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# Perceptions of Transactional and Transformational Leaders According to Gender

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# Perceptions of Transactional and Transformational Leaders According to Gender

## **Abstract**

The lack of females occupying leadership positions in the modern workplace has prompted the research of this study. In order to better understand the perceptions that exist regarding successful leadership, this study was conducted with the intention of understanding individual leadership style through the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, which measures transactional and transformational leadership styles (Bass and Avolio, 1993). 64 male and female participants, made up of 36 students and 28 individuals in the workforce ages 18-61 with an average age of 31 answered 21 questions to assess their leadership style and 1 to measure who they perceived as a successful leader, with responses coded by gender of responder and response. This study aimed to assess whether males identified more with transactional leadership and females with transformational leadership style, which would confirm current research conducted in the field. The Chi Squared statistical analysis test results showed that 72.4% of males displayed transformational leadership styles, along with 82.9% of females displaying this same style, which showed a lack of significance between gender and difference in leadership style. However, in response to the question asking to identify a successful leader, results showed that most individuals of both gender wrote down a male leader.

## **Keywords**

Gender, Leadership Style

## **Disciplines**

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## **Comments**

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Perceptions of Transactional and Transformational Leaders According to Gender

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### Abstract

The lack of females occupying leadership positions in the modern workplace has prompted the research of this study. In order to better understand the perceptions that exist regarding successful leadership, this study was conducted with the intention of understanding individual leadership style through the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, which measures transactional and transformational leadership styles (Bass and Avolio, 1993). 64 male and female participants, made up of 36 students and 28 individuals in the workforce ages 18-61 with an average age of 31 answered 21 questions to assess their leadership style and 1 to measure who they perceived as a successful leader, with responses coded by gender of responder and response. This study aimed to assess whether males identified more with transactional leadership and females with transformational leadership style, which would confirm current research conducted in the field. The Chi Squared statistical analysis test results showed that 72.4% of males displayed transformational leadership styles, along with 82.9% of females displaying this same style, which showed a lack of significance between gender and difference in leadership style. However, in response to the question asking to identify a successful leader, results showed that most individuals of both gender wrote down a male leader.

### Perceptions of Transactional and Transformational Leaders According to Gender

32. Out of all of the Fortune 500 companies in the United States, just 32 of them have female CEOs. (“The 2017 fortune 500 includes,” 2017) Throughout our lives we have learned about the history of women’s rights and how they have changed and developed through the years. In recent years this has translated directly to women’s roles within the workplace, specifically in relation to the perceptions of female workers in contrast with how they could be viewed by their counterparts. Research has investigated how this influences their abilities as workers and what makes them a more successful leader or executive. One common issue that has been examined and published within several scholarly outlets focuses on the common traps that women face as they attempt to climb their way into higher leadership roles. Vanderbroek (2010) came to one main conclusions regarding what holds women back in their roles on an executive level. He found evidence suggesting that while women and men often possess the same leadership abilities women often feel as though they need to imitate men in order to become successful leaders.

There have been many other follow up studies that examined the differences in leadership styles between males and females and what makes for a successful leader. According to Appelbaum, Shapiro, Didus and Luongo (2013), there are three main topics in the realm of gender and leadership including behavioral stereotypes, evaluating women as managers, and the glass cliff effect. These all function as important explanations for the gender imbalance that currently exists at a corporate level. These researchers additionally concluded that while women are often criticized for their levels of sympathy, this aids in making them more effective managers and leaders.

Cook and Glass (2014) studied the effects of the glass cliff as a result of women leaders in the world today. Within the study, they examined the three main theories that impact the ability of women to secure tenure in managerial positions. In addition to the glass cliff effect the study also examined the decision- maker diversity theory as well as the saviour effect. Their first two hypotheses suggested that women would be likely to receive CEO positions at companies that were experiencing a decline in growth, which examined the glass cliff effect. The second hypothesis stated that female CEO's would be likely to be replaced by males if the firm performance did not increase under their leadership, both of these hypotheses did not end up being supported, this evaluated the decision maker effect. Their final hypothesis stated that if the board of directors was comprised mainly of women that females were more likely to be appointed CEO and experience longer tenures did end up being supported. Thus, displaying that the decision- maker diversity theory was the only one of the three that ultimately was supported in regards to comparisons between male and female CEO's.

