

GENDER AND LEADERSHIP STYLES: EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVES FROM MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT: *Leadership styles are a major topic of interest in the fields of management and organizational development. This paper will explore the different gender-based leadership styles and the possible existence of differences in leadership approaches between men and women.*

Leadership styles play a crucial role in shaping the direction and success of organizations and teams. The way leaders interact with their followers, make decisions, and inspire others to achieve common goals can significantly impact a group's overall performance and effectiveness. Over the years, various leadership styles have emerged, each with its unique approach and principles—whether we refer to transactional, transformational, or laissez-faire leadership styles.

It is important to note that leadership styles are not inherently linked to gender. Both men and women can exhibit a wide range of leadership styles, and individual leadership preferences and approaches can vary greatly, regardless of gender. However, it is important to address certain common stereotypes and perceptions associated with the leadership styles typically attributed to men and women, while also acknowledging that these generalizations may not apply to every individual.

Keywords: *management; leadership styles; organizations; "glass ceiling" phenomenon;*

1. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

1.1. Leadership Styles

To understand the origin of the concept of “leadership style,” we must first analyze what this notion means. First and foremost, it is important to understand why there are so many leadership styles. Undoubtedly, the business community has evolved significantly since Frederick Taylor introduced scientific management. As Buchanan explains, “the world has gone through different phases of the leadership concept since the beginning of the 20th century. Historically, it began with the idea of 'command-and-control', which prevailed until the 1980s, followed by 'empower-and-track' until the mid-2000s, and finally the 'connect-and-nurture' approach, which continues to dominate today.” (Gandolfi, 2017)

Research on leadership style has captured the imagination of scholars and researchers since the 1990s due to its essential role in leading workgroups and complex organizations.

Transactional leadership refers to most traditional leadership models, which focus on “the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers,” whereas transformational leadership

refers to “the process by which a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality for both the leader and the follower.” (Megheirkouni, 2018)

Leaders with inspirational motivation communicate high expectations to their followers, inspiring them with motivation to become more committed to the organization’s shared vision and feel part of it. Leaders with intellectual stimulation encourage followers to be creative and innovative, challenging their own beliefs and values as well as those of the leader and the organization. Leaders who display individualized consideration provide a supportive climate in which they attentively listen to the individual needs of followers and act as coaches and mentors, helping them reach their full potential.

Leadership has traditionally been interpreted as a male-dominated endeavor, often posing challenges and obstacles for women. This perception raises the very interesting question of how women lead in comparison.

Research suggests that women often show a greater tendency to adopt a transformational leadership style compared to men. Transformational leadership is characterized by inspiring and motivating followers to reach their full potential. “Multiple studies have shown that

women tend to possess qualities inherent to this leadership style, such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and relationship-building skills. These attributes allow female leaders to create a supportive and inclusive work environment, empower their subordinates, and encourage collaboration and innovation.” (Bass, 2016)

Interpersonal relationships can also influence the professional development of employees and the organization as a whole. Positive relationships can lead to the formation of a network of contacts and the acquisition of career opportunities, as well as to the increase of the organization's reputation. On the other hand, negative relationships can lead to the loss of career opportunities and the damage to the organization's reputation. (Dabu, Bobocel, 2025, 266)

Moreover, female leaders often demonstrate a more participative and democratic approach, encouraging team members to contribute ideas and engage in decision-making processes. By adopting a transformational leadership style, female leaders can positively influence organizational culture and enhance team effectiveness, thereby contributing to improved employee performance and satisfaction.

1.2. The "Glass Ceiling" Phenomenon

The "glass ceiling" phenomenon is the most widely used metaphor to describe inequalities between women and men in the workplace. Generally, the "glass ceiling" refers to the inequalities that arise over the course of a career, where women or minorities may have a promising start, but at a certain point, they are not granted promotions or salary increases due to gender discrimination. (Merchant, 2012) Although women hold 44% of executive managerial roles, they represent only 5% of top leadership positions.

The barriers that prevent women from advancing in their careers include the lack of female mentors and role models in leadership positions, exclusion from informal communication networks, stereotypes and preconceived notions about gender roles and capabilities, and the burden of family responsibilities. All these factors explain why women do not ascend the corporate ladder at the same pace as men.

