

# Leadership Behaviour: Does Sex and Level of Education matter?

Anthony Sumnaya Kumasey<sup>1</sup>, Eric Delle<sup>2</sup>, Albert Puni Puni<sup>3</sup>

---

## ARTICLE INFO

Available Online April 2014

Key words:

Leadership Behaviour;

Sex;

Level of Education

and Ghana.

## ABSTRACT

We examined individual differences in leadership behaviour in the Ghanaian business sector. Specifically, sex differences as well as level of education on leadership behaviour were examined. Cross-sectional survey design was used to study 95 participants conveniently sampled from selected organizations within the Greater Accra Metropolis. Questionnaire was used to collect data from a cross-section of people in the organization. Test of normality and reliability testing were conducted as part of the preliminary analysis. Multivariate test was used to test the hypotheses in the study. The result showed that females showed significantly people-oriented leadership behaviour than their male counterparts. However, level of education did not significantly influence the leadership behaviour of participants. Implications and limitations of the study are provided.

---

## Introduction

Over the past two decades, the increase in the number of women occupying managerial posts has stimulated widespread interest in the study of women in management. According to Fortune (2007) Women have made great strides achieving positional success within business organizations and government, they are still underrepresented at the higher levels of these organizations. This has necessitated an increasing interest in the study of sex differences in leadership styles (Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Vinkenbug et al., 2000). Numerous studies have supported the argument that women inherently possess certain feminine characteristics (such as good communication skills, good listening, empathy, negotiation and conflict handling skills, as well as interpersonal skills) that diverge sharply from male leadership characteristics (Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Valian, 1998; Vinkenbug et al., 2000). The opposite position in this argument perceives little or no sex difference in leadership styles. Any disparities are attributed to home and family responsibilities or workplace norms (Donnell & Hall, 1980; Powell, 1988, 1990). Korabik (1990) on his part has pointed out that work on leadership tends to either ignore women or focus on sex difference, and both can prove damaging to women. However, the individual difference factor in leadership behaviour is vital in contemporary organizational management given the implications of these behaviours on organizational progress and survival. Against this backdrop, we seek to investigate sex differences in leadership behaviour as well as ascertain the leadership behaviours of managers and non-managers.

## Statement of Problem

Though leadership research begun some 20 years ago, the individual difference factor in leadership behaviour still remains significantly under-researched. Further, most of the empirical evidence reported is plagued with inconsistent findings (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Hare, Koenigs & Hare, 1997). For instance, while some scholar's associate people-oriented style to females and task-oriented to males, others did not see any difference in the leadership behaviour of both sexes. The status of the person has also been found to influence the leadership status of male and female in organizations.

## Literature Review

### *Theoretical Framework*

We utilized the behavioural theory of leadership to provide theoretical foundation for the study. In terms of behaviour, the leader either demonstrates people-oriented or task-oriented behaviour (Bass, 1985; Burns,

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Department of Business Administration, University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana, Email: tonysk30@hotmail.co.uk

<sup>2</sup> Department of Business Administration, University of Professional Studies

<sup>3</sup> Department of Business Administration, University of Professional Studies

1978). A task oriented leader is one who emphasizes task, performance and meeting of standards. Thus, such a leader determines standards of task performance, and ensures that group members perform up to those standards. A people-oriented leader on the other hand show concern and respect for individual group members, is friendly and approachable, encourage input from others and treats all group members equally and fairly (Bass, 1990).

Does the sex of a leader determine the behavioural orientation? According to Eagly (1987), sex differences in leadership can be viewed from two perspectives; communal and agentic. A leader who is communal by nature demonstrates concern for the welfare of other people such as show of affection, devotion of self to others, eager to soothe hurt feelings, and generally aware of the feelings of others. Researchers have reported that, females are more often characterized by communal qualities (Deaux & Lewis, 1983; Ruble, 1985; Rosner, 1990; Spencer & Helmreich, 1978; Weiner & LaRussa, 1985). Leaders who are agentic are assertive, goal-oriented and demonstrate control over subjects. Various studies have demonstrated that in general, males are often more characterized by agentic qualities (e.g, Rosner, 1990; Weiner & LaRussa, 1985; Spencer & Helmreich, 1978; Bem, 1974).

