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# Leadership Attribute among Women Employees

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Heightened competition world wide has raised the performance expectation of organizations which women still find it difficult to meet. Women have equal access to higher education but are not treated equally in comparison to their male counterparts while climbing the corporate ladder. Their biological differences, family culture and belief are the limiting factor. There are also many stereotype beliefs which are hindering women from breaking the glass ceiling. For women, struggle at work and home seem to occupy her entire life. Despite many historical achievements by women, these hold little promise for the women in their long standing battle for economic quality. This study aims to understand the hindrances perceived by women themselves with regard to their management capabilities. The objective of this study is to analyze the leadership attribute perceived to be present in them by the women employees. This study also attempts to test whether the perception of women about their leadership capabilities are dependent on their age, social status and their education.*

## **Introduction**

Organization today face heightened competition on a world wide basis, thus experiencing increasing performance pressures. High performance organizations have raised their expectations regarding time, energy and work commitment. These expectations are difficult for women to meet as they still perform the bulk of house hold tasks. Combination of factors contributes to the relatively slow influx of women into senior levels of corporate management (Ronald J Burke, 2002). Conservatism, patterns of upbringing and prejudice prevent women from reaching high positions in organizations. Though there is a considerable increase in women accessing higher education, but only few women reach senior positions. (Yvonne Due Billing and Mats Alvesson, 1989) It has been researched and concluded time and again that "it would seem women invest in the same education and skills as men, they earn equal access to "male"

occupations, but not equal treatment in the internal corporate labor markets" (Devanna M A,1987). Stereotype beliefs that men are intellectually and emotionally superior and therefore are set for promotions because they are more assertive and possess attributes for success hinder women from breaking the glass ceiling. These stereotype beliefs influence the employer's, right from recruitment and selection to ongoing career development and performance evaluations. Their biological differences are considered as the yardstick to decide their managerial capabilities. The society prefers to see

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them placed in traditional roles. Family culture and beliefs are also the limiting factors.

## Review of Literature

According to the Industrial Society (1980) recommendations, (a) women should be encouraged to take up management careers in the industry so that attitudes of parents, teachers improve towards women (b) ensure that girls are given guidance and opportunities at schools and in higher education; (c) reduce sex bias in education and particularly in subject choice. In a study, female interviewees were questioned as to what managerial skills they would like to develop. The findings were as follows (1) senior female managers were more concerned with interpersonal skills of managing people, skills of learning new technology and being able to retain more information; (2) middle and junior managers want to learn how to deal with difficult staff (particularly men), delegation, assertiveness, being more persuasive; (3) supervisory managers seemed to be interested in developing the basic skills of management (Cary L Cooper, Marilyn J Davidson, (1984). For men struggle is generally confined to the workplace, while home and leisure offer a contrast, where as for almost every women, struggles both fronts seem to occupy her entire life (Sujatha Gathoskar, 1992). There is a change in management competencies and aptitude. The old system was based on survival skills and in order to excel in the old organization requirements were forcefulness, motivator, decisiveness, willfulness, assertiveness, result and bottom line oriented, task oriented, integrity and diplomacy. The new leadership competencies require factors such as the ability to think in terms of systems and knowing how to lead systems; (Peter R Scholtes, 2004).

Women make up 40.5 percent of the global labor force in 2008, compared to 39.9 percent in 1998, indicating only an increase of just 0.6 percent in 10 years. (Global Employments Trends of Women 2009). The recession that hit North America has seen a spurt in firing of men and hiring of women resulting in women outnumbering men. The Empowerment Index for the world is 48.4 percent. The Empowerment Index where the number of women working as percent of total female population (above 15 years of age) shows that the index is Denmark 74.6 percent; Sweden