Both the glass ceiling and the gender pay gap are pressing challenges for women in the workforce. Although companies are beginning to

show greater representation of women in management roles, women's presence in leadership positions remains disproportionate compared to that of men. “These inequalities between men and women in terms of rights, positions, and opportunities are caused by existing gender differences in communication styles, influence tactics, and leadership approaches.” (Merchant, 2012)

The glass ceiling trend not only affects economic growth agendas but also poses a threat to achieving gender equity goals at all levels of society and within organizations. Therefore, “breaking this effect is fundamental to ensuring fair or equal representation of women at all hierarchical levels in order to truly adopt the philosophy of equal employment opportunity. This ‘glass ceiling’ effect hinders the progress of economic reform agendas by preventing equal participation of women at all levels.” (Saleem, 2017)

In developing countries, it is especially critical to achieve maximum economic efficiency through the full use of human resource development potential. In this context, the central issue is to highlight the obstacles that prevent women from being fairly represented in upper management corridors.

In conclusion, the glass ceiling remains a persistent barrier that hinders the advancement and representation of marginalized groups—particularly women—across various areas of society. Despite progress in gender equality and increased awareness of diversity and inclusion, women still face significant obstacles in reaching top leadership roles and in obtaining equitable opportunities for professional growth.

1.3. Leadership Styles: A Gender Perspective

Leadership styles are a major topic of interest in the fields of management and organizational development. In this context, different leadership styles based on gender will be explored, along with the possible existence of differences in the way men and women lead.

Leadership styles play a crucial role in shaping the direction and success of organizations and teams. The way leaders interact with their followers, make decisions, and inspire others to achieve shared goals can significantly impact the overall performance and effectiveness of a group.

Over the years, various leadership styles have emerged, each with its own unique approach and principles, whether we refer to transactional, transformational, or laissez-faire leadership.

It is important to note that leadership styles are not inherently tied to gender. Both men and women can exhibit a wide range of leadership styles, and individual preferences and leadership approaches can vary greatly regardless of gender. Nevertheless, it is important to discuss some common stereotypes and perceptions associated with leadership styles attributed to men and women, while acknowledging that these generalizations may not apply to every individual.

2. Methodology

In this study, the data collection method is quantitative, using the basic instrument of opinion surveys - the questionnaire.

Quantitative research, as its name suggests, "helps gather information presented in numerical form. The data obtained, due to the use of structured and standardized tools (tests, closed-ended questionnaires), can be categorized, sorted, and ranked, as well as measured on numerical scales." (Obrad, 2018)

Thus, quantitative research deals with the quantification, measurement, and calculation of information obtained through empirical approaches, which consist of measuring the study subjects with sufficient precision to reach highly accurate and detailed conclusions.

The main benefit of this method lies in its "standardized nature, as the questions are clearly pre-formulated, along with their number and order; moreover, the number of people with certain characteristics (gender, age, education level, etc.) to whom the questions are addressed is also determined, with no deviation from this organizational scheme being permitted." (Cauc, 2007), The purpose of this study is to explore behavioral differences between men and women in leadership positions and to suggest explanations for the differences and similarities observed.

The main objective of this study is to determine the existence of differences in leadership style based on gender. In support of the main objective, two specific objectives have been formulated: the first objective aims to identify the leadership style adopted by the leader based on gender; the second specific objective refers to

analyzing the behaviors exhibited by the leader.

The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

- There are statistically significant differences between gender and the adoption of a transactional style;
- There are statistically significant differences between gender and the adoption of a transformational style;
- There are statistically significant differences between gender and people-oriented leadership;
- There are statistically significant differences between gender and business-oriented leadership;
- There are differences between the following age groups - 18–25 years and 40–50 years, 25–30 years and 40–50 years, 30–40 years and 40–50 years - regarding the idealized behavior exhibited by the leader.

The instrument used, as previously mentioned, is the questionnaire. The questionnaire is based on the leadership assessment scale known as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 2020), designed by Bruce J. Avolio and Bernard M. Bass. This questionnaire includes two key concepts, measuring the transformational and transactional leadership styles adopted by leaders - the first composed of 9 dimensions, and the second of 6 dimensions.

