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The Impact of Feminine Identity and Soft Influence Tactics on Leadership Style

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Abstract

Using sex identity theory, the paper studies the impact of feminine identity and soft influence tactics on leadership styles, specifically task oriented and participative. Earlier researchers have documented difference in the working and leadership styles of men and women and tactics used for securing compliance from team members. Yet there are few studies which have proceeded beyond an understanding of leadership styles which are based on the “psychosocial” behavior of men and women stemming from their sex identity, defined in terms of “masculinity” and “femininity”. The results from 379 subjects from four different sectors show that there is a significant correlation between feminine identity and soft influence tactics which directly impact the leadership styles of men and women. We posit that these leadership styles are not gender specific but defined by the identity of the leader and the situational requirements.

Key words: sex identity, soft influence tactics, participative leadership, task oriented leadership, rationality, personalized help, ingratiation

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership styles within organizations have been of significant interest to researchers and scholars for over three decades. With the advent of women in organizations, study of leadership styles has extended to encompass feminine and masculine leader behavior (Deal & Stevenson, 1998). Male and female managers have been attributed to possessing different leadership traits which are characteristic of their sex (Heilman, Block & Martell, 1995). Klenke (1996), in a seminal article on differing leadership styles across genders, stated that masculine styles were instrumental, task-oriented, and autocratic while feminine styles were interpersonal, charismatic, and democratic. Managers who displayed masculine traits were objective, authoritative and favored more (Wajcman, 1998) than those who displayed “feminine” traits as collaboration and supportiveness (Schein, 1973, 1975) even though these same traits enhanced productivity and morale (Wood, 2003). However, is “lack of research evidence that makes a case for sex differences in either leadership aptitude or style” (Kanter, 1993: p. 99) and there are few documented “meaningful differences between men and women” (Kunkel & Burlison, 1999: p. 333).

Research postulating variations and no-variations in use of leadership styles by men and women is of growing significance as the number of women employees within organizations and multinational corporations (MNCs) has grown substantially. The interest in diversity in context and differences in social expectations from men and women (White, 1988; DuBrin, 1991; Lamude, 1993; Carothers & Allen, 1999) has been an issue for concern for western scholars for over two decades. In developing countries, it is a relatively new concept which has developed in proportion to the increasing number of women employees. While the growth has been evidenced maximum in the IT sector, other sectors have not been left untouched.

Multiple issues with respect to group composition, group dynamics have surfaced, and their impact has been felt both by the organization and the employees. Substantial resources are being spent by organizations to comprehend the diverse workforce and implement “gender friendly practices” which promise to secure retention, cooperation and compliance. Research findings by scholars are being studied to understand the nature and manner of interaction and operations in mixed and solo gender groups.

With an increase in the ratio of women to men, there is a need to deliberate on the following question: is there a difference in the styles of leadership across genders or has the social acculturation process

diminished the line? All attempts to answer the question focus on an understanding of “masculinity” and “femininity” which is more relevant in the organizational context than an assessment based on biological sex. Attributes associated with the concept of “masculinity” and “femininity” or the sex role identity, are cultural and not defined by the biological make-up. Powell (1982) hypothesized “The sex-role identity is *more related than sex* to the description of a good manager, i.e., the relationship between sex-role identity and good-manager descriptions is stronger than the relationship between sex and good-manager descriptions”(p. 71).

Klein and Wang (2010) documented the difference between masculine and feminine characteristics which are both, clearly evident and well embedded in the individual because of social or cultural nurturance. However, this distinction has been viewed as too simple. The differences have been understood in terms of linkages to inherent psychological traits (Eagly & Chin, 2010). “A basic principle of human judgment, known as *correspondent inference*, is that people’s internal characteristics are inferred from their observable qualities.” (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 1). These “observable qualities” often result from relationships between an individual’s psychology and social categories, leading to self identification and projection. This categorization of the self is reflected in behavior and expected congruency with projected identities (Wood, Christensen, Hebl, & Rothgerber, 1997) by selection of acceptable social roles (Evans & Diekmann, 2009). The formation of social identities, masculine and feminine, and their reflection on group behavior within organizations has a direct impact on the exercise of leadership (Eagly & Chin, 2010).

The paper develops a framework which is focused on the identity of the individual. Much of the research on gender and leadership has been conducted from the point of view of the biological sex. However, it is important to extrapolate the findings to a larger canvas as operational competencies are rarely, if ever, judged by the sex of the individual. Given the fact that there is slender representation of women in the top echelons of industries, understanding the integration of leadership, sex identity and soft influence tactics (SIT) to secure team support is of importance from the HR perspective.

