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**EMPLOYABILITY OF WOMEN MANAGERS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR:  
A STUDY ON THEIR LEADERSHIP ROLE**

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The teaching profession both in this country and internationally is, with few exceptions, predominated by women as it has traditionally been seen as a 'suitable' job for women. However, a look at the statistics reveals that despite the large numbers of women in the profession, they are greatly under-represented in positions of management. Thus the under-representation of women in positions of senior management within educational institutions continues to be a matter of some concern. Studies on gender and leadership have revealed a number of barriers to women seeking educational leadership and management positions. This paper discusses the status of women at senior management level within the educational sector. Previous studies have found differences in leadership styles in terms of gender and managerial hierarchy. Discussions on the gender differentiation of leadership have centered on the different qualities and styles of leadership of men and women; that is, the so-called masculine and feminine styles of leadership. In this context this paper examines the literature relating to the leadership styles typically adopted by women in order to explain how such styles will have an impact on the educational sector.

**Keywords:** educational sector, leadership, women.

## **1 Background**

Number of women entering into University education in UK has continued to increase over recent years, and women now account for over 50% of students. However, the women participation rate at senior management level is very low. Education is numerically dominated by women but managers in education are predominantly male although there is some evidence of growing willingness of women to take up leadership positions in education (Leithwood, 1994).

In this context, this paper reviews the status of women at senior management positions as leaders within the educational sector. The leadership concept cannot be taken out entirely when discussing the employability of women at managerial level. Previous studies have found differences in leadership styles in terms of gender and managerial hierarchy. Discussions on the gendered differentiation of leadership have centered on the different qualities and styles of leadership of men and women; that is, the so-called masculine and feminine styles of leadership. Thus the literature relating to the leadership styles typically adopted by women is reviewed in this paper. It also discusses how such styles will contribute to the development of educational sector.

This paper begins with the status of women in educational sector and the associated barriers they face in climbing up the ladder. Then it reviews the influence of gender on leadership styles currently in place and it further reviews the literature relating to leadership qualities of women in the educational sector. Then it moves on to a discussion on the employability of women managers within the educational sector.

## **2 Status of Women in the Educational Sector**

The sector of higher education is characterized by specific aspects which make it distinguishable from the business world. However, in higher education, as well as in business, men and masculine values are dominant (Whitehead, 2001). Statistics show that men represent the majority of academic staff (in the UK men represent 63 per cent of the academic staff and occupy the most senior academic and managerial positions; Munford and Rumball (1999) report that only 7 per cent of universities worldwide are managed by women (Priola, 2004).

The teaching profession both in this country and internationally is, with few exceptions, predominated by women as it has traditionally been seen as a 'suitable' job for women. The fact that the teaching profession is relatively lower paid and does not enjoy the same high status as other male-dominated professions may partly account for the fact that there are more women than men in this profession. However, a look at the statistics reveals that despite the large numbers of women in the profession, they are greatly under-represented in positions of management (Cubillo and Brown, 2003).

Like any new trend in traditional settings, it takes years to develop leadership styles until these styles are understood and accepted. Meanwhile, women face several barriers that prevent them from been considered leaders or leadership candidates (Still, 1994). Therefore it is appropriate to look into the barriers faced by women entering into educational sector. Studies on gender and leadership have revealed a number of barriers to women seeking educational leadership and management positions (Olsson and Walker 2003).

