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Communication Profile of Women Leaders in Finland

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Abstract: The working life is slightly changing towards more equality between genders and role of women at charge is increasing. Plenty of studies have concentrated about men leaders due to available data, but the need to study women leaders have increased. In order to know more about women leaders this study focuses on communication style of the Finnish women leaders. The data was collected altogether from 164 women leaders. Finnish women leaders are using Enabling and Modelling transformational leadership style and having tendency to use Emphatic and Self-Controlled communication style. Results also indicated that highly transformational women leaders communicate differently than less transformational women leaders. Several statistically significant results emerged indicating that those highly transformational leaders are using more Impatient, Self-Controlled, Dominant and Clear communication styles than less transformational women leaders. The results and their applicability in the leadership training are discussed.

Keywords: Leadership, transformational leadership, women in management, communication

1. Introduction

According to Tienari, Soderberg, Holgersson and Vaara (2005) the lack of women leaders in business organizations is justified by reference to general social inequality. It has been argued that gender stereotypes can be particularly damaging for women in leadership roles, since masculine attributes are still considered more essential than feminine ones (Kunda & Spencer, 2003). Also, the research has been focused mostly on men leaders, due the fact that men are more represented in those positions, and this might have strengthened the masculine views of leadership. These may be the reasons for some research results indicating that women are undervalued by male subordinates and colleagues (Northouse, 2007). However, recent leadership literature has stressed importance of feminine qualities, and, for example, in case of the transformational leadership multiple studies indicate that women leaders exceed men leaders (Bass, 1999; Brandt & Edinger, 2015; Carless, 1998; Northouse, 2007). This study focuses on the transformational leadership, because it consists both masculine (challenging) and feminine (enabling and rewarding) behavior.

The communication is the crucial part of leaders' behavior and leaders cannot be effective if they cannot communicate their visions, values and expectations in clear and appealing way. The emotions are transmitted via communication and the emphasizing positive emotions and empathy have impact on the leaders' effect on others. The research shows that leaders who pay attention to their own communication are more effective change agents than those who do not (Gilley, Gilley, & McMillan, 2009). Also, leaders' communication styles have been found to be linked to their subordinates' levels of satisfaction (Infante, Elissa, & Gorden, 1982) and motivation (Kay & Christophel, 1995) and effective internal communication can enhance employee trust and engagement if transparent and conducted in person (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014).

Surprisingly little research has been conducted of the relationship between leadership and communication, and especially few there are concerning only women leaders. Here the interest is to see how Finnish women leaders communicate and interact, and are there differences between highly transformational and less transformational leaders.

2. Women as leaders and communicators

Some of the studies indicate that women are more transformational in their leadership style than men (Bass, 1999; Carless, 1998; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003, Northouse, 2007; Silva & Mendis, 2017) and some studies suggest that there are no differences in leadership attributable to gender (Brown & Reilly, 2008; Kent, Blair, Rudd & Schuele, 2010; Manning, 2002; Oyster, 1992). According to van Engen and Willemsen (2004) men and women do not consistently and reliably differ in their enactment of interpersonal versus task style in leadership roles. The differences in emphasizes were found also by Cavallo and Brienza (2006) who reported that women were rated higher than men by both their peers and direct reports in service orientation. In case of the transformational leadership dimensions women emphasized enabling (Brandt & Laiho, 2013; Brandt & Edinger, 2015) and men challenging behavior (Brandt & Laiho, 2013). Groves (2005) reported that

women leaders were rated more highly than men leaders on the charismatic leadership. Women leaders are rated as better at developing others (Cavallo & Brienza, 2006), as well as inspiring, and motivating others, building relationships, and collaboration and teamwork than their male peers (Zenger & Folkman, 2012).

In case of gender differences at work, it has been found that feminine leadership qualities are more highly valued by subordinates, while masculine qualities are more valued by managers (Cann & Siegfried, 1987). Women are less likely to advocate for themselves, less likely to ask for what they want, and less likely to initiate negotiations (Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007; Kray & Thompson, 2004). Findings have also indicated that women are expected to present themselves in a more modest way (Rudman & Glick, 1999), and they are more effective in male-dominated groups when they demonstrate hedging and self-doubt in their speech (Carli, 1990) as well as when they are self-effacing in their behavior (Rudman, 1998). Women are less likely to self-promote (Bowles & McGinn, 2005), which has been shown to be a critical component of professional success, contributing indirectly to hiring and promotion decisions (Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Women are also more likely to shy away from formal leadership roles and instead opt for informal roles like facilitator or organizer (Fletcher, 2001). Women on Boards of Directors appear to approach decisions through "complex moral reasoning" and by considering multiple viewpoints, accounting for varying interests of different stakeholder groups (Bart & McQueen, 2013: 97).