An additional study examining the sources of development for women was assessed by O'Neil, Hopkins and Sullivan (2011) looking into the networks of women and how this influenced their careers. Their findings supported that the majority of women did say that having women in leadership roles is a strategic decision for the organization because it will have a positive direct impact on the bottom line of the organization. Thus, this shows how using the perceptions of members within a network allows women to further develop their leadership and career goals in an environment that is often dominated by males.

On the other hand, in a study completed by Meng, Berger, Gower and Heyman (2012) the researchers looked at gender inequalities and differences primarily in the field of public relations. Their findings ultimately showed the crucial differences in leadership among the different

approaches including behavioral, situational, and transformational leadership approaches. They assessed these approaches through surveying with five questions regarding important qualities of leadership and sources for leadership skills and developments. These findings came to suggest that there were few to no differences between the perceptions of leaders from the perspective of a male or a female within the public relations field.

To further investigate positive perceptions of women, Rosette and Tost (2010) examined the debate if females actually have an advantage when it comes to leadership. The studies ultimately supported that top female leaders were evaluated more favorably on overall leadership effectiveness than their male counterparts.

Thus, studies show an array of results of women's effectiveness and the perceptions of women as leaders making it difficult to assess the differences between females and male leaders according the studies that have been completed already. The above studies also suggest common themes of transactional and transformational leadership styles as a more tangible way to study perceptions of women in leadership roles.

### **Transactional Leadership**

As leadership is a crucial area of study in the field of social sciences, it is essential to explain the relevance of the style of transactional leadership. This study aimed to measure this leadership style along with transformational leadership through the questions within the multi-item questionnaire, which identified measure of behavior that fell in these categories.

Importantly, the study conducted by Alimo-Metcalfe (1995) found that women are more likely to use the transformational leadership style, while men are more likely to use the transactional leadership style. It is necessary to address the research that exists to explain such differences. To illustrate this, researchers Bass and Avolio (1993) identified key differences between the two

styles within their study regarding transformational leadership and organizational culture, by asserting that a transactional leader is more likely to follow rules, procedures, and norms that already exist within an organization. Additionally, transactional leaders focus on making exchanges and bargains with those that they influence. Specifically, Bass and Avolio (1993) explained that transactional leaders utilize contingent reward meaning that they motivate those who meet certain goals, providing reward for meeting said criteria, and often punishing those who do not meet identified goals.

Researchers Den Hartog, Van Muijen and Koopman (1997) used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to assess individuals' leadership styles based on specific criteria for each style. For transactional leaders, the items of contingent reward, active management-by-exception, and passive management-by-exception were assessed through the survey. The contingent reward example is illustrated as a leader addressing what the subordinate will receive if they complete a certain task, active management-by-exception meaning that a leader focuses his or her attention on mistakes and exceptions of what is expected of the individual. Passive management-by-exception means that a leader believes problems must become chronic before they see it fit to step in.

### **Transformational Leadership**

In contrast to the transactional leadership style, the transformational style is characterized as motivational and inspiring, and followers often develop a form of emotional attachment to the leader. Den Hartog, Van Muijen and Koopman (1997) included within their research that the transformational leader motivates followers to stray from their own self-interests to aid those of the group and to do more than is expected of them. The components included within their study to assess transformational leadership are charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and



individual consideration. A leader that exhibits charismatic traits is trusted by subordinates to overcome obstacles, and an inspiring leader is viewed as a symbol of success and accomplishment. Intellectual stimulation refers to the ability of leader to consider problems from many angles and individual consideration refers to the ability of the leader to value individual members within a group setting for all that they have to offer. Transformational leaders possess a positive and creative approach to re-aligning the organizational culture so that a new vision is created from the shared values and norms of group members.