A number of writers have attempted to identify and categorize some of the barriers to the progress of women's careers in educational leadership (Brown and Ralph, 1996; Coleman, 2001; Hall, 1996). One of the theories put forward is the socialisation and stereotyping as the barriers for women seeking a senior position in education. Schmuck (1986) warns of the dangers of subscribing to this "deficit" model where women are seen to need to be trained or educated up to the level of men, rather than be valued for what they might bring to the field of management. Some internal barriers such as one's lack of confidence, lack of competitiveness and fear of failure have also been identified for women entry into leadership position. Cubillo (1999) found in her study that women's lack of confidence was more to do with unfamiliarity with the territory than a lack of faith in their abilities. The fear of failure, too, tended to be much reduced once women were aware of the "rules of the game". Women leaders in education need to find the leadership styles that, without denying its feminine origins, result in effectiveness. The redefinition of skills and characteristics of an effective school leader, following the current trends of organizational leadership, will help erase gender stereotypes and focus on desirable characteristics that candidates (men or women) bring to the position (Logan, 1998). Whatever the idealized view of educational leaders and despite calls for leaders who shape the fundamental culture, structure, and goals of educational organizations, stereotypes about leadership need to be challenged and addressed

before educational training programs designed to promote women to the top will be successful.

Further, there has also been limited investigation of gender differences despite the dramatic rise of women in managerial and executive roles (Klein et al, 1996). It is true that women are disproportionately represented in lower-level corporate jobs and may feel less comfortable in work and training settings because of their token status (Kanter, 1997). Nevertheless a growing number of women attain middle- and upper-level positions, making it imperative to understand the influence of gender on learning during leadership education. The lack of research on gender and level in management education is due to a number of factors (Klein et al., 1996). Historically upper management has been a male domain, so gender has rarely been investigated (Fagenson, 1990). In addition, data on leadership education has not widely been available possibly due to concerns that confidentiality cannot be maintained. As the psychological investigation of executives is rare; there may be a reluctance to evaluate their performance (Carnevale, 1988).

Regardless of equal opportunities policies and rhetoric of parity and fairness, gender relations are often based on asymmetries which reinforce the inequalities between women and men in organisations (Priola, V, 2004). While the idea of gender neutrality has been abandoned (Mavin et al., 2004), inequalities are often revealed by numerical discrepancies between men and women in certain positions (e.g. managerial). Research (Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Collinson and Hearn, 1996) has shown the role of gender in organisational functioning and has highlighted the importance of considering whether managers are men or women when understanding organisational behaviour. As most managers are men it is important to consider the role of women managers and investigate the construction of women's identities in male dominated working environments (Priola, 2004).

Due to above mentioned barriers and reasons it is obvious that the women are under-represented in managerial positions in the educational sector. Therefore it is appropriate to look into this issue further and study the ways of employing more women managers in such sectors. In this context, studying the leadership qualities of women cannot be ignored. The following section discusses why the leadership is a factor to consider when employing women to managerial level. It also explains how the gender influences the leadership styles.

### 3 Gender and Leadership

As this study focuses on the women at managerial positions, it is important to take leadership qualities into consideration. Because organisations have paid attention to leadership styles of people who occupy managerial positions, holding the belief that leadership is an important factor in achieving business success (Giritli, and Oraz, 2004). The leadership is defined as ‘the ability to influence – either directly or indirectly – the behaviour, thoughts, and actions of a significant number of individuals’ (Gardner, 1995). Leadership is one of the least-understood concepts in business, despite the countless articles and books written about it. Many theories of leadership have been developed, yet no single approach adequately captures the essence of the concept. Educational leadership refers to “leadership influence through the generation and dissemination of educational knowledge and instructional information, development of teaching programs, and supervision of teaching performance” (Shum and Cheng, 1997). The intention of leadership theories is to explain relationship between leadership styles and the context in which leadership is evaluated. The real issue in leadership differences lies in the equity in selecting the right person with the appropriate skills and qualities to ensure the effectiveness and success of the organization (Bass and Avolio, 1994).