In case of communication and leadership styles, De Vries, Bakker-Pieper and Oostenveld (2010) reported that leadership is very much grounded in communication style in relation to charismatic and human-oriented leadership. They found charismatic leadership to be characterized by communication styles incorporating assuredness, supportiveness, argumentativeness, and preciseness. Berson and Avolio (2004) found that leaders assessed as transformational were more effective communicators in all three areas meaning that they were careful listeners, open, and careful transmitters. Comparison of male and female leaders in Germany indicated same degree of verbal consideration according their subordinates (Mohr & Wolfram, 2008). According to Kent et al. (2010) men attempt to communicate the meaning and value of important matters within the organization more frequently than women.

Concerning communication and gender differences, the masculine traits are traditionally connected to employed in the initiation of structure, whereas feminine traits are more employed in demonstrating consideration (Spence & Helmreich, 1987). Men have been found to be somewhat more self-assertive, aggressive, and coarse in their manner and language than women. Women, in contrast, have been found to be more expressive of emotion and compassion (Chesler, 2001; Simmons, 2002). Further, women have found to be more expressive, tentative, and polite in conversations, men are more assertive and power hungry (Basow & Rubenfield, 2003). Gender differences have also been identified in influence tactics: men tend to use influence tactics such as personal appeal, consultation, assertiveness, and inspirational appeal, while women use tactics such as consultation, inspirational appeal, and ingratiation more with other female and exchange tactics with males (Carli, 1999; Carothers & Allen, 1999; Dubrin, 1991; Lamude, 1993; White, 1998). According to Adler, Lanley, and Parcker (1993), women and men use language differently, indicating that women use signals of courtesy when they talk to people and they show respect by listening and remembering what has been said. Shakeshaft (1989) shows that women's communication style has been considered as "deficient" and as a result, women leaders did have been told to 'talk like men' in order to succeed. Women's communicative styles are often equated with powerlessness while men's communicative styles are often associated with professionalism and power (Coates, 1996; Thorne, Kramarae, & Henley, 1983).

3. Methods

3.1 Data

There were totally 164 women leaders at the data. The data was gathered during the years 2019 and 2020 in the four different leadership courses of the female adults with electric questionnaires. The answering was voluntary, but most participants wanted to fill in the questionnaire in order to have the feedback. The background information was not gathered in order to ensure the anonymousness of respondents, but most of the respondents were acting as middle managers and came from multiple organizations from the public and private sectors.

3.2 Measures

The transformational leadership was measured with Finnish version of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) which is originally developed by Kouzes and Posner (1988). The Finnish version of the LPI used in this study has been in use since 2005 (see e.g. Hautala, 2005; Brandt & Laiho, 2013; Brandt, 2020). The items in the questionnaire were rated on a Likert scale with options ranging from 'very rarely if at all ' (1) to 'frequently if not constantly' (5). Overall Transformational Profile was constructed by averaging the factor score variables. Cronbach's alphas varied from Modeling 0.516 to Rewarding 0.824, thus they can be regarded adequate.

The dimensions include: *Visioning*, which can be described as presenting the ideal future to others, making sure that people hold common values, and communicating the view about the best way to lead the organization. *Challenging* which includes risk taking, introducing innovations to improve an organization, and seeking challenging tasks. *Enabling* means respecting others, giving them freedom to make their own decisions, creating a trusting atmosphere, and making others feel projects are their own. *Modeling* includes consistency of organizational values and confidence in the philosophy of how to lead, and confirmation of planning and goal setting. *Rewarding* means celebrating accomplishments.

The communication style was measured with 29 items examining different perspectives on communication styles. Items were rated with a 7-point Likert scale from 1 ("I never behave like this") to 7 ("I always behave like this"). Following the principal component analyses with the Varimax rotation, six communication styles were designated based on the earlier studies by Norton 1983 and Richmond and McCroskey (1990). The reliability coefficient alphas (Cronbach) varied from 0.582 Clear communication style to 0.715 Emphatic communication, and those alphas can be regarded adequate.

The six communication styles are Emphatic, Insecure, Self-Controlled, Impatient, Dominant, and Clear style. *Emphatic* style means that person can notice the other person's feelings, if doubt that she has been insulting, she is apologizing and s/he can easily put his/her soul into other's position. *Insecure* style means, that person do not want to say his/her opinions if there is threat that others might not agree and person has tendency to avoid or delay the critical subjects. *Self-Controlling* style means that person do not show his or her feelings and can control them well. *Impatient* style means that person is not listening necessarily very carefully, gets easily bored with listening, and has tendency to interrupt others. *Dominant* style means that person takes big role in the discussions and can raise his/her voice during the discussions, other might be a little bit scared of his/her presence. *Clear* style means that person communicates very clear way, so that there will not be any ambiguities (e.g. Brandt & Uusi-Kakkuri, 2016).