Although there exists a large disparity in the number of women in leadership positions throughout many fields and research has shown significant differences between the leadership styles of men and women, this is not always evidence to prove that one leader is more effective or successful than another based on gender. In a specific study regarding gender and leadership researcher Appelbaum (2003) matched the findings of Alimo- Metcalfe (1995), which concluded that although differences in styles were shown through results of the survey at hand, women's styles were in fact not less effective. Specifically, leadership by females can be more effective in a team setting when the transformational leadership style is employed.

### **The Present Study**

The initial hypothesis for the study is that the responses to questions by males will place more value on qualities directly related to transactional leadership style. A follow up hypothesis is that females will respond to survey questions exhibiting more value placement on the transformational leadership style. Questions from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire will measure the first hypotheses. Lastly, an open-ended research question will focus on whether the gender of the individual influences the gender choice of who they would define as a successful

leader. For this specific question, the third hypothesis predicts that respondents will identify a successful leader that belongs to the same gender as them.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Sixty four participants responded to the survey asking questions assessing transformational and transactional leadership style questions. Thirty six of these responses came from students currently attending a university and were surveyed through a range of different organizations including sports teams, greek organizations and class Facebook pages. The remaining 28 participants were individuals already in the workforce and obtain a variety of levels of leadership roles. This was sent out to parents, who agreed to pass along the survey to friends and coworkers, along with Gettysburg College professors. The participants ranged in age, including students and individuals in the workforce, from ages 18-61, with a mean age of 31. The study contained results from 29 males and 35 females. Every participant answered all 21 questions on transformational and transactional leadership qualities.

### **Materials**

Results were gathered through the collection of online surveys. This survey consisted of 27 questions for participants to fill out. The initial demographic questions assessed age, the gender of the participants and if the participants are students or in the workforce. The following questions assessed transactional and transformational leadership skills based on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (See Appendix).

Participants were asked to complete a multi-item questionnaire that was implicitly related to gender and leadership; the questions were related to transactional and transformational leadership styles on a scale of 0-4. The choices on this scale ranged from not at all to frequently,

if not always. The final question asked about who people would define as the ideal leader in their view. As this was an open ended question, it was then coded following collection in order to determine if people perceive more males or females to be successful leaders. In order to keep the survey implicit the title of the survey was labeled as “Research Methods Survey”. This ensured that participants answered questions regarding leadership style alone and were not influenced by perceptions of gender.

The answers to the transformational and transactional leadership style questions were then coded using numbers, for example males were assigned the number 1 and females were assigned 2. Age and the job position of individuals in the business world were grouped and coded into presidents and CEOs, salespeople, administrative assistants and lastly office jobs. These results were then put into an excel document along with the sum of transformational leader qualities and the sum of transactional leadership qualities were grouped into two separate columns. The mean score of each was taken in order to determine if each participant related more to transactional or transformational leadership qualities. The significance was then tested for males and females and their leadership styles as well as for the question that assessed males and females and who they perceived as a successful leader using a Chi- Squared test. This test determined significance as well the percentage of males and females associated with each of the two categories.

### **Results**

The transformational versus transactional leadership qualities in males and females was determined by the mean number given in answers under each style of leadership. The transformational and transactional leadership qualities shown in males and females produced percentages through a Chi- Squared output as follows: 72.4% of males displayed

transformational leadership styles and 27.6% of men displayed transactional leadership styles. In regards to females, 82.9% displayed transformational leadership qualities and 17.1% displayed transactional leadership styles. The males thus did display more transactional leadership styles than female by a 10% margin, but they did also display primarily transformational leadership qualities. Males did not have a significantly higher percentage of transactional leader qualities than females had transformational leadership qualities,  $\chi^2(1) = 1.01, p = .31$ .

In addition to performing a Chi-Squared test on transformational and transactional leadership styles, the same type of analysis was run in order to determine if there was a significant difference between the number of males and females that perceived a successful leader to be the same gender as their own. 93.1% of males wrote down the name of a male as who they perceived as a successful leader and 6.9% of males wrote down a female as who they perceived as a successful leader. On the other hand, 52.8% of females wrote down a male for a successful leader and 47.2% of females wrote down a female for who they perceived as a successful leader. The results show that males were more likely to write down someone of their same gender, while females were split more evenly on who they wrote down for a leader. The analysis did show a significant difference between the gender of the participant and the gender of their perceived successful leader,  $\chi^2(1) = 12.63, p < .001$ .

