview, a battery of psychological tests, and a medical examination. For pilots, the Pilot Aptitude Test Battery would be conducted.

Women in the unit are at present at the tenth, ninth and eighth level from the top in the organizational hierarchy. The ages of these women are in the range of 23 to 28. At present, none of the women has reached the level in the hierarchy where she either is an instructor or is senior enough to write appraisal reports of other officers. The women officers as of now have working under them, junior officers who are mostly male, and non-managerial subordinates who are all male.

The entry of women into the unit was a highly debated topic and was met with opposition from all levels in the hierarchy. Owing to this, the reception received by women was cool and unwelcome. The focus group that we interviewed felt that the women who joined the unit were more adventurous, risk taking and “masculine” than the average woman was.

Leadership questionnaires were distributed to a randomly selected sample of 103 male and female officers in the unit. The usable sample size was 101, of which 75 were men and 26 were women, in the sixth through tenth level from the top in the formal hierarchy. The age varied from 21 to 45, with two-thirds of the sample being less than 30 years of age.

We measured initiating structure and consideration using the Sergiovanni, Metzcus, and Burden’s (1969) revision of the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 35 items, of which 20 items measure initiating structure and 15 items measure consideration. The responses are given on a 5-point scale: 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = often, 4 = frequently, 5 = always. A score of 1 is given for every response of 4 or 5 in the case of initiating structure and for every response of 1 or 2 in the case of consideration. These are then added up to give the individual’s score for the two variables—consideration and initiating structure. Transformational leadership was measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire–Form 6S (Bass and Avolio, 1992). The questionnaire has 12 items—three items each for each of the four factors of transformational leadership. Responses were given on the same 5-point scale as before: 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = often, 4 = frequently, 5 = always. The mean response for the three items comprising each of the transformational leadership factors was taken as the score for that factor.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the correlations among all variables studied. Initiating structure was significantly positively related to all transformational factors other than intellectual stimulation. Consideration was significantly positively related to each of the four factors of transformational leadership. Thus, our hypothesis 1 was largely supported.

TABLE 1
CORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES STUDIED ^a

(N=101)	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Consideration	7.70	2.44	(0.60)					
2. Initiating Structure	12.29	3.55	.13	(0.76)				
3. Idealized Influence	3.93	0.72	** .31	*** .49	(0.57)			
4. Inspirational Motivation	3.71	0.68	* .22	*** .41	*** .38	(0.46)		
5. Intellectual Stimulation	3.54	0.71	** .27	.11	** .26	** .27	(0.49)	
6. Individualized Consideration	4.14	0.61	* .22	** .30	*** .44	* .24	*** .34	(0.47)

^a Reliabilities of scales are in parentheses.

* p < 0.05

** p < 0.01

*** p < 0.001

We did an analysis of variance to test if scores on the leadership measures varied across gender. The results are reported in Table 2. There was a significant difference between the genders only in the case of initiating structure and consideration. Women rated themselves significantly lower on both initiating structure and consideration than men did. This supports our hypotheses 2 and 3. Our hypothesis 4 was however not supported, since the four transformational factors did not differ between men and women.

TABLE 2
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ACROSS GENDER

Leadership Variables (N=101)	Mean		F value
	Female (N=26)	Male (N=75)	
Initiating Structure	10.88	12.77	* 5.74
Consideration	6.88	7.99	* 4.05
Idealized Influence	3.79	3.98	1.26
Inspirational Motivation	3.58	3.76	1.42
Intellectual Stimulation	3.58	3.53	0.09
Individualized Consideration	4.19	4.12	0.24

* p < 0.05

We explored further by looking at the gender-wise correlations of initiating structure and consideration with the transformational leadership variables. The results are given in Table 3. The correlations between initiating structure and consideration on the one hand, and transformational leadership factors on the other, do not appear to differ between men and women.

