

Impact of Environmental Factors on Women Leadership

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Introduction

The origin of the leadership theories can be traced back to the historic western Industrial Revolution that took place at the end of the nineteenth century. It was during the Industrial Revolution that the area of leadership research gained prominence much like the studies related to the other aspects of the organizations. Previously it was a commonly held practice that leadership characteristics were predicted on the basis of intuition. Gradually researchers started using scientific methods to understand and predict the effectiveness of leadership characteristics and measure them accordingly (Nahavandi, 2018). It is a well acknowledged fact that the qualities of good leaders are also the qualities of good followers. One of the striking characteristics of followers is their expertise to shift easily between the leadership and followership roles (Hollander, 1993; Hollander, 1992b). The exhibited leadership behavior of a leader has its most direct impact on the psyche of the individual followers.

It was not until the 1980s that researchers started focusing on the area of organizational leadership (Flemming & Flemming, 2017). Organizational leadership is one of the key factors influencing the success of the organizational strategies and generating competitive advantages in dynamic business environment. In the present scenario organizations needs leaders who will constantly assess the strategic position

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and align the organizational objectives and mission with a philosophical purpose for the effective sustainability of the organizations. Organizational leaders provide direction and vision for the long term survival of their organizations. The contemporary approaches to effective leadership suggest leadership is all about encouraging teamwork, collaboration, and empowerment along with providing support to the employees (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Hammer & Champy, 1994; Senge, 1994). Leaders working in the organizational settings influence the different psychological reactions of the followers', for example attitudes, exhibited emotions, perceptions, degrees of motivation and expectations. More specifically, the factors include followers' satisfaction with the working style of the leader, level of job satisfaction, commitment towards the organization, role clarity, group cohesion, degree of job related stress and motivation (Howell & Costley, 2008). The effective and efficient management of the available human resources in the organization is the stepping stone towards the continuous process of growth. The unified perception of the managers and the subordinates leads to the accomplishment of the organizational goals (Dessler, 2007). Employees' performance is a critical factor which determines the organizational success (Mangkunegara & Huddin, 2016). Therefore, it may be said the outcome of effective leadership and followership is reflected in the accomplishment of organizational goals.

Traditionally leadership positions were occupied by men and the leadership traits were also perceived to be masculine in nature. The last few decades has witnessed the rise in the numbers of women joining the diverse business organizations across the globe. The increase in the number of women leaders has often been associated with the advancement of leadership theories and practices. Gender diversity in the organizations in all parts of the world is the need of the hour. This is aptly described by Lantara, Haming, Mus, & Alam (2012), 'The boundary line of the role played by the men and women is blurred in the daily life'. It has been a general consensus that women encounter more challenges and hurdles in their journey to reach the leadership positions (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). The characteristics of women leadership are employee empowerment and effective inter personal relationship with the people at the work settings. An interesting question that challenges researchers is this: what kind of environmental factors could influence the emergence of leadership and development? Previous literatures evaluating the environmental influences on leadership and development suggest that there exists a broad range of environmental variables that plays significant role when individuals assumes leadership role. Past studies exploring women leadership seems to suggest women tend to exhibit democratic leadership behavior (Trinidad and Normore, 2005; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Robbins, 1998; Gibson, 1995; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). It seems to emerge from studies related to women leadership that presence of women leaders across the various levels of management has significant impact on organizational leadership at large.