68.4 percent; Kazakhstan 66.7 percent; Thailand 65.8 percent; Canada 62.8 percent; Switzerland 61.3 percent; Netherlands 59.2 percent and Australia 58.4 percent (Times of India, 2009). In India the work participation rate for women was 25.63 percent in 2001 compared to 22.27 percent in 1991 and 19.67 percent in 1981. Though these figures show an increase in women work participation rate but in comparison with the male rate, it is still very low (Annual Report 2007-2008, Ministry of Labor). The numbers of women in 100 men who consider themselves to be in managerial positions in India are only 12 where as in China it is 74. (Business India, 2009) In the United States, women in management are now 49.8 percent and are projected to cross 50 in middle management tend to underrate their leadership ability, men were statistically more likely to be promoted than women because women's advancing opportunities are influenced by a "glass ceiling"/ "Glass Cage". Women's underrating reflects difficulty in seeing themselves as leaders which is based on masculine stereotypes of leadership. Despite their actual leadership ability, others in the organization would not recognize women as transformational leaders. Women in management need to recognize organizational obstacles to promotion rather than draw conclusion as to their own leadership ability. (Tracey T, Manning 2000).

Most women claimed to be ambitious, career oriented and more competent than their male counterparts. Many have achieved rapid career growth by open thinking and networking and applying the traditional roles of nurturing. The skills they use in their jobs, such as "conflict resolution", and "team building" are the ones they have learnt at home. By maintaining a "bond in the family structure", they have developed good communication, interpersonal and negotiation skills. (Babita Mathur-Helm, 2002). A study among the United States work force by Joanna Barsh and Susie Cranston on the topic "How Remarkable women lead" shows that there is persistent gap, in which women hold no more than 3 percent of Chief Executive Jobs in Fortune 500 Companies. This study on successful woman in leadership opined that women who lead, are inspired by a sense of meaning in what they do, assess situation in the positive light and know the value of connecting with others. (Times of India, 2009) Women employees feel that progression to more senior or leadership positions

are less attractive especially if it conflicts with work life balance. Stereotypical masculine behaviors are valued in many organizations and women are required to adorn it to succeed as leaders (Duncan Mctavish and Karen Miller, (2009).

**Objectives**

Self confidence and perception of self that she is capable and competent to take up leadership responsibility are significant factors to break the "glass ceiling/ glass cage". In this study the researcher seeks to answer the following questions: What are the leadership attribute perceived to be present in among women? Are the leadership attribute dependent on their age, educational status and social status? The literary survey strengthens the researcher's curiosity to understand perceived leadership attribute among women employees in Tamil Nadu with special reference to Chennai District. The objectives formulated by the researcher in this study are:

1. To understand the extent of leadership attribute perceived to be present among women employees.
2. To test whether the perceived leadership attribute are dependent on the age,

educational qualification and social status of the women.

**Methodology**

The various organization covered in this study are Standard Chartered bank, Citi Bank, Pepsico India Holdings Private and Hindustan Lever Ltd. The researcher circulated structured questionnaire among the respondents during the year 2008. The respondents were chosen on the basis of convenience sampling method. The tools adopted to study this were frequency, cumulative frequency, percentages and diagrams. Chi square was used to test the hypothesis. The number of women respondent was 66 in this survey from the Chennai district.

**Results and Discussion**

The profile of the respondents in the Table 1 indicates that 53 percent of the respondents were in the age group of 20-30 years. About 52 percent of the women questioned were post graduates. The number of married women comprised of 68 percent. The women respondents belonging to the middle class are 71 percent in the sample. The respondents belong to two categories, clerks and managers. About 61 percent were functioning as clerks. The respondents mostly had 0 to 5 years of experience in the organization.

**Table 1  
Profile of Respondents**

Particulars	Frequency (N=66)	Cumulative frequency	Percentage
<b>Age:</b>			
20-30	35	35	53
30-40	31	66	47
<b>Educational Qualifications</b>			
Undergraduate	32	32	48
Post graduate	34	66	52
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Married	45	45	68
Unmarried	21	66	32

<b>Social status</b>			
Middle Class	47	47	71
Upper Middle class	19	66	29
<b>Designation</b>			
Clerk	40	40	61
Manager	26	66	39
<b>Experience</b>			
0-5 years	31	31	47
5-10 years	18	49	27
10 years and above	17	66	26