Although mainstream research on leadership generally continues to ignore gender relations, over recent years there has been major expansion of international research on gender relations in leadership, organizations and management (Hearn and Piekkari, 2005). Previous studies have found differences in leadership styles in terms of gender and managerial hierarchy. Discussions on the gendered differentiation of leadership have centered on the different qualities and styles of leadership of men and women; that is, the so-called masculine and feminine styles of leadership (Cubillo, and Brown, 2003). Hofstede (2001) suggests that the masculinity / femininity dimension affects the meaning of work in people’s lives. High masculinity may give rise to a fairly macho type of leadership, whereas high femininity may lead to a more empathetic consideration type of leadership. In masculine cultures, there is a higher emphasis on assertiveness and the acquisition of money and other material things. Feminine cultures stress relationships among people, concern for others, and interest in the quality of work environment (Giritli, and Oraz, 2004).

From the early 1990s, management literature proposes that contemporary management practices such as employee participation, teamwork and flexibility encourage the

feminisation of management (Lee, 1994). The feminisation of management refers to the spread of values, meanings or qualities culturally associated with females (Priola, 2004). New systems of management which emphasize behaviours such as nurturing and caring, interpersonal sensitivity and preference for open and cooperative relationships, have been advocated as the most effective response to changes in organisations' environments (Colwill and Townsend, 1999). In education, Coleman (2000) surveyed women head-teachers in England and Wales and found that they identify with a collaborative, people-oriented style of leadership.

The presence of feminine or masculine characteristics in leadership styles is related to the construct of gender (Larson and Freeman, 1997). Gender, race, class, and other elements of social difference are acknowledged to play an important role in the development of leadership styles. Studies such as those conducted by Martin Court (1995) in New Zealand, Margaret Grogan (1996) in the USA and Marianne Coleman (2001) in England and Wales have uncovered similarities in women's social, economic and educational backgrounds, career progression, family circumstances and leadership styles (Fitzgerald 2003). Fitzgerald also suggested that it is impossible to create conceptualisations of leading and managing without taking into account issues of gender and ethnicity.

#### **4 Leadership Role of Women in the Educational Sector**

This section mainly focuses on the role of leadership qualities of women in the educational sector. As women have a more prominent presence as managers and executives in organisations, more attention has been devoted to the possible differences between the leadership styles of women and men. Intuitive reasoning suggests that early socialisation patterns develop different qualities in women and men that would likely result in variations in leadership styles (Powell, 1993). The growing number of women in managerial positions have created interest in the role of women as leaders (Klenke, 1996). In recent years, both mainstream management literature and organisational policy show evidence of a marked turn to leadership rather than management as the means to enhance organisational performance in contemporary organisations. This is matched by a growing trend in the UK to attribute ever-greater significance to leadership as a way of solving organisational problems not only within the private sector, but also within the public sector more generally, across education (in

schools and in universities) as well as in health and local government organisations.(Ford, 2005).

Hay/McBer, which is a consulting firm, has leadership style typology, which is based on the work of David Mc Clelland (Giritli, and Oraz, 2004). Hey/ McBer categorizes leadership styles into six distinct styles based on two major classes or styles: they are transactional and transformational (Goleman, 2000). Under transformational leadership, the most prominent behaviour used is inspirational motivation, followed by idealized attributes, intellectual stimulation, idealized behaviours, and individualized consideration. Under transactional leadership, the most prominent behaviour used is contingent reward, followed by management-by-exception active, and management-by-exception passive (Chan and Chan, 2005). In this regard corrective style ('do what I tell you) and authoritative style ('come with me') fall under transactional style whereas affiliative style ('people come first'), democratic style ('what do you think'), pacesetting style ('do as I do, now') and coaching style ('try this') fall under the transformational leadership styles (Goleman, 2000).