Review of Literature

- **Leadership & Followership**

Leadership continues to preoccupy us in every sphere of our life. 'A leader's behaviour influences the psychological reactions of the individual followers and group of followers at large' (Basu & Mukherjee, 2018). Conceptualization of leadership is moderated by the social structure of the society. The various definitions of leadership represent a personal perspective along with the social construct that reflects the social scenario of that particular time. 'Leadership is a relational activity where an individual(s) guide(s) or direct(s) others (followers) to attain an objective or goal' (Beerel, 2009). The leadership process takes place within the context of a particular group of followers (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1996). Leadership and followership are basically interdependent and complimentary roles (Hollander, 1992a; Heller & Til, 1982). The outcome of effective leadership is followers willingly parting with rewards like monetary benefits, status and fame that come along with leadership and instead derive satisfaction in working with the leader and their co-workers. A diverse range of factors influence the roles of followers in organizations. Factors include shortage in supply of resources, drastic increase in global competition, rising operating costs, increasing educational qualifications of the workforce, shifting attitudes towards formal authority, better technological advancement at the workplace lowered number of middle-management level executives in large organizations (Howell and Costley, 2008). All these factors contribute in shaping followers to take up more responsibilities than in the past. Followership role includes the level of individual enthusiasm, proactive participation, cooperation, effort, competency related to the assigned task and analytical skills displayed in favour of accomplishing the objectives of the group and organizational goals at large (Howell and Costley, 2008). Leadership is a dynamic process that encompasses of changes in the relationship between the leaders and the followers. Indeed leadership and followership is a two way process and intrinsically reciprocal in nature.

- **Organizational Leadership**

An organizational leader is an individual who influences the people and groups within an organization, helps them in accomplishing goals and guides them towards establishing those goals, thereby enabling them to be effective. It is only through effective leadership that individual followers can be induced to contribute their optimum efforts towards the attainment of organizational goals. A number external and internal organizational of factors are fuelling changes in the organizational leadership such as globalization, demographic changes and worldwide political changes (Nahavandi, 2018). Firstly, with the economic downturn around the world, rising worldwide and local competition, along with complex and fast-changing technologies, a number of organizations are struggling to survive and working on the

long term existential policies. The second component that is driving changes at the organizational leadership is demographic changes. Demographic changes results into the increased diversity in the different groups and organizations push leaders to take into account the diversity parameter while decision making (Nahavandi, 2018). The third factor is the political changes across the globe are leading the roadway to more openness and democracy. According to Nahavandi (2018), 'These political changes shape and are shaped by images of what is considered to be appropriate leadership'. Workforce diversity is one of the predominant forces behind effective organizational leadership in the recent times. It is quite apparent that the present day workforce dynamics has changed significantly over the past few decades. Thus, it may be said in the existing context women leaders in the organizations impacts organizational leadership at large.

- **Women Leadership**

The gradual entry of women in the various business sectors and their eventual elevation to the top posts has paved the way of research in the field of women leadership. As observed by Basu & Mukherjee (2018), 'After decades of being the minority in the management positions women have gradually made the progress in climbing up the ladder of corporate life'. According to Cockburn (1991) the qualities exhibited by women is an outcome of their childhood experiences, parent-child relationship along with socialization practices that gives a vivid picture of the cultural sex-role stereotypes and beliefs about gender differences and the ideal occupations for men and women. 'These experiences encourage "feminine" values such as kindness, compassion, nurturing, and sharing' (Yukl, 2014). Women have the natural instinct to brace for participation, to decentralize power, share requisite information, and to take the necessary measures to ensure the growth of the followers (Lantara, Haming, Mus, & Alam, 2012). Researchers' claims women are in a better position than men to possess the requisite values and skills needed to demonstrate effective leadership in the present day organizations (Yukl, 2014; Carr-Ruffino, 1993; Hegelsen, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Grant, 1988). As pointed out by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Van Egen (2003), women leaders are cooperative, team oriented and willing to embrace change for the betterment of their organizations. According to management guru Tom Peters the success of the new economy is dependent on the collaborative leadership style exhibited by women leaders rather than the use of command and control style traditionally used by male leaders (Reingold, 2003). As noted by Yukl (2014), women in general are perceived to be highly empathetic, believes in their intuitive skills, are highly sensitive to emotions and they also takes into account the quality of bonding they share with others. Inclusion of the women work force brings forth the diversity factor in the organizations. Presence of women personnel is positively linked with the organizational performance (Desavaux, Devillard-Hoellinger & Meaney, 2008). Women are inclined towards exercising

collaborative power which stems from the referent sources (French and Raven, 1959). Advocates of feminine advantage claim the changing nature of organizational leadership has given prominence to the relevance of skills and values that are stronger in woman than their male counterparts (Yukl, 2014). The blend of feminine qualities exhibited by women leaders seems to be an added advantage for the organizations.