TABLE 3
CORRELATIONS BY GENDER

(N=101)	Initiating Structure		Consideration	
	Female (N=26)	Male (N=75)	Female (N=26)	Male (N=75)
Idealized Influence	** .52	*** .46	† .34	* .27
Inspirational Motivation	* .47	** .36	.20	† .20
Intellectual Stimulation	.13	.11	.31	* .26
Individualized Consideration	** .53	* .23	† .36	.19

† p < .10. * p < 0.05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001

By way of testing our hypothesis 5, we did an analysis of covariance to see if initiating structure and consideration varied across genders after controlling for transformational leadership factors. Analysis of covariance assumes that the slope of the covariate by independent variable is the same for all levels of the independent variable (Scheffe, 1959). We tested for heterogeneity of slopes by modeling initiating structure and consideration separately against transformational leadership, gender, and the product of gender and transformational leadership. Except in the case of initiating structure modeled against individualized consideration, there was no significant difference in the gender by transformational leadership relationship as a function of gender. We therefore did the analysis of covariance except in the case of initiating structure against individualized consideration. The results of the analysis of covariance are presented in Table 4. Women rated themselves significantly lower on initiating structure than men did, after controlling for idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation one at a time. Women also rated themselves on consideration lower than men did, when each transformational factor was separately controlled. The difference was however only moderately ($p < .10$) significant in the case of idealized influence and inspirational motivation. These findings provide partial support for our hypothesis 5.

TABLE 4
LEAST SQUARES MEANS OF INITIATING STRUCTURE AND CONSIDERATION ACROSS GENDER

(N=101)	Initiating Structure			Consideration		
	Mean		F value	Mean		F value
AFTER ADJUSTING FOR COVARIANCE WITH	Female (N=26)	Male (N=75)		Female (N=26)	Male (N=75)	
Idealized Influence	11.20	12.66	* 4.38	7.02	7.94	† 3.03
Inspirational Motivation	11.16	12.68	* 4.29	6.98	7.95	† 3.20
Intellectual Stimulation	10.86	12.78	* 5.92	6.85	8.00	* 4.70
Individualized Consideration	—	—	—	6.84	8.00	* 4.72

† $p < 0.10$. * $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION

The results of the study are interesting and in contradiction with some of the previous literature. The data indicate a significant difference between the leadership styles of men and women regarding consideration and initiating structure. Previous studies have not highlighted any significant difference between the genders regarding these two styles. In addition to the above, the results regarding transformational leadership show no difference between the genders. Existing literature however shows a significant difference between the styles of men and women with respect to transformational leadership. A significant positive correlation of transformational leadership with consideration and initiating structure is also seen; this is in tune with past findings.

One explanation for transformational leadership not varying across genders could be the organizational context in which the study was conducted. The military set up does not allow for freedom of individual management style. The receptivity to transformational leadership (Pawar & Eastman, 1997) could be an overriding factor in this case. Strict adherence to rules and procedures is the norm in the military. In such a culture, the transformational leadership style is likely to be exhibited uniformly by both women and men.

The reliability of the items making up the transformational leadership scales is low which could be attributed to respondent error, which is a limitation of the study.

The most significant finding of this study is that women rate themselves lower on consideration and initiating structure than men do in a male-dominated organization. This difference continues to exist even after removing the common variance of transformational leadership with consideration and initiating structure. This indicates that the gender differences with respect to leadership are on the most basic dimensions of consideration and initiating structure. An implication of this finding is that focus of training for female leaders should shift away from transformational leadership to the two basic behavioral dimensions of leadership. Enhancing transformational leadership in women will not help reduce the gender gap in leadership practice.

A limitation of the study is the small sample of women as compared to men. Though the percentage of women as compared to men was more than what actually exists in the Indian defense services, ideally an equal number of men and women would have been more desirable. In addition, since the context is military, the generalizability of the results of this study is limited.

CONCLUSION

The study indicates that there is no difference between the leadership styles of men and women with respect to transformational leadership. However, women rate themselves lower on both consideration and initiating structure than men do. This gender difference in consideration and initiating structure continues to hold even after controlling for transformational leadership. The study also indicates that consideration and initiating structure are positively related to transformational leadership. The findings suggest that gender differences in leadership practice can be best handled by focusing on the two basic leadership dimensions—consideration and initiating structure—rather than on transformational leadership behaviors. These results seem to have a specific relation with the organization in which they were studied and further investigation into the causes for these results could prove to be an interesting research undertaking.

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