Using data from four sectors, hospitality, IT, FMCG, and nationalized banks, we have explored leadership styles of men and women in the organizational context. Developing on the concept of sex identity (Bem, 1974, 1975), we studied 379 male and female leaders. The present paper analyses the relationship between feminine sex identity, soft influence tactics and leadership styles. The theoretical implications of these results, it is expected, will enhance the functioning of the teams within the organization by removing stereotypical biases and prejudices.

In the first section, we review the literature on leadership styles and gender, which is followed by a section on personal identity and SIT and gender. Hypotheses are generated and tested, followed by discussion elaborating the findings and their significance in the HR context.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

Leadership Styles and Gender

Northouse (2004) defined leadership as a process used by the protagonist to influence team members for achievement of a particular goal. The definition includes two important components: task and relationship. While the former can be understood by direction and control, the latter comprises support and interaction (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Goleman (2000) identified six styles of leadership: coercive, authoritative, affiliative, pacesetter, coaching, and democratic.

There is part consensus among researchers on the differences in working and leadership styles of men and women. Women have been found to focus more on co-workers, while men have shown a preference towards the ability to use skill sets (Centers & Bugenthal, 1966). Eagly and Johnson (1990) in their study of leadership styles of men and women concluded that women leaders are marginally more interpersonal and task-oriented than men. They suggested that there could be differing factors governing leadership styles. One identified determining factor was the sex ratio (Billing & Alvesson, 2000) and the other, variations in the sex composition of members in a team (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). For instance, in a male dominated organizational environment, women tend to adopt styles which are congruent with the context of operations.

For many decades, leadership styles have been associated with men and “masculine” style has become synonymous with leader behavior and requirements thereof (Chliwniak, 1997). Similarly, gender socialization theory also ascribes masculine traits to leadership (Geber, 1987). As a result, identity of women is developed by “the context of connections,” with “responsiveness to others” (Forrest & Mikolaitis, 1986: p. 80). Women develop a leadership style which is typically masculine and fits better in the hierarchical and social structures, often referred to as male-dominated (Acker, 1989). Notably, choice of tactics, is based on expectations and perceptions (Lamude, 1993; Carli, 1999). Hence, women are not as effective when using direct strategies (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992). However the same, when employed by men has revealed positive effects (Burgoon, Dillard & Doran, 1983).

Violations of the norms of gender for women and men are viewed differently. The “... same leadership behaviors, when performed by a woman, maybe viewed less favorably than they are when

performed by a man” (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992: p. 3). Deviations by women are viewed with suspicion and they often have to brave the prejudiced wrath of the community and invite penalty which may not be similarly awarded to their male counterparts.

We would like to emphasize that there have also been studies which have recorded “no differences” in leadership styles across genders (Brief, Rose, & Aldag, 1977; Klenke, 1993; Van Engen & Willemsen, 2000; Vinkenburg, Jansen, & Koopman, 2000). Multiple views, presented by researchers, have excited organizational interest in study of “masculine” and “feminine” leadership styles. The reasons for the same are threefold: first, the critical role of teams and their productivity underscores the vital role to be played by leaders in teams with heterogeneous specializations (Thomas & Bendoly, 2009). Secondly, there is an identified need to understand means by which leaders can affect outcomes (Shin & Zhou, 2007). Finally, with changing trends in organizational structures – move towards flat hierarchical structures and team based working patterns – so called typical male leadership traits have been dispelled in favor of nurturant qualities and traits which are feminine in nature (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Freeman & Varey, 1997; Stanford *et al.*, 1995; Van der Boon, 2003), but not typical to women working in the organization.

While similarities and differences in the leadership styles of men and women have been identified and documented, the question we wish to probe is: should the focus of HR rest primarily on the biological sex and focus on men with “masculine” traits? Arguably, the issue is broader than merely the question of replacing women with men. It can well be understood by studying the three dimensions of “gender labeling”: the sociological, that is, different work orientations; structural, that is organizational; and cultural, that is, how identity is shaped by cultural factors (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Based on these three dimensions, we can state, that employees will demonstrate leadership styles which subscribe to the sociological, structural or cultural dimensions.

In a review of literature on leadership, Bass (1990) surmised that on a continuum of leadership styles, autocratic and democratic clusters would fall on the extremes or be polar opposites. Autocratic cluster would comprise authoritarian, directive, task oriented and coercive styles of leadership and democratic cluster: democratic, participative, and consultative. Men have been found to fall in the autocratic cluster whereas women in the democratic cluster. However, the style of leadership which yields the best results is a mix which can be changed with the situation (Goleman, 2000).

In this paper, we have borrowed from the analysis of Bass (1990), and restricted our analysis to study of reported styles of men and women: task oriented and participative styles as we wish to explore the relationship between the two constructs: leadership style and sex identity.