Environmental & Developmental Factors Related To Leadership Role Occupancy

Researchers over the years have attempted to figure out the exact determinants of leadership and developments. In the words of Arvey, Rotundo, Johnson, Zhang, & McGue (2006), 'Throughout the years, a variety of constructs and predictors have been posited as determinants of leadership including general intelligence, personality, values, and even genetic factors.' The ground reality at times makes individuals believe that leadership skills are hardwired in people during the early phase of their lives (Scorcher and Brant, 2002). It was put forward by Chan & Drasgow (2001) that a range of cognitive, personality and motivational factors are linked to leadership talent across the samples drawn from the varying international environment. The findings from the past studies evaluating the types of environmental factors that could influence leadership emergence and development suggests there exists a wide spread range of experiences that could impact individuals assuming leadership roles (Avolio, 2005). Therefore, it may be said diverse environmental variables and experiences contributes in shaping the leadership skills in individuals over a period of time.

A number of specific environmental variables are identified on the basis of the past literatures related to leadership and development is considered for the purpose of the present study.

- **Influence of Family Members:** Findings from past studies suggests leaders whole heartedly acknowledged the contribution of their family members in shaping their world outlook related to leadership and development (Arvey, Zhang, Avolio, and Kruenger, 2007). Parenting style experienced by individuals in their growing up years is associated with the exhibited leadership behaviour (Avolio & Gibbons, 1988).
- **Educational Experiences:** Evidence from past literatures shows prior educational experiences being associated with future management success (Howard & Bray, 1988; Wakabayashi and Graen, 1984; Bray, Campbell, and Grant, 1974). Educational experiences were one of the most frequently mentioned events in an individual's life that is perceived to shape leadership and development skills (Lindsey, Homes, and McCall, 1991).
- **Role of The Mentor or Mentors:** Researchers suggests experiences related to mentorship plays a pivotal role, when individuals assume leadership positions

(Day 2000; Bass 1990; Kram, 1983). As observed by Standford - Blair and Dickman (2005), contributions of mentor or mentors recurrently surfaced in the narrative biographical details of leaders.

- **Prior Challenges In Organizational Settings:** Researchers have pointed out a number of factors of jobs and/ or task related factors of jobs that contributes in leadership development. Job roles that required initiating change, job overload, and facing critical business environments represented components of managerial job that had significant impact on leadership development (McCauly, Ruderman, Ohlott, and Morrow, 1994). Challenging assignments contributes to the growth of executives (Day 2000; Mc Call, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988).

Women Leadership & Democratic Leadership Style

Gender is an intrinsic part to the present-day notion of effective leadership behavior that has morphed from a conventional masculine, autocratic style to the contemporary more feminine or androgynous styles of democratic and transformational leadership behavior. When leaders use democratic leadership style, they include followers in the decision making processes. Democratic leadership is also referred to as participative and consultative leadership. To quote Howell and Costley (2008), 'Participative leadership behaviors may include holding one-on-one meetings with individuals or group of followers to gather input for decisions; it may involve a group decision-making effort initiated by the leader; or it may involve assigning a particular problem to a follower to resolve'. Each of the exhibited behavioral traits represents various degrees or types of democratic leadership. Women tend to exhibit democratic and participative leadership behavior when compared to their male counterparts (Trinidad and Normore, 2005). It emerged from a number of studies related to women leadership that women prefers to demonstrate democratic leadership behaviour (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Robbins, 1998; Gibson, 1995; Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Objective

The present paper is an attempt to assess the impact of the probable environmental factors of the upbringing years on the adult behaviour of a woman executive working in a department under the central government of India based on an in-depth interview. An effort has also been made to understand the perceived leadership style of the executive. Extensive interviews were taken of her subordinates to identify the exhibited leadership style of the executive.

Methodology

The present study is based on qualitative methodology. To further the research design it is based on case study research methodology (Erikson and

Kovalainan, 2014; Thomas, 2011). The data for the present study was collected through standardized structured interview guidelines.