3.3 Data analysis procedures

Respondents were divided to the high-transformational (=effective leadership) and low-transformational (non-effective leadership) groups based on the overall means, so that the median of 50% was dividing point. Leaders above the mean were regarded more efficient transformational leaders and leaders below the mean were regarded non-efficient transformational leaders. Additionally, the transformational leadership dimensions were divided accordingly (Enabling, Visioning, Modelling, Challenging, Rewarding). Statistical differences between the high and low groups' communication style were analyzed with the *t*-test.

4. Results

At the Table 1 can be seen overall means of all the sample. The women tend to be strongest at the Emphatic and Self-Controlled communication style and the lowest at the Insecure and Dominant communication style. In case of the transformational leadership the highest value was at the Enabling and Modelling leadership and lowest at the Rewarding leadership.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of women leaders' communication and leadership style (N=164). The lowest, the highest, means and the standard deviations presented

Communication styles:	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.
Emphatic style	3,20	7,00	**5,4727**	,78650
Insecure style	1,20	4,80	*2,8731*	,80939
Self-Controlled style	2,67	7,00	5,3574	,91126
Impatient style	2,00	6,50	4,1318	,98524
Dominant style	1,50	5,50	3,1936	,83415
Clear style	2,50	7,00	5,0685	,92847

Leadership dimensions:				
Enabling	2,60	5,00	**4,1329**	,47992
Visioning	1,33	4,67	3,1052	,71216
Modeling	2,25	5,00	3,9352	,48923
Rewarding	1,00	5,00	*2,9315*	1,15806
Challenging	1,50	5,00	3,4613	,74222
TF Total	2,57	4,78	3,5161	,40282

At the Tables 2 and 3 can be seen statistically significant results (*t*-test) when highly transformational leaders are compared to those who regard themselves less transformational leaders. When looking the results of each dimension, those leaders who regard themselves high on the Enabling leadership dimension had the communication style as more Emphatic, more Self-Controlled and more Clear and less Insecure than the less Enabling leaders. Those leaders with high on the Visioning regarded themselves more Impatient and more Dominating in their communicating than leaders with the low Visioning skills. Leaders with high on the Modelling behavior regarded themselves the more Self-Controlled and Clear in communication when compared to low-leadership group. Similarly, highly Challenging leaders regarded themselves more Self-Controlled as well as Dominating than those with low Challenging behavior. Finally, those leaders with the high Transformational Leadership Profile regarded their communication style more Impatient than those with low Transformational Leadership Profile. In case of the Rewarding there were no statistically significant differences of communication styles.

Table 2: Comparison of high and low groups of transformational leadership dimensions: Enabling, Visioning, Modelling and Rewarding in relation to communication style. Significance levels: $^+$ p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < 0.01

	Enabl.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	sig.t-tailed	Vision.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	sig.t-tailed
Emphat.	High	113	5,655	**,7542**	**,331**	**,000****	High	80	5,418	,7783	,101	,383
	Low	49	5,069	**,7298**		**,000**	Low	85	5,525	,7952		,383
Insecure	High	115	2,782	**,7976**	**,181**	**,035***	High	81	2,943	,7818	,262	,278
	Low	49	3,073	**,8100**		**,037**	Low	86	2,807	,8337		,277
Self-Control.	High	114	5,478	**,8177**	**5,351**	**,014***	High	81	5,288	,8494	,647	,340
	Low	49	5,095	**1,0715**		**,028**	Low	85	5,424	,9669		,338
Impat.	High	113	4,095	,9923	1,119	,323	**High**	79	**4,573**	**,8293**	**1,308**	**,000****
	Low	49	4,260	,9270		,311	**Low**	86	**3,727**	**,9461**		**,000**
Dom.	High	113	3,217	,8501	,778	,755	**High**	79	**3,446**	**,7862**	**,075**	**,000****
	Low	48	3,172	,7908		,748	**Low**	85	**2,959**	**,8127**		**,000**
Clear	**High**	115	5,157	**,9444**	**,061**	**,090**$^+$	High	82	5,037	,9616	,764	,665
	Low	49	4,888	**,8676**		**,080**	Low	86	5,099	,9004		,666
	Modell.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	sig.t-tailed	Rewar.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	sig.t-tailed
Emphat.	High	87	5,559	,8047	,542	,148	High	95	5,512	,7084	4,847	,461
	Low	76	5,379	,7677		,147	Low	70	5,420	,8841		,476
Insecure	High	87	2,807	,7991	,177	,348	High	96	2,890	,7888	,151	,760
	Low	78	2,926	,8193		,348	Low	71	2,851	,8416		,762
Self-Control.	**High**	87	5,506	**,8905**	**,055**	**,027***	High	96	5,267	,8302	2,726	,136
	Low	77	5,191	**,9168**		**,027**	Low	70	5,481	1,0050		,149
Impat.	High	85	4,059	1,0094	,001	,369	High	96	4,219	,9883	,000	,182
	Low	78	4,199	,9673		,368	Low	69	4,011	,9753		,181
Dom.	High	86	3,148	,8264	,001	,413	High	96	3,151	,8099	,790	,439
	Low	76	3,257	,8524		,414	Low	68	3,254	,8698		,445
Clear	**High**	88	**5,239**	**,8937**	**,083**	**,018***	High	96	5,042	,9366	,203	,667
	Low	78	**4,897**	**,9410**		**,018**	Low	72	5,104	,9229		,667