The population was selected from participants aged between 18 and over 50 years, who are or have been employed in a multinational company and have worked under the coordination of a team leader.

The sampling method and the selection procedure of respondents were based on non-probabilistic sampling, targeting specific characteristics among the respondents. Firstly, to ensure the results are as accurate as possible, respondents were selected based on current or past employment in a multinational company under a team leader. An equal proportion of individuals who have had either a male or female leader was targeted. Secondly, the age range of the respondents was between 18 and over 50 years.

The questionnaire was distributed online, with 100 questionnaires shared among current or former employees of multinational companies in the country. The questionnaire was created using the Google Forms platform and included 34 items, taking approximately 7 minutes to complete.

3. The results of the research

Following the statistical analysis conducted, $t(98) = 0.11$, $p = 0.90$, $p > 0.05$, we aimed to determine whether there are differences between the male and female genders regarding idealized behavior. The mean scores of the two groups are: Female ($m = 3.03$; $sd = 0.81$), Male ($m = 3.04$; $sd = 0.66$), indicating that the two means are not statistically different (Tab. 1).

Following the independent samples T-test, we discovered that there are no statistically significant differences based on the leader's gender, $t(98) = 2.79$, $p = 0.58$, $p > 0.05$; the means are not statistically different: Female ($m = 3.14$; $sd = 0.79$), Male ($m = 3.22$; $sd = 0.68$).

Therefore, we conclude that there are no statistically significant differences between female and male leaders in terms of **inspiration and motivation** (Tab. 4).

After conducting the statistical analysis, $t(98)$

Table 1. T test

	Respondent gender	N	Mediate	Standard deviation	Levene's test	T test
Idealized behavior	Female	44	3,03	0,81	F(98)=3,23, p=0,07	t(98)=0,11, p=0,90, p>0,05
	Male	56	3,04	0,66		

In conclusion, there are no statistically significant differences between the male and female genders in terms of idealized behavior (Tab. 2).

$= 0.31$, $p = 0.75$, $p > 0.05$, the aim was to determine whether there are differences between male and female leaders regarding **individualized consideration**. No differences were found

Table 2. Test

	Respondent gender	N	Mediate	Standard deviation	Levene's test	T test
Contingent reward	Female	44	3,02	0,85	F(73,40)=8,99 p=0,00	t(73,40)=2,79, p=0,00, p<0,05
	Male	56	3,44	0,59		

After performing the *independent samples T-test*, we found that there are statistically significant differences between the female and male genders, $t(73.40) = 2.79$, $p = 0.00$, $p < 0.05$. The two means are statistically different: Female ($m = 3.02$; $sd = 0.85$), Male ($m = 3.44$; $sd = 0.59$).

Thus, we can conclude that there are statistically significant differences between females and males regarding contingent reward (Tab 3).

between the two means: Female ($m = 2.95$; $sd = 3.00$), Male ($m = 0.81$; $sd = 0.70$). As a result, we can state that there is **no statistically significant difference** between the leader's gender and individualized consideration (Tab. 5).

In order to determine whether there are differences between female and male leaders regarding their **management-by-exception** tendencies, we used the T-test, $t(98) = 0.31$, $p = 0.75$, $p > 0.05$.

Table 3. Test

	Gender leader	N	Mediate	Standard deviation	Levene's test	T test
Inspiration and motivation.	Female	42	3,14	0,79	F(98)=0,65, p=0,58	t(98)=0,55, p=0,58, p>0,05
	Male	58	3,22	0,68		

Table 4. Test

	Gender leader	N	Mediate	Standard deviation	Levene's test	Test T
Individualized consideration	Female	42	2,95	0,81	F(98)=1,78, p=0,75	t(98)=0,31, p=0,75, p>0,05
	Male	58	3,00	0,70		

Table 5. Test

	Gender leader	N	Mediate	Standard deviation	Levene's test	T test
Management by exception	Female	42	2,03	0,64	F(98)=3,58, p=0,71	t(98)=0,36, p=0,71, p>0,05
	Male	58	1,97	0,81		

Following the analysis, we concluded that the means are not statistically different: Female ($m = 2.03$, $sd = 0.64$), Male ($m = 1.97$, $sd = 0.81$) in terms of management-by-exception, indicating **no statistically significant difference** (Tab 6).