Task oriented: Leaders following task oriented style are found to structure the functioning of the entire team as well as provide necessary guidance, keeping a track on the performance and capability of the member to fulfill organizational goals (Likert, 1967). Leaders with task orientation maintain a distance, are more governed by the nature of the task rather than sentimentality of approach. Being more process oriented, their focus is on what and how to perform, with a guideline to determine the path to be followed (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) and an attempt to search for new methods to complete the task (Soriano & Martinez, 2007). In such situations, the power and responsibilities of the member are dependent on the leader and in most cases, suppressed. The members rely on the leader to design tactics and provide help in collaboration and coordination (Van Fleet & Yukl, 1986) which makes this style more functional than relational (Bennis & Biederman, 1998). Male leaders have been found to be more task oriented than female leaders (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Participative: In a participative leadership style, all team members are part of the decision making process. The objective is introduction of these members to the subtle nuances of making decisions (Cole *et al.*, 1993). Securing support of the members in the process ensures approval. Hence decisions, which in most cases affect the team members, are discussed and all members are encouraged to contribute to the strategic thinking process. They are motivated to take responsibility, and rewarded for their efforts (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). However research indicates that the delegation is functional and does not transcend to the level of taking responsibilities (Ribeiro, 2003a). Participative leadership style is relational and impacts personal and professional relationships. Formal and informal group meetings are used as a means to narrow distance among the team members by building trust, mutual obligation and responsibility (McGrath, 1984). This form of leadership leads to a sense of “psychological ownership” (Sashkin, 1976), sense of empowerment (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005) and a desire to put in more effort for contribution to the organization (Moorman, 1991). Women leaders have been attributed to be more participative and relational than their male counterparts (Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Sex Identity:

Male and female managers have been attributed to possess different traits (Heilman, Block & Martell, 1995; Schein, 1973, 1975). The identified differences between masculine and feminine have been attributed to biological sex and societal moorings. Carli (2001), Carli & Bukatko (2000) basing their study on the biological sex propose that men use traits which present dominance, aggression, competitiveness, independence, ambition, self confidence, whereas women display affection, are submissive, gentle, emotional. Most of these differentiating features have surfaced as a result of

gender stereotypes which create perceptions of differences across genders (Dubno, 1985; Eagly & Wood, 1991).

Elaborating on the trends in research in sex-related areas, Powell & Butterfield (1981) stressed on the thematic preference of researchers for differentiating between biological sex and sex-related identity. Social science models posit that men and women at the time of birth are neutral to “sex-dimorphic behavioral predispositions” (Udry, 2000: p.445). The nature of role played by males and females brings to the fore differences in personalities and temperaments developed from social practices which recognize people as different in a socially significant manner. Based on this difference, they develop relationships (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999).

With a change in the existing roles across genders and classical understanding of their attributes, it has become pertinent to understand the developing environment from the perspective of sex role identity or “masculine” and “feminine”, rather than from a “male” and female” one (Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, & Lueptow, 2001). Sex role identity can be understood as a trait within an individual which enables prevalence of what is termed as “masculine” or “feminine” (Storms, 1979). Bem (1974, 1975) in her two dimensional model of masculinity and femininity proposed that it was sex identity and not biological sex which determined the attributes an individual possessed. She based her argument on trait analysis and postulated commonality of traits in both men and women and introduced the concept of personal identity of an individual as a factor which enables a difference in understanding gender as opposed to the traits stemming from the biological sex.

Comprehension about the dimensions of masculinity and femininity or gender calls for an exploration of culture and an understanding of the social, cognitive, and emotional orders (Keller, 1985). As early as 1963, Merton referred to “socialization” as the process by which men and women selectively acquire knowledge and skills for performance of social roles. Factors as culture, organization policies and procedures, formal training, etc. impact the socialization process (Normore, 2004a, b; Rutherford, 2001) which is “the manner in which an individual learns that behavior appropriate to his position in a group through interaction with others who hold normative beliefs about what his role should be and who reward or punish him for correct or incorrect actions” (Brim as cited in Trinidad & Normore, 2005: p. 577). At the workplace, the process of socialization includes relationships and perceptions between and among people, which impact behavior (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Geber (1987) found that gender socialization played a significant role in associating masculine traits with leadership. However, the purpose of socialization should be to instill in men and women gender appropriate characteristics to “guarantee acquisition of socially prescribed gender roles” (Boatwright *et.al.*, 2001: p. 663).

Within the organization, the construct “gender” refers to traits and attitudes developed in a situation to appropriately handle issues. For instance, “masculinity” in the organizational context implies aggression, logic, decision and “femininity”: sensitivity, nurturance and expressiveness (Fernandes & Cabral-Cardoso, 2003). Researchers suggest that masculine control within the organization or “rational control” (Kerfoot & Knights, 1996) is not fixed but keeps altering. Kimmel (1994) refers to manhood as someone with and of power. Arguably then, masculinity can be performed by women who are in positions of power and have achieved success (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Kanter (1993) documents