Research findings of Trinidad and Normore (2005) show that women adopt democratic and participative leadership styles in the corporate world and in education. Another research done by Rosener (1990) revealed that women are more likely than men to use "transformational leadership" which is motivating others by transforming their individual self-interest into the goals of the group. The characteristics of transformational leadership relate to female values developed through socialization processes that include building relationships, communication, consensus building, power as influence, and working together for a common purpose. This is also supported by Shane et al (1995) saying that femininity was found to be positively correlated with transformational leadership. Further several studies focusing on transformational leadership indicated that women are perceived, and perceive themselves, as using transformational leadership styles more than men (Bass et al., 1996; Druskat, 1994; Rosener, 1990). Bass (1990) and Bass and Stogdill (1990) also suggested that women are slightly more likely to be described as charismatic, as women scored higher on transformation factor than men. Also the transformational, empowering and collaborative style of leadership associated with women is compared with the more directive and authoritarian style traditionally associated with male leaders. This is further supported by Comer et al (1995), where they have noted that female business managers tend to be rated higher than male managers on the 'individual consideration' dimension of transformational



leadership styles. Yammarino et al. (1997) have also noted that female leaders rather than male leaders tend to develop the individualized, unique relationships with subordinates necessary to effect the transformational leadership style. The notion of male and female gender qualities facilitates the argument that male gender qualities are oriented towards the more impersonal, task oriented or transactional approach to leadership, while female gender qualities tend towards more nurturing, relationships oriented style of leadership that underlies the transformational leadership approach (Pounder and Coleman, 2002). Likewise, many authors refer to transformational leadership as a feminine leadership style. However, research by Hackman et al, (1992) showed that transformational leadership is a stereotypically gender-balanced style.

In describing nearly every aspect of management, women made reference to trying to make people feel part of the organisation from setting performance goals to determining strategy (Rosener, 1990). Men, on the other hand, were found to be more likely than women to: adopt “transactional” leadership styles (exchanging rewards or punishment for performance); use power that comes from their organizational position and formal authority (Rosener, 1990). Apart from this transformational style, the multi tasking ability is another major issue which is quite useful in managing educational sectors. Women are said to be better than men in terms of multi-tasking. The ability to juggle several things at once was also reported as one of the differences between women and men in Deem’s (2003) study of 137 manager-academics (women and men). The belief that women are better than men at managing different activities simultaneously finds its origins in the role of women in various societies. Women are often carers of the family and of the household in addition to external employment. In a research carried out by Priola (2004) almost all of the participants interviewed referred to multitasking presenting it as a female quality and ability. Priola’s research further identified four major discourses which refer to aspects generally associated with femininities when constructing femininities within educational institutions. Those are the ability to manage multi-tasks (including administration), people and communication skills, the ability to focus on support and care for the staff and the implementation of a team-based approach rather than an authoritarian style.

Women are good in interpersonal and communication skills. Maintaining personal relationship within educational sectors is very important as it will keep the working environment friendly and accommodative. Rosener’s (1990) study found that women

managers put effort in building relationships and understanding the people they work with, so that they can adapt their style to each individual. Rosener (1990) also found through her study that women use “interactive leadership” styles by encouraging participation, sharing power and information, enhancing peoples’ self-worth. She further justified that women are much more likely than men to ascribe their power to interpersonal skills or personal contacts rather than to organizational stature. Women as leaders believe that people perform best when they feel good about themselves and their work, and they try to create situations that contribute to that feeling. Research into the feminisation of management suggests that contemporary managers are moving towards substituting the “masculine power” of decision-making, giving orders and being obeyed, with the power to give others (the work force) sustenance, nurture their growth and care for them (Fondas, 1997). Earlier thinking emphasized that women who had achieved leadership positions were imitators of male characteristics, but contemporary theories recognize feminine leadership styles (Stanford et al., 1995).

## **5 Discussion**

The issues related to the women in managerial positions in the educational sector are discussed in this paper. It is the fact that women are under-represented in managerial positions in educational sectors. One of the reasons for this lack of women in managerial positions is the barriers they face. In addition to that the leadership is taken as a factor which cannot simply be ignored when talking about the employability in managerial positions. In this context, the concept of leadership in relation to the gender has been discussed in this paper.