We aimed to observe whether there are differences in **idealized behavior** as perceived by employees across different age groups: 18–25 years, 25–30 years, 30–40 years, 40–50 years, and over 50 years. Differences were observed between

Table 6. Test OneWay ANOVA

	Gender leader	N	Mediate	Standard deviation	Levene's test	T test
Management by exception	Female	42	2,03	0,64	F(98)=3,58, p=0,71	t(98)=0,36, p=0,71, p>0,05
	Male	58	1,97	0,81		

(I)	1. Age reached at the time of completing the questionnaire:	(J) 1. Age reached at the time of completing the questionnaire:	Mediate	Sig.
18-25		25-30	0,11	0,98
		30-40	0,00	1,00
		40-50	0,91	0,00
		over 50	0,64	0,75
25-30		18-25	0,11	0,98
		30-40	0,11	0,97
		40-50	1,03	0,00
		over 50	0,52	0,81
30-40		18-25	0,00	1,00
		25-30	0,11	0,97
		40-50	0,91	0,00
		over 50	0,63	0,74
40-50		18-25	0,91	0,00
		25-30	1,03	0,00
		30-40	0,91	0,00
		over 50	1,55	0,24
over 50		18-25	0,64	0,75
		25-30	0,52	0,81
		30-40	0,63	0,74
		40-50	1,55	0,24

these group means:

18–25 years ($m = 3.08$; $sd = 0.92$)

25–30 years ($m = 2.96$; $sd = 0.60$)

30–40 years ($m = 3.08$; $sd = 0.76$)

40–50 years ($m = 4.00$; $sd = 0.00$)

over 50 years ($m = 3.00$; $sd = 0.83$)

To test for differences between categories, we conducted a **One-Way ANOVA**. The ANOVA test result, $F(4, 95) = 2.54$, $p = 0.04$, indicates that the observed differences are **statistically significant**.

The **Games-Howell post hoc test** revealed that there are significant differences between the following age groups in terms of the **idealized behavior displayed by the leader**:

- 18–25 and 40–50
- 25–30 and 40–50
- 30–40 and 40–50

In seeking to observe whether differences exist in terms of **inspiration and motivation** among employees of multinational companies across age groups -

18–25 ($m = 3.13$, $sd = 0.87$),

25–30 ($m = 3.27$, $sd = 0.70$),

30–40 ($m = 2.97$, $sd = 0.65$),

40–50 ($m = 3.62$, $sd = 0.25$),

and over 50 ($m = 2.83$, $sd = 0.76$)

-we found **no statistically significant difference**.

To reach this conclusion, we used the **One-Way ANOVA test** ($F(4, 95) = 1.21$), confirming the result stated above (Tab 9).

In the analyzed case, there is no statistically significant difference between groups, as determined using the One-Way ANOVA test ($F(4, 95) = 2.56$, $p = 0.43$). There are no differences between the mean scores for the age

Table 7. Test OneWay ANOVA

	N	Mediate	Standard deviation	Levene's test	F	Materiality threshold
18-25	19	2,84	0,37	$F(4, 95) = 0,50$, $p = 0,73$	$F(4, 95) = 2,28$	$p = 0,06$
25-30	54	2,62	0,56			
30-40	20	2,37	0,60			
40-50	4	3,00	0,81			
over 50	3	2,83	0,57			
Total	100	2,64	0,56			

There is **no statistically significant difference** between the age groups, as determined using the One-Way ANOVA test ($F(4, 95) = 2.28$, $p = 0.06$). No differences were observed between the following group means:

18–25 years ($m = 2.84$; $sd = 0.37$),

25–30 years ($m = 2.62$; $sd = 0.37$),

30–40 years ($m = 2.37$; $sd = 0.60$),

40–50 years ($m = 3.00$; $sd = 0.81$),

over 50 years ($m = 2.83$; $sd = 0.56$).

Therefore, we conclude that there are no statistically significant differences between the age groups regarding the extra effort tendency displayed by the leader (Tab. 8).

groups?