Findings

• Profile of the Woman Executive

Exhibit 1: Demographic Profile of the Woman Executive

Age	Educational Qualification	Age When Joined The Present Organization	Duration Of Service With The Present Organization	Job Description
56 years	M.Sc, M.Phil	24 years	32 years	Finance

The lady executive aged in her mid-fifties hails from the southern part of India. She joined the organization at the age of 24 and has 32 years of work experience. The executive heads the finance department at a zone office located in the eastern part of India. She described herself to the researcher, as a dedicated optimist who believes in the motto you should bring your people along with you. Born and brought up in a traditional joint family, she hails from a well-educated family. She further added it gives her immense pleasure to motivate others through thick and thin. Undoubtedly the executive considered for the purpose of the present study is an erudite scholar. The executive told the researcher that her greatest assets are her communication skills, amicable nature, being an extrovert and she takes her people along with her to climb up the ladder of success.

• Early Life & Family Experience

The executive aged in her mid-fifties is a native of the southern part of India. In a confident tone she told the researcher she was born into an illustrious family of engineers and scientists. Her grandfather was the first Indian engineer to be recruited in the Indian railways by the then British government. She went on to narrate the specific profiles of her family members; her father was an engineer while her uncle is a senior scientist working with one of the top research institute in India. The women in her family as she says knew the art of how to become self-learned scholars. Her sister is a management graduate from an elite management institute in India. The lady particularly spoke of her mother and grandmother and their immense contribution in her life. To quote the lady, 'I wanted to make everything happen by emulating my mother and drawing inspiration from her who was educated only up to secondary school level but the love and respect she commanded in the society was mind boggling'. Additionally, the executive admitted she was inherited the boldness factor and the will to turn every problem into opportunity from her mother and her grandmother.

• Educational Experiences

The executive with a smile on her face shared with the researcher that she takes deep interest in economics. She did her post-graduation in economics.

Thereafter, she completed her M.Phil. in economics. The woman executive stated her strong foundation in economics helps in her professional arena too. As she say, 'it is all about application of the subject knowledge at the right time'. She also acknowledged that her home environment taught her the best lessons in value education which she considers is the key to achieving success.

- **Roles of Mentor/Mentors**

The woman told the researcher apart from her family members she looks up to her M.Phil. guide who happens to be an esteemed economist. She shared her guide's mentor was another renowned economist. The executive acknowledged that her command over economics both as theory and application is due to the invaluable contribution of her guide.

- **Prior Challenges in Organizational Settings**

The executive shared an interesting account of how she joined the present organization. She went on to narrate, she had every casually applied for post of a clerical cadre at the organization. At the same time the executive admitted she was not keen to take up the job. The lady had received appointment letter for the post of financial officer from one of the top organization in India. But there was some kind of socio-political turmoil going on all over the country at that time. Abiding by the advice of the elders in her family she joined the present organization. In the words of the lady, 'the day I joined this organization, I had made up my mind to reach the level of the highest officer in the organization but with a difference of being the best officer'. She was been conferred with a lot of awards for her contributions in the organizational growth. The executive also acknowledged that it was due to her transferable job that she gets the opportunity to learn and converse in different languages. The lady narrated to the researchers that at an early stage she understood the basic qualities to excel in life are adaptability, hard work, and perseverance along with the willingness to learn new things.

Exhibit 2: Profile of the Subordinates

Mean Age of the Subordinates	Mean Duration Of Service With The Present Organization	Mean Duration Of Service Under The Woman Executive
54 Years	26 Years	3 Years

Exhibit 2 depicts the profile of the subordinates. The mean age of the subordinates is 54 years. The mean duration of service with the present organization is 26 years. The mean duration of service under the woman executive is 3 years.

Exhibit 3: Educational Qualifications of the Subordinates

Educational Qualification	School Dropout	School Passed	Graduate
Total Employees (in percentage)	33.33%	Nil	66.66%

Exhibit 3 suggests 66.66% of the employees are college graduates. 33.33% of employees are school drop outs.

Narrative Accounts of Perceived Democratic Leadership Behavior of the Woman Executive as Shared by her Subordinates

- **Perfect Blend of Leadership Qualities**

A male subordinate shared with the researcher his views regarding the leadership qualities of the executive. He told the researcher that executive makes sure the department runs smoothly and at the same time she motivates her subordinates to give in their best efforts. The subordinate emphasized that it is due the working style of the executive that the department is working as one unit. Specifically he mentioned the executive maintains good rapport with the team members and equality among all the subordinates.