Survey

The researcher has identified the following leadership attributes: delegation, resilience, assertiveness, ambition, endurance, popularity, analytical, motivated, industrious, competence, loyalty, decision making capability, enthusiastic and confidence. The respondents were asked to tick yes if they perceive the presence of these attribute in them and no if they perceive as not present. Those who ticked yes for more than 10 attributes were grouped as excellent, those who ticked 5 to 10 attributes were grouped as good and agreement for less than 5 were grouped as fair. The Table 2 shows that 14 percent in the age group of 30 to 40 years perceived to have more than

10 of the leadership attribute, and 25 percent in the same age group have perceived to possess 5 to 10 attribute. Grouping the data according to the educational qualification of the women shown in Table 3. It was observed that 32 percent of the undergraduates have agreed to perceive that they have up to 10 of the leadership attribute cited by the researcher and they were grouped as good whereas 28 percent of the post graduates believed to have excellent potential to become leaders. About 38 percent of middle class women believed to have good leadership attribute and 18 percent of the middle class have excellent leadership attribute.

**Table 2**  
**Perceived Leadership Attribute among Women based on Age**  
**(Figures in percentages)**

<b>Age of the respondents</b>	<b>Excellent (agreement to 10 or more attribute)</b>	<b>Good to 5 to 10 attribute</b>	<b>Fair (agreement to 5 and below attribute)</b>
20-30 years	13	20	17
30 – 40 years	14	25	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>28</b>

Survey

**Table 3**  
**Perceived Leadership Attribute among Women based on Educational Qualification (Figures in percentages)**

<b>Educational Qualification of the respondents</b>	<b>Excellent (agreement to 10 or more attribute)</b>	<b>Good (agreement to 5 to 10 attribute)</b>	<b>Fair (agreement to 5 and below attribute)</b>
Undergraduate	11	32	11
Postgraduate	28	13	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>16</b>

Survey

**Table 3**  
**Perceived Leadership Attribute among Women based on Social Status of Women (Figures in percentages)**

<b>Social Status of the respondents</b>	<b>Excellent (agreement to 10 or more attribute)</b>	<b>Good (agreement to 5 to 10 attribute)</b>	<b>Fair (agreement to 5 and below attribute)</b>
Middle Class	18	38	14
Upper Middle Class	9	17	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>28</b>

Survey

As the age increases, the presence of the various attributes among women also increases. Higher educational qualification also helps them to perceive that they are equally competent to become leaders. Majority of the women in the middle class have also perceived to possess good or excellent leadership attributes. The researcher applied the chi square tool to test the significance for the following hypothesis:

***Ho: Perceived leadership attribute of women employees in the organizations are not dependent on age.***

The calculated value at 5 percent level of significance and 6 degrees of freedom give a value of 2.802, which is less than the table value. This shows that the perceived leadership attribute of the women employees are not dependent on the age of women.

***Ho: Perceived leadership attribute of women employees in the organizations are not dependent on their social status.***

The chi square test results indicated that the calculated value of 1.352 is less than the table value at 5 percent level of freedom with 2 degrees of freedom. These results indicated that the perceived leadership attribute are not dependent on the social status of the women employees.