### ***Review of Related Studies***

The interest in leadership research by organizational scholars has gained momentum with the increasing need for leaders who will exhibit the right kind of behaviour that will take the organization to its rightful destination.

We are driven by the individual difference factor in leadership behaviour and more importantly share the sentiments expressed by Melero (2004) that leadership behaviour between male and female is qualitatively different. Empirical evidence suggests that, inconsistent findings regarding sex differences have been reported by researchers. For instance, Eagly and Johnson (1990) observed that women managers tend to adopt a more participative and democratic leadership orientation while their male counterparts favour a more directive and autocratic orientation. They found no significant difference in both sexes reliance on interpersonal relationships or task definition for their leadership styles. However, women were found to be "transformational leadership oriented" where they demonstrate intense interpersonal interactions by giving individualized mentoring to subordinates and also stimulating subordinates' interest in the job, men on the other hand demonstrate and actually practice "management by default" and "laissez-faire" leadership styles where they show no concern for their subordinates in terms of supervision and development on the job. Research in Britain corroborated the evidence reported by Eagly and Johnson (1990).

Wajcman (1996) sought to determine the views of British men and women managers about differences in managerial styles of males and females. It was observed that while females were more people-oriented, males were more task-oriented in their approach to leadership. Similarly, Hare, Koenigs and Hare (1997) in a comparative study of 130 female managers with 130 male managers with similar background characteristics in which different raters were used, found that self-rating and peer ratings of leadership behaviour ratings showed that, females demonstrates more democratic and interpersonally oriented leadership behaviour that their male counterparts. Further, Lewis and Fagenson-Eland (1998) in their study found based self and supervisor ratings that, female leaders rated themselves less task oriented than male leaders. No interaction effect of sex and organizational level was found on either self-or supervisor ratings.

Contrary to the above empirical evidence, other studies have reported non-significant difference in organizational effectiveness between men and women (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995). Similarly, non-significant difference in leadership behaviour was revealed in a study utilizing a matched sample of 900 managers from different sexes working at similar positions within the same firm. Specifically, women were not found to be more democratic than their men counterparts. Johnson (1993) also reported non-significant difference between self, subordinate and observational instruments on sex comparisons of directive and supportive behaviours by students acting as leaders in an organizational simulation. Sakata and Kurokawa (1992) in a Japanese stimulation study revealed that, female students demonstrated more task-oriented leadership posture and less of interpersonal oriented style.

The status of the person has also been found to affect the leadership orientation of the person. Thus, theoretically, an interactive effect is being suggested by scholars. For instance, Denmark (1993) in a study involving a diverse sample found that both male and female leaders with higher status were more

empowering than leaders with lower status. This, implies that the managerial status of the person as to whether the person is a manager or not has implication on the exhibition of leadership behaviour. In another study involving evening students describing their daytime managers, it was revealed that no sex differences in the ratings of transformational or transactional leadership exist.

In the view of Melero (2004), most of the studies on sex differences in leadership behaviour had methodological deficiency. For instance, stereotyping bias was found to have infiltrated the research outcome because most females in order to show their feminine attributes made responses accordingly while males also demonstrated their masculine attributes. One way to avoid this problem is to adopt a macro level (organizational) analysis instead of micro (individual). Consistent with this position, we chose a methodology which did not require the sample to assess their leadership behaviour. This way participant assessed leadership behaviour (i.e. people-oriented and task-oriented) not with him/herself in the picture but with the organization in mind (Kanter, 1977; cited in Melero, 2004).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

We employed cross-sectional survey design to investigate differences in leadership behaviour from the perspective of sex and managerial status. This design was appropriate because data were collected at a single point in time from individuals with different characteristics, and most importantly, we sought to test these differences in the study. The study follows the quantitative approach because questionnaire was used to collect data.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Procedure**

We utilized non-probability sampling method in drawing the organizations and participants for the study. Convenience sampling strategy was used to select the organizations and participants in the study. One Hundred and Twenty (n=120) were administered. Of this number, 95 questionnaires were finally used for the analysis. Thus, response rate of 79.2% was obtained. The sample comprised males and females, managerial and non-managerial workers and workers of different educational background.

