

“Gender Based Employee Perceptions of Female Leadership Effectiveness in Sri Lanka”

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ABSTRACT

This is an era that discusses about the gender equity and that opens up more employment opportunities to women. However female representation is still lacking in the leadership positions in many countries in the world. It may due to many constraints including the gender base stereotypes and the dual role they have to play as women and the leaders. This study investigated 120 Sri Lankan employees from both private sector and government sector to study about their perceptions on the effectiveness of the female leaders in Sri Lankan context.

Literature shows contradictory findings on the leadership effectiveness of female leaders. This study shows that gender has no significant impact on perceiving the effectiveness of female leaders. However there is a significant correlation between the four leaders' behavioral aspects of Communication skills, decision making skills, usage of power and the personal character and the perceived female leadership effectiveness of employees.

KEYWORDS: *female leaders, employee perceptions, leadership effectiveness, leader's behavioral aspects*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is known as an inherently notion (Mos and Jensrud, 1995). Most of the workplaces are male dominant and the representation of the females in the leadership positions is considerably low. Regardless the concepts of the gender equity, equal rights for all the genders and all the established rules and regulations to motivate the females to reach the top positions of the organizations, majority of the organizations still remain as the male dominant institutes. It can be resulted due to glass ceiling, their dual role as the females in the society, the stereotypes and prejudices against females and many more. The majority of the top leadership positions in the world are held by men more than women. It is more vivid in the regions such as South Asia. For instance the number of the female members of the parliament in Sri Lanka is only 12 (5.3%) out of the total number of 225 of the members of the parliament. That is visible in the other social spheres of Sri Lanka as well. Thus investigating the constraints for females to reach the top positions of the organizations has become a controversial issue. Florence (1993), states that the stereotypes were more typically held by women than the men against the female leaders. Further the prejudicial beliefs are expressed the inappropriateness of the women in the leadership roles and their effectiveness as leaders (Eagly, 2007). That makes sense that the qualities of being female gender role do not allow them to possess leadership qualities (Heilman, 2001). Though the number of the female employees is increased and the number of the managerial positions in the organizations is increased, the number of the females who play the leadership roles is remained the same (Weyer, 2007). The assumptions of females having less working experiences and less educational qualifications create the barriers for the females to reach the top positions of the organizations (Carli & Eagly, 2001). Conversely, the exhibited identical behaviors of the leaders are evaluated differently on males and females and it's more favorable to the males (Powel, Butterfield & Bartol, 2008). According to Hopfl & Matilal (2007), females are perceived as they are lack of the necessary leadership skills and less status and smaller budgets (Maddock, 2005). In contrast, Burke & Cooper (2004) state, today's organizations require more talented employees as leaders and these are increasingly found to be women. Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woher (2014) state that despite the evidence that men are typically perceived as more appropriate and effective than women in leadership positions, a recent debate has emerged in the popular press and academic literature over the potential existence of a female leadership advantage. Further some scholars argue that female gender advantage in modern organizations that require the 'feminine' type of leadership (Conlin, 2003; Williams, 2012 as cited by Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woher, 2014). As further explained by Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woher, (2014), 'academic discussion among leadership and gender researchers criticized the simplicity of these arguments, proposing that studies should not be asking whether there is a perceived gender difference in leadership but rather when and why there may be gender difference in perceived leadership effectiveness (Eagly & Carly, 2003a, 2003b; Vecchio, 2002,

2003)’. Thus this study focusses to study employee perceptions of female leadership effectiveness, based on the gender, particularly in Sri Lanka. Further thorough this study it investigated the impact of leader behavioral aspects of communication skills, usage of power, decision making skills and personal character on the perceived leadership effectiveness of the employees. Findings of the literature are contradictory and showing a mixed result towards female leadership effectiveness (Jayasinghe, 2020). For instance, as of Dobbins & Platz, (1986), Engen, Leeden & Willemsen (2001) and Powell, (1990), gender has no relationship to leadership style and leadership effectiveness (as cited by Jayasinghe, 2020). In contrast Book (2000), Helgesen (1990) and Rosener (1995), describes female leadership effectiveness as perceived more effective than males. According to Eagly & Karu (1991), Rudman (1998), Rudman & Glick (2001), Andrews (1992), Fletcher (2001), Bowles & McGinn (2005) and Powell & Graves (2003), the perceived leadership is dependent on the expectations towards the leaders (as cited by Jayasinghe, 2020). When referring these findings, it is obvious that the perceived leadership effectiveness is unable to conclude in a steady ground and as Mirza (2003) describes it depends up on the other factors such as leadership skills and other external factors. Though Sri Lankan females are having comparatively better literacy rate and more opportunities than the females in many other Asian countries, they are underrepresented in the leadership positions in the organizations in Sri Lanka. Thus it is significant to see the reasons that are leading to restrict the females form reaching the top positions of the organizations. Although the number of women in management has grown rapidly, the number of female leaders in Sri Lankan Organizations still remains extremely low. As Sri Lanka is planning to go forward towards to the new development strategies and expansion horizons in terms of the social and economic developments, the contribution of the women as the leadership morals will be really benefited the country. Based on the literature the following research objectives are formed for the study.