18–25 ($m = 3.21$, $sd = 0.94$),

25–30 ($m = 3.25$, $sd = 0.70$),

30–40 ($m = 3.22$, $sd = 0.73$),

40–50 ($m = 3.87$, $sd = 0.25$),

over 50 ($m = 3.00$, $sd = 0.74$).

In conclusion, there are no statistically significant differences between the age groups and contingent reward (Tab 10).

In the conducted analysis, we aimed to observe whether there are differences regarding the idealized influence of employees and the age groups of the respondents: 18–25 years ($m = 2.42$, $sd = 0.80$), 25–30 years ($m = 2.47$, $sd =$

Table 8. Test OneWay ANOVA

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Levene's test	F	Materiality threshold
18-25	19	3,13	0,87	$F(4, 95) = 1,69$, $p = 0,15$	$F(4, 95) = 1,21$	$p = 0,31$
25-30	54	3,27	0,70			
30-40	20	2,97	0,65			
40-50	4	3,62	0,25			
over 50	3	2,83	0,76			
Total	100	3,19	0,72			

Table 9. Test OneWay ANOVA

	N	Mediate	Standard deviation	Levene's test	F	Materiality threshold
18-25	19	3,21	0,94	F (4,95)=2,56, p=0,43	F(4,95)=0,79	p=0,53
25-30	54	3,25	0,70			
30-40	20	3,22	0,73			
40-50	4	3,87	0,25			
over 50	3	3,00	0,50			
Total	100	3,26	0,74			

Table 10. Test OneWayANOVA

	N	Media	Standard deviation	Levene's test	F	Materiality threshold
18-25	19	2,42	0,80	F(4,95)= 1,84, p=0,12	F(4,95)= 1,77	p=0,14
25-30	54	2,47	0,60			
30-40	20	2,65	0,60			
40-50	4	3,25	0,50			
over 50	3	2,16	1,25			
Total	100	2,52	0,67			

0.60), 30–40 years ($m = 2.65$, $sd = 0.60$), 40–50 years ($m = 3.25$, $sd = 0.50$), and over 50 years ($m = 2.16$, $sd = 1.25$). The value of the ANOVA test, $F(4,95) = 1.84$, $p = 0.12$, indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between age and the idealized influence expressed by the leader (Tab 11).

state of research and understanding how men and women approach leadership roles.

Following the T-tests, One-Way ANOVA, and correlation analysis, out of the 5 hypotheses, only one was confirmed-specifically, the one related to the differences observed between the following age groups: 18–25 and 40–50 years, 25–30 and

Table 11. Corelation

		Idealized behavior	The kind of leader
Idealized behavior	Pearson correlation	1	0,028
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,78
	N	100	100
The kind of leader	Pearson correlation	0,02	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,78	
	N	100	100

Following the Pearson correlation, we obtained the following results according to the table above: the significance level $p = 0.78$, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no statistically significant correlation between gender and idealized behavior.

In conclusion, the examination of leadership styles adopted by men and women has provided valuable insights into the different approaches and contributions individuals of various genders bring to leadership roles.

In recent years, the understanding of leadership styles has evolved to acknowledge the influence of gender on leadership behaviors and approaches. The relevance of gender-based leadership styles involves examining the current

40–50 years, and 30–40 and 40–50 years in terms of the idealized behavior displayed by the leader. The other four hypotheses were rejected. Therefore, we can deduce that there are no statistically significant differences between men and women when it comes to the leadership styles they adopt.

Although most hypotheses were rejected, it remains essential to promote gender equality in leadership going forward and to create supportive environments that allow individuals to embrace their authentic leadership styles. This can be achieved through initiatives such as mentorship programs, leadership development opportunities, and the implementation of inclusive policies and practices that challenge gender biases and

promote equal opportunities for both men and women to advance in leadership roles.

Society must recognize and appreciate the unique strengths and perspectives that individuals of different genders bring to leadership. By challenging gender stereotypes, promoting inclusion, and leveraging diverse leadership styles,

organizations can harness the full potential of the workforce and create a more equitable and effective leadership landscape.

Embracing gender diversity in leadership will lead to improved organizational performance and pave the way for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

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