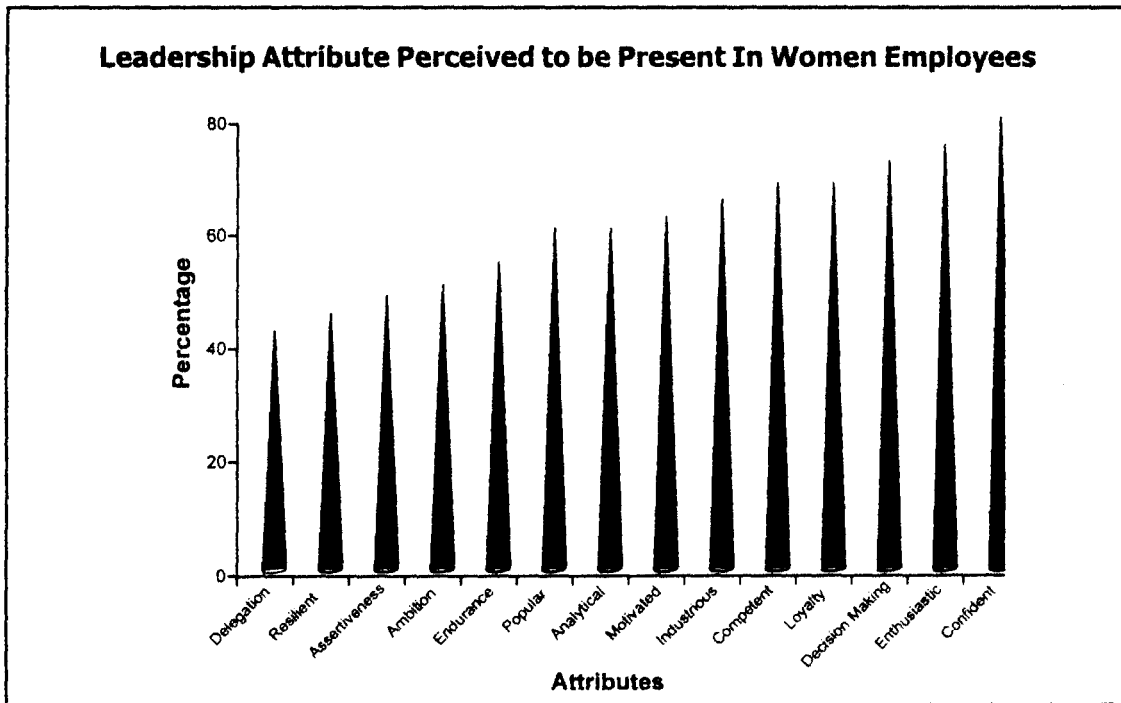
***Ho: Perceived leadership attributes of women employees in the organization are not dependent on their educational qualifications.***

The calculated results derived at 5 percent level of significance for 2 degrees of freedom are 9.485 which is grater than table value. Therefore, the perceived leadership attribute of women employees are dependent on their educational qualifications.

This study reveals that perception among women of the presence of various specified attributes are not dependent on their age or their social status but is definitely dependent on their education.

The Figure 1 shows that the women employees are very confident but are not prepared to delegate. They are also very enthusiastic about their work but take time to bounce back. They are good at decision making but are not very assertive. Loyalty and commitment are also agreed to be present in most of the women employees.

Figure : 1



### Conclusion

Patterns of upbringing prevalent in the country have a significant role to play on developing the leadership attribute of women. Limited access to education and skill development is also another impediment. Very few women pursue education in management and those who pursue opt out to devote much time to their family commitments. Even those who acquire higher positions face discriminations, and have to push hard to prove. They fail to find time for visibility and networking which are essential elements to stay at the top. Policy makers need to identify the challenges and issues faced by women and address it while implementing stimulus packages. Women must be trained from childhood to become confident and eliminate the feeling of insecurity and encouraged to

emulate personalities like Denis Thatcher, Nirangan Alva and Raj Kishan Nooyi Sharing family care also is to be included in policy framework. Initiatives are to be directed towards providing social facilities for child care, elderly and the sick. Offering training to develop their soft skills is to be initiated by the government. Lack of delegation is considered bad management. Women are not confident and comfortable to delegate which is an important attribute in management. The barriers' preventing them from delegation needs to be identified and addressed. They should be encouraged to be frank, open and communicate effectively so as to reinforce trust and nurture mutual esteem. Women must be encouraged to participate in social dialogue to offer suggestion for improving. Campaigns to bring about attitudinal change are a

dire need which may be initiated by the government. Girls from the higher secondary school level must be encouraged to unleash their talents and groomed to become leaders. Achieving 33 percent reservation is only a beginning and the nation must see a vision of not restricting the number of women participation to just 33 percent. The words of a 70 year old household cook are worth noting: "We don't need a day as token for us; we just need respect, and a safe world to live in. Women need to know their rights and duties so that they can make best choices."

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