From the foregoing sections, we could see that the transformational leadership could be the preferred leadership style used by women. But we cannot totally rely on this statement as a range of styles are needed to manage the educational institutions. Depending on various situations the managers should be able to use different or combination of leadership styles.

Nevertheless, the feminine leadership styles encourage the teamwork, personal relationship, caring, and nurturing qualities. The educational sector naturally falls under a good environment where the personal relationship is given importance. More than task oriented activities, people oriented activities should be given more priority in educational sectors as

such sectors provide a room for development of people's network. Teamwork should also be encouraged in such sectors in order to achieve the organisational goals.

The leadership styles adopted by women seem to be suitable to apply in educational sectors. But due to certain barriers the women are lacking in managerial positions. Therefore it is important to educate the respective people with the knowledge of how women managers will fit within educational sectors and what could be the benefits by employing women managers in such sectors. In this context, through this paper the authors intend to say that the female leadership qualities identified through various literatures could positively contribute to the management of educational sectors.

Helgesin (1990) argues that women's central involvement in managing households, raising children, juggling careers gives them a capacity for prioritization in leadership role that men typically do not possess. Rigg and Sparrow (1994) said that female leaders emphasized the team approach more than men and were regarded as more people oriented than their male counterparts, while male leaders were considered more paternalistic and authoritarian than female leaders.

In summarizing the leadership qualities of women, following are said to be the feminine leadership qualities: the democratic participative styles, ability to manage multi tasks, excellent interpersonal skills, caring, and developing personal relationship. Such characteristics would contribute positively in managing educational sectors. However, when we take the work-life balancing into consideration men and women differ in their attitudes towards balancing the demands of work and family. Gutek et al., 1986 report that the maternal role requires more time and personal involvement than the paternal role. Thus the demanding nature of women's family roles makes them more likely to experience conflict, overload and negative consequences from family roles than men (Keith and Schafer, 1980). A proper work life balance should be achieved in order to manage both the academic and social life effectively. But as far as the educational sector is concerned the possibilities of getting flexible working hours are comparatively high than other types of organisations. In this regard, the work –life balance could be obtained by females.

Based on the foregoing discussion the appropriateness of women in leadership position could be identified within the educational sector. It is imperative to understand what benefits the

leadership qualities that are typically adopted by women will bring to the educational organisations. Once it is understood, the necessary steps to be taken to identify and remove the barriers that prevent women to capture the top most position in educational sector. This will ultimately lead to increase the employability of women managers in such sectors.

## **6 Conclusion**

This research paper reviewed literature on ‘women managers in educational sector’, ‘educational leadership’ and ‘gender and leadership’ in order to examine the employability of women managers in educational sectors.

From the literature survey it is revealed that women adopt democratic and participative leadership styles in the corporate world and in education. From this it could be said that the women have the capability to manage the educational sector. This democratic participative style can fall under the major category of ‘transformational’ leadership style which is the preferred leadership style used by women. The characteristics of transformational leadership relate to female values developed through socialization processes that include building relationships, communication, consensus building, power as influence, and working together for a common purpose. More specifically, many authors refer to transformational leadership as a feminine leadership style. However the barriers pertaining to educational sectors, managerial positions in particular, may be a big challenge for women. Such barriers are one of the reasons behind the under-representation of women in senior management positions. In this regard this paper identified some barriers faced by women in capturing the top most position in educational organizations. Socialisation and stereotyping could be said as the barriers for women seeking a senior position in education. Also some internal barriers such as one’s lack of confidence lack of competitiveness and fear of failure have been identified for women entry into educational leadership position.

As this paper is produced based on initial literature survey, further research is recommended to find out whether the feminine leadership styles are better than the masculine styles or vice versa. According to a journal article by Pounder (2001), it is said that an array of leadership style which has both masculine and feminine characteristics is required for an effective management. This study will be a supportive resource to any reader interested in identifying the women’s leadership qualities to manage the educational sector and in finding out the ways to remove the barriers of women’s entry into managerial positions.

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