### **Instruments/Measures**

Two categorical independent variables and one dependent variable were involved in the study. The independent variables were sex and managerial status. **Sex** was measured with a single item. Participants were asked to indicate whether they were male or female. Similarly, **level of education was measured** with a single item. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of education.

**Leadership behaviour** was conceptualized as people-oriented and task-oriented behaviours. Leadership orientation was measured with 24-items scale developed by Sergiovanni et al (1969). Each subscale contains 12-items. Thus, 12-items each were used to measure people-oriented and task-oriented leadership behaviour respectively. This scale was used by Tatlah (2010), and in Tatlah's (2010) study, the reliability values obtained were 0.62 and 0.61 for people-oriented and task-oriented respectively. Responses were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) for both people-oriented and task-oriented leadership behaviour.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

To guarantee the ethical acceptability of the study, we adhered to relevant ethical protocols in the study. We sought the consent of all the organizations that participated in the study. This was done through the Human Resource Department of such organizations. Questionnaires were administered by hand to individuals who agreed voluntarily to participate in the study. To fulfill the pledge of confidentiality of information, envelopes were added to the questionnaires. Participants were instructed to put the completed questionnaires into the envelop to ensure that the researchers were the only people who would have access to the information.

## **Results**

Independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses in the study. Independent t-test is a parametric test and therefore is used when the dependent variable scores are normally distributed. Test of normality was conducted using skewness and kurtosis approach. Normality of the dependent variables (people-oriented

and task-oriented leadership behaviours) was determined. Using the statistical range proposed by Tabacknick and Fidell (1986), the kurtosis and skewness values were found to be within the acceptable range of normality. We also calculated for Partial eta squared to determine the contribution of the independent variables in the study. Finally, reliability analysis was performed. Results of normality and reliability analysis of the variables are shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1:**  
**Summary of Skewness, Kurtosis and Reliability Values of Study Variables**

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis	Alpha	No. of Items
People-oriented	-0.088	-0.083	.762	12
Task-oriented	0.198	0.063	.637	12

### Testing Hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested using independent t-test. The assumption underlying the use of this test was established. The following hypotheses were tested:

- Female leaders will demonstrate more people-oriented behaviours than their male counterparts
- Male leaders will demonstrate more task-oriented behaviours than their female counterparts
- People who are highly educated will demonstrate significantly people-oriented leadership behaviour than those with low level of education.

**Table 2:**  
**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects of the Effect of Sex and Level of Education on Leadership Behaviour**

Source	Dependent Variable	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Eta Sq.
Sex	People-oriented	329.193	1	329.193	11.053	.001	.106
	Task-oriented	127.532	1	127.532	2.219	.140	.023
Education	People-oriented	21.251	1	21.251	.714	.400	.008
	Task-oriented	1.560	1	1.560	.027	.869	.000
Error	People-oriented	2769.745	93	29.782			
	Task-oriented	215009.406	93	57.484			
Total	People-oriented	3099.156	95				
	Task-oriented	5475.406	95				

As shown in **Table 2**, there was a statistically significant sex difference in people-oriented leadership behaviour [ $F_{(1, 95)} = 11.053, p = .001$ ; partial Eta squared = .106]. The partial eta squared value showed that, sex accounted for 10.6% in the adoption of people-oriented leadership behaviour. Specifically, females demonstrated significantly more people-oriented leadership behaviour ( $m = 46.261, SD = 4.919$ ) than their male counterparts ( $M = 42.589, SD = 6.008$ ).

There was no statistically significant sex difference in task-oriented leadership behaviour [ $F_{(1, 95)} = 2.219, p = .140$ , Partial Eta Squared = .023]. Thus, sex accounted for only 2.3% in the adoption of task-oriented leadership behaviour.

There was no statistically significant difference in level of education and adoption of people-oriented [ $F_{(1, 95)} = .714, p = .400$ , Partial Eta Squared = .008] and task-oriented behaviour [ $F_{(1, 95)} = .027, p = .869$ , Partial Eta Squared = .000]. This implies that, level of education whether high or low was not significant statistically in determining the adoption either people-oriented leadership behaviour or task-oriented behaviour.

### Discussion

Leadership provides an organization with a sense of direction and focus. The behaviour exhibited by a leader has a telling effect on the performance of followers. However, individual difference has been found to influence the leadership behaviour an individual adopts (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995). We also sought to determine whether level of education of an individual would influence the leadership behaviour an

individual chooses because with higher level of education, it is expected that the individual would appreciate and understand the dynamics of people and organization management than with lower education.