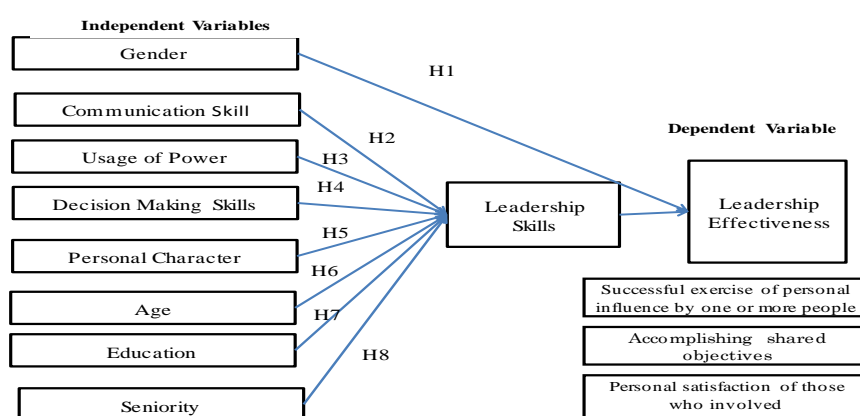
- To investigate the perceived female leadership effectiveness of male and female employees
- To investigate the relationship between the leaders behavioral aspects and the perceived Female leadership effectiveness
- Differentiate the perceived female leadership effectiveness based on the other demographic factors such as age education and seniority

The research questions for the study are;

- What is the difference between the perceived female leadership effectiveness of male and female employees?
- What is the relationship between the leader’s behavioral aspects and the perceived Female leadership effectiveness?
- What is the perceived female leadership effectiveness based on the other demographic factors such as age education and seniority?

II. METHODOLOGY

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Source: Jayasinghe (2020)

Population and Sample

All the employees of the Service sector who are working or who have been worked under the female leaders in Sri Lanka are considered as the population of the study. The sample of this study involved both male and female staffs who have the working experience with female leaders. Out of the total sample 32 males and 31 females represent the government sector and 28 males and 29 females represent the private sector. A mixed

method of convenient sampling and Snowball sampling was used as the sampling technique. In order to collect the data, a semi-structured questionnaire with five point Likert Scale was distributed among the respondents.

Reliability of the study

In order to check the internal consistency and the validity of the questionnaire, Cronbach’s alpha value and convergent validity and divergent validity was checked and proved using the 60 questionnaires that distributed among the employees used for the pilot study. The results of the pilot survey were exceeding 0.70 for all the variables ensuring the reliability and the consistency of the questionnaire.

Techniques of Data Analysis

Package for the Social Science, version 20 (SPSS20) was used for the data analysis purposes. Data was analyzed through Descriptive Statistics and Inferential Statistics. Descriptive Statistics carried out to analyze respondent’s demographic backgrounds and to measures the differences of the perception of respondents towards the effectiveness of the female leadership. Frequencies and percentage of respondent’s demographic background were then calculated using the frequency analysis. Inferential Statistics is used to test the hypothesis. The analysis technique such as T-test, ANOVA used to determine the differences of perception between two variables. Pearson Correlation carried out to examine the strength of the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variables.

Hypothesis

The following Hypothesis were constructed and tested to reach the objectives of the study.

H1: There is a significance difference between male and female employee’s perception on female leadership effectiveness

H2: There is a relationship between the communications skills of the female leaders and the perceived female leadership effectiveness of employees

H3: There is a relationship between the usage of power of the female leaders and perceived female leadership effectiveness of employees

H4: There is a relationship between decision making skills of the female leaders and perceived female leadership effectiveness of employees

H5: There is a relationship between personal characteristics of the female leaders and perceived female leadership effectiveness of employees

H6: There is a significant difference between age group perceptions of perceived female leadership effectiveness of employees

H7: There is a significance difference between the levels of education group perceptions of perceived female leadership effectiveness of employees

H8: There is a significance difference between seniority group perceptions of perceived female leadership effectiveness of employees

III. RESULTS

According to the results the difference in means of perceiving leadership effectiveness for the male and female respondents is 3.92 and 4.09 with standard deviation of 0.40 and 0.49 is not significant ($t = 5.22$, $P > 0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis, H_0 is not substantiated. This result indicates that male and female employees have no difference in perceiving the effectiveness of their female leaders’ leadership.

Pearson Correlation has been carried out to find out the relationship between the behavioral aspects of the female leaders and the perceived leadership effectiveness of employees particularly based on the gender of the employees. According to the findings both male and female employees perceived that there is a relationship between the leadership skills and the effectiveness of the female leaders. According to the results Pearson Correlation coefficient values (r) for both men and women employees for the four leadership characteristics respectively are, communication Skills 0.95/ 0.87, Usage of power 0.67/0.52, Decision Making 0.54/0.64 and Personal Character 0.48/ 0.65. Thus it can conclude that there is a relationship between the leadership behavior and the perceived leadership effectiveness by the employees based on their gender.

ANOVA Test has been carried out to find out the difference of perceived female leadership effectiveness based on the respondent’s age, education and length of the service and according to the results for the age groups $F=0.682$, $P>0.05$, for the level of education groups $F=0.782$, $P>0.05$, and for the length of the service $F=1.120$, $P>0.05$.

IV. CONCLUSION

As the results depict there is no significant difference between male and female employees in perceiving the effectiveness of leadership of their female leaders. Regardless their gender both male and female

employees perceive that their female leaders are effective as the leaders. Further the employees perceive that there is a relationship between the four selected leadership skills of Communication skills, decision making skills, usage of power and the personal character of their female leaders and the perceived leadership effectiveness of employees. However according to the results of the analysis age, education level and the length of the service of the employees have no relationship with the perceived effectiveness of female leaders.

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