Table 3. Comparison of high and low groups of transformational leadership dimension Challenging and Overall Transformational profile in relation to communication style. Significance levels: + p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < 0.01

	Chall.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	sig.t-tailed	TF	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	sig.t-tailed
Emphat.	High	109	5,466	,7808	,129	,880	High	81	5,565	,7347	2,663	,170
	Low	56	5,486	,8044		,881	Low	79	5,392	,8500		,171
Insecure	High	111	2,836	,8145	,067	,407	High	82	2,795	,7724	1,675	,308
	Low	56	2,946	,8014		,405	Low	80	2,925	,8446		,309
Self-Control.	**High**	**110**	**5,467**	**,9089**	**,503**	**,030***	High	82	5,411	,8287	2,250	,517
	Low	**56**	**5,143**	**,8850**		**,029**	Low	79	5,317	1,0055		,519
Impat.	High	110	4,189	1,0058	,157	,296	**High**	**81**	**4,340**	**,9757**	**,043**	**,008**
	Low	55	4,018	,9414		,286	**Low**	**79**	**3,934**	**,9403**		**,008****
Dom.	**High**	**109**	**3,282**	**,8560**	**2,218**	**,055+**	High	82	3,271	,8072	,351	,333
	Low	**55**	**3,018**	**,7666**		**,048**	Low	77	3,143	,8626		,334
Clear	High	112	5,067	,9215	,001	,977	High	82	5,134	,9462	1,167	,509
	Low	56	5,071	,9507		,977	Low	80	5,038	,9133		,509

5. Discussion

The Finnish women leaders in this study tend to be strong at the Enabling and Modelling leadership and weaker at the Visioning and Rewarding leadership. The Emphatic and Self-Controlled communication style were the highest and the lowest were the Insecure and Dominant communication style. These results support earlier research where women tend to develop, inspire and motivate others (Cavallo & Brieza, 2006), as well as build relationships and collaboration (Zenger & Folman, 2012).

The high leadership skills were related in all the six communication styles indicating that highly transformational women leaders communicate differently than the less transformational women leaders. When looking the overall Transformational Leadership Profile the effective leaders were using more Impatient communication style than others. That means that those leaders may interrupt others if they found it necessarily and they may have difficulties to concentrate listening while others are speaking. According to Breshnan and Cai (1996:172) interruption indicates dominance, aggression, a face threat, and conversational mis-coordination. However, this may reflect also that those leaders are very busy and have many things going on, and probably they are extroverted personalities who have tendency to have difficulties in listening. The research shows that men tend to interrupt more than women, but also that that women and men use simultaneous talk differently (Breshanan & Cai, 1986; & Coates, 1987). Women are said to produce simultaneous speech (that means two or more people speak at same time) more than men (Mills, 1995: 23). This result is contradictory for example to Berson and Avolio (2004) leadership study (of both genders) when transformational leaders were evaluated to be careful listeners. However, it may be that some leaders may look alike careful listeners even they themselves would not experience themselves as such.

Overall, Finnish women who have highly effective transformational leadership behavior has different communication profile than the un-effective transformational leaders. Those effective leaders seem to be impatient, self-controlled, dominant and clear in their communication. This creates a picture of efficient, insightful, straight spoken and professional leaders who succeed in their positions very well. According this study, when concerning education and training of the women leaders, there could be emphasizing the tools and development methods for controlling emotions and also, surprisingly, impatient and dominant communication style. According to this study, these are important communication qualities for successful Finnish women leaders. Those are related to traditional masculine traits, so it seems that leaders need both qualities (masculine and feminine). Even the individuals would develop their behavior the organizations and societies should develop themselves too. Raising the importance of feminine behavior at the organizations and leadership would be important, in order to get appreciation also for the feminine qualities, which have noted to produce increased results and also to get more variety on leadership.

As a limitation it should be noticed, that the study uses convenience sample and the results are based on the self-appraisals. It may be that subordinates' or supervisors' appraisals would have produced different

outcomes, for example, that subordinates regard highly transformational leaders more emotional and not so self-controlled. Thus, it would be important to study this area more and include different perspectives.

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