The empirical evidence gathered in this study showed that, females demonstrated significantly more people-oriented leadership behaviour than their male counterparts. This result corroborated previous research (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Hare et al., 1997; Lewis & Fagenson-Eland, 1998). This finding is justified because like previous researchers, the current has endorsed the view that females continue to demonstrate their feminine attributes such as caring, empathic, consideration, participative style and empowering attitude even in leadership. In addition, given the context of the study; Ghanaian society where the woman is taught to be submissive, caring and mother-like, it is not surprising that, females leaders were found to demonstrated people oriented leadership behaviour.

In terms of task-oriented leadership behaviour, no statistically significant sex difference was found. This outcome contradicted previous research outcome (Deaux & Lewis, 1983; Lewis & Fagenson-Eland, 1998; Ruble, 1985; Rosner, 1990; Spencer & Helmreich, 1978; Weiner & La Russa, 1985). Though female leaders were found to demonstrate people-oriented behaviours than male leaders, in terms of task-oriented behaviours, the difference is not significant. This implies that, the difference in leadership behaviour is unipolar not bipolar. Thus, though females can be said to be people-oriented leaders, males cannot be said to be task-oriented based on this empirical evidence.

According to Denmark (1993), the status of a person has implications on leadership behaviour. For instance, Denmark (1993) reported that people with high status tend to empower their followers than those with low status. This point to the fact that high status leaders tend to demonstrate people-oriented behaviours while those with low status tends to show task-oriented behaviours. However, the result of this study showed that there was no statistically significant between highly educated and lowly educated people in terms of people-oriented and task-oriented leadership behaviour.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study is not without limitation. For instance, the cross-sectional survey design used to investigate individual differences in leadership lacks the capacity to produce cause-effect relationship. Thus, the fact that females showed people-oriented leadership behaviour more than their male counterparts does not suggest that being a female causes the demonstration of people-oriented attitudes. Finally, the study drew the entire sample from the private sector of Ghana. This makes it difficult to generalize the research result to include people in the public sector.

### **Conclusion**

The study has partly supported the behavioural theory of leadership from the angle of communal and agentic attributes of male and female leaders (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995). Specifically, the study revealed that females demonstrate more communal qualities which are consistent with people-oriented leadership behaviour than their male counterparts. However, no significant difference in task oriented leadership was found between male and female. Level of education did not significantly determine the choice of leadership behaviour by participants in the study.

### **References**

- Bem, S. L., (1974). The Measurement of Psychological Androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 42: 155-162
- Deaux, K & Lewis, L.L. (1983) Components of Gender Stereotypes. *Psychological Documents*, 13(2): 25-50.
- Donnell, S.M. & Hall, J. (1980). Men and women as managers: a significant case of no significant difference", *Organizational Dynamics*, Spring, pp. 60-77.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex Differences in Social Behaviour: A Social Role Interpretation*, Hillsdale, NJ. Erlbaum.

- Helgesen, S. (1990). *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership*, Doubleday, New York, NY.
- Korabik, K. (1990). Androgyny and leadership style. *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 9, pp. 283-92.
- Powell, G.N. (1988). *Women and Men in Management*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA.
- Rosner, J. B. (1990). Ways Women Lead. *Harvard Business Review*, November-December: 119-125.
- Ruble, T. L. (1983). Sex Stereotypes: Issues of Change in the 1970s. *Sex Roles*, 9: 397-402.
- Spencer, J.T & Helmreich, R.L. (1978). *Masculinity and Femininity: Their Psychological Dimensions, Correlates and Antecedents*. Austin, Tex: University of Texas Press.
- Vinkenburg, C.J., Jansen, P.G.W. & Koopman, P.L. (2000). Feminine leadership: a review of gender differences in managerial behavior and effectiveness, in Davidson, M.J. and Burke, R.J. (Eds), *Women in Management: Current Research Issues*, Vol. II, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 120-37.
- Werner, P.D. & LaRussa, G.W. (1985). Persistence and Change in Sex-Role Stereotypes. *Sex Roles*, 12: 1089-1110.