- **Thoughtful Leader**

An interesting descriptive account was shared by a team member with the researcher. The team member said, 'we have random vigilance survey in the entire zone office, sometimes employees from other departments face the heat of the vigilance officer. But the executive is so compassionate and helpful that she comes forward and guides the other employees as to how they can rectify their mistakes'. Most of the subordinates univocally admitted that employees from other departments too perceive the woman executive as a leader.

- **Ideal Listener**

Majority of the subordinates acknowledged that the woman executive is an ideal listener. In one voice they told the researcher she always welcomes us to share our opinions. One of the subordinate particularly mentioned that even if they commits a mistake the executive is prompt enough to guide them & help them rectify their mistakes.

- **Ideal Mentor**

A female subordinate elaborated her personal experience of working with the executive. The female subordinate said, 'my executive has all the leadership qualities to enhance the job performance level of the subordinates'. Unanimously majority of the subordinates mentioned of the perceived leadership qualities of the woman executive's as follows; determination, listening skill, level of knowledge, communication skills and most importantly the ability to bind everyone together as one team.

Discussion

- **Woman Executive: Environmental Factors**

- **Influence of Family Members:** The various descriptive experiences related to the upbringing years as narrated by the executive seems to

suggest the significant figures in her early life has left a strong impact on her personality and later leadership style. This seems to find support to the findings emerging from the past studies related to parental influence in leadership development (Arvey, Zhang, Avolio, and Krueger, 2007).

- **Educational Experiences:** It emerges from the interview data of the woman executive that she is a highly qualified individual. Additionally, her family members and her home environment appear to have shaped her educational values. This seems to endorse the findings of the previous literatures related to prior educational experiences and success at the organizational settings (Lindsey, Homes, and McCall, 1991; Howard & Bray, 1988; Wakabayashi and Graen, 1984; Bray, Campbell, and Grant, 1974).
- **Role of the Mentor or the Mentors:** The illustrative narrative related to woman executive's mentor/s seems to suggest that her mentor/s has played a vital role in shaping her personality. This seems to authenticate the findings of the studies related to the influence of mentorship and leadership skills development in individuals (Day, 2000; Bass, 1990; Kram, 1983).
- **Prior Challenges in Organizational Settings:** The illustrative account narrated by the executive regarding her career choice and professional advancement appears to suggest she had faced critical situation during the early phase of her career. It is due to her determination and self-confidence that she has managed to reach the top management post. This seems to corroborate to the findings of past studies related to critical components which contributes to leadership development (Day 2000; McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlstrand Morrow, 1994; Mc Call, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988).

• **Subordinates Narrative Accounts**

The various descriptive accounts narrated by the subordinates seem to reflect the diverse leadership qualities demonstrated by the woman executive. The interview data of the subordinates seems to suggest the woman executive exhibits democratic leadership behaviour. This seems to have enhanced the overall job performance level of the subordinates. The findings emerging from the subordinates' interview data appears to corroborate to the outcomes of past studies related to democratic leadership style of women leaders (Trinidad and Normore, 2005; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Robbins, 1998; Gibson, 1995).

Conclusion

The topic of leadership has traditionally drawn the attention of researcher throughout ages. The person at top of the organization may take it either to remarkable height or may lead it to the downfall. Organizational leadership is a critical

factor contributing to organizational performance. Diversity at the organizational management level is a prerequisite for the long term sustainability of organizations at the time of globalization. Since the last few decades there has been a steady increase in the number of women folks joining diverse business organizations. Women leaders are emerging to be proficient leaders leading organizations around the globe. With the rise in the number of women leaders the question arises what are the environmental factors that shape the leadership qualities of these women. Extensive studies exploring the environmental variables of women leaders and their exhibited leadership behaviour will help the researchers to have a better insight into the area of women leadership. The implication of the present study is if organizations aim to enhance the job satisfaction of the employees, the organizations should ensure leadership roles are assigned to individuals who will effectively evaluate employees' performance and takes necessary measures to contribute to the employees' growth.

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