### **Discussion**

The analysis that related directly to the initial two hypotheses regarding the gender of the participant and the leadership qualities that they possessed was not present in the findings based on the current study. More specifically, there was not a significant difference in males exhibiting more transactional leadership qualities and females exhibiting mainly transformational leadership qualities. There are several studies that could assist in explaining these findings and

the lack of a difference between gender and leadership style. Although many researchers discovered that there was a significant difference between gender and leadership style, researchers Meng, Berger and Gower (2012) found that specifically in the Public Relations field there were very few differences between the leadership styles of males and females, therefore one may need to therefore consider the impact of the field or title of individuals in order to assess if gender may or may not have an impact on leadership style.

In addition, a large majority of the male respondents evaluated corresponded with the more feminine transformational style of leadership and answered questions in a way that related directly to the transformational leadership styles. The study conducted by researchers Den Hartog, Van Muijen and Koopman (1997) explained that the transformational style of leadership often carries the more acceptable and motivational leadership style. Therefore, one may need to consider the impact that taking a survey may have on a participant and how effectively a participant is able to evaluate their own leadership styles in accordance with wanting to be perceived as an effective leader with redeeming qualities.

Based on this idea, while the results were insignificant one must carefully assess the impact of social desirability bias on the current study. While filling out the survey questions participants may have been swayed by wanting to appear as a creative, motivational and inspirational leader. Thus, participants that felt as though they had a creative and positive impact on their organizational culture may have been more likely to identify with transformational leadership qualities in hopes of fitting in and appearing as a more effective leader. Another limitation to the current study in addition to social desirability bias that is important to consider in regards to the research completed by Meng, Berger and Gower (2012) was the small range of positions within the workforce of the participants within the current study. Had there been a

wider range of participants working in a variety of fields, positions and corporate cultures, there may have been different results offering an alternative assessment on the leadership styles of males and females. Additionally, the student participants within the current study may have had a more difficult time assessing their leadership qualities due to the fact that many students have never worked in a office culture before in their lifetime. As a result, the student respondents may have been an aspect that lead to the insignificant results of the differences in leadership styles between male and female leaders.

The results of the current study additionally showed a large similarity between the leadership styles of males and females, which can always be interpreted in positive manner. The percentages identified for males and females who identified as transformational leaders were nearly equal. Upon first examining this surprising similarity it was easy to only correspond this with errors with the sample population and corresponding biases. On the other hand, another way to consider this similarity would be to examine the idea that the gender gap between males and females in the workplace is beginning to close. Through time males and females have begun to adapt to similar styles of leadership and are working to overall become more inspirational, charismatic, motivational leaders that aspire to push the boundaries of what they are asked to do and work and think through a new and similar perspective. Additionally, this similarity in leadership styles of males and females may help as a way to transgress in order to dismantle many of the current stereotypes that lie outside of the current study with the connotation that males are associated with being more successful leaders than females. Due to the fact that males and females reported similar leadership styles the current study may have helped to represent a closure in the gap of leadership styles.

In the analysis on the impact of gender on who participants perceived as a successful leader, it is interesting to note the significant difference between these two groups. Though a high percentage of males that reported males as a successful leader and a more even split for females, this once again raises the question of why a gender gap in leadership persists. It examines the barrier that remains between males and their perception of successful leadership styles and what females perceive to be important leadership qualities during the current time. While this is an area that has certainly changed and evolved through time it is clear that the barrier remains and that there is still a gap that needs to be closed. Thus, in this realm it would interesting to conduct further research using retrospective and prospective survey methods in order to analyze how the perceptions of successful leaders may have been different in the past and if this gap will close more moving into the future.

Based on the above results, one limitation that would be important to note was the lack of specificity with who participants were asked to list as a successful leader. Through using more specifics or potentially even giving specific options it may have been easier to clearly identify the differences in perceived successful leaders between males and females. An additional limitation in the overall design of the current study relates to the use of identifiable measure such as age, gender and particular leadership qualities. This choice of measure it may have allowed for the correlation of each set of responses to a particular participant, thus it was crucial to effectively correspond each measure with specific numbers and categories in order to eliminate this form of bias and any lack of ethical principles.

Following up from this, it would be interesting to conduct further research into the ideas of transformational and transactional leadership styles by conducting a similar method using a proxy study. Thus, using a range of participants within the workforce and asking their coworkers

to fill out a survey on their leadership styles and behavioral measures using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire in order to have a different perspective on the leadership qualities of an individual. This information would then be used to examine the difference in leadership styles between males and females. As mentioned before, it would also be interesting to examine leadership styles and the differences between qualities seen in males and females in a range of different fields. For instance, engineering, nursing, construction, social work and other fields that are often correlated with being dominated by males or females.

Although it is necessary to suggest these potential changes, it would be important to keep aspects of the current study to ensure it is carried into any further research conducted in this realm. It was beneficial to the current study and will be crucial to a future study to have a good balance of participants and include a fairly equal number of participants of both genders. Additionally, in relation to this particular study lends itself to the current study that there was a balanced number of participants that identified as students and participants identifying as part of the workforce. This greatly aided in the analysis of results conducted following the survey collection.

Despite the inability of the current study to find significance in the relation between males taking on transactional leadership qualities and females taking on more transformational leadership qualities, the study examines the gender gap and how it might be evolving through time. The adoption of similar leadership qualities by both genders may explain an adaptation to how individuals aspire to lead within an organizational setting as well as help convey that males and females have the ability to be successful leaders with the same style. On the other hand, the significance found in relation to who males and females perceive as a successful leader reopens this gender gap in the workplace. This leads researchers and individuals to consider how the



world can be made so that both men and women perceive a range of both genders as successful leaders in the world today and throughout history. Until a more obvious conclusion can be reached regarding the gender gap and who individuals perceive as successful leaders based on their gender, this area will continue to be an important topic to examine in more depth in order to close this gap moving forward.

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## Appendix

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your age?

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently a student or in the workforce?

- Student
- Workforce

Please skip this question if you are a student. If you are in the workforce, what is your current position at your company?

\_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions according to the key below as honestly as possible:

KEY

0 - Not at all 1 - Once in a while 2 = Sometimes

3 = Fairly often 4 = Frequently, if not always

1. I make others feel good to be around me.....0 1 2 3 4
2. I express with a few simple words what we could and should do. ....0 1 2 3 4
3. I enable others to think about old problems in new ways.....0 1 2 3 4
4. I help others develop themselves.....0 1 2 3 4
5. I tell others what to do if they want to be rewarded for their work. ....0 1 2 3 4
6. I am satisfied when others meet agreed- upon standards.....0 1 2 3 4
7. I am content to let others continue working in the same ways always. ....0 1 2 3 4
8. Others have complete faith in me.....0 1 2 3 4
9. I provide appealing images about what we can do.....0 1 2 3 4
10. I provide others with new ways of looking at puzzling things. ....0 1 2 3 4
11. I let others know how I think they are doing. ....0 1 2 3 4
12. I provide recognition/rewards when others reach their goals.....0 1 2 3 4
13. As long as things are working, I do not try to change anything. ....0 1 2 3 4
14. Whatever others want to do is OK with me .....0 1 2 3 4
15. Others are proud to be associated with me. ....0 1 2 3 4
16. I help others find meaning in their work. ....0 1 2 3 4
17. I get others to rethink ideas that they had never questioned before.....0 1 2 3 4.
18. I give personal attention to others who seem rejected.....0 1 2 3 4
19. I call attention to what others can get for what they accomplish.....0 1 2 3 4
20. I tell others the standards they have to know to carry out their work. ....0 1 2 3 4
21. I ask no more of others than what is absolutely essential.....0 1 2 3 4

22. Please name someone who you perceive as a successful leader in the world today or from history. (This can be a famous person or someone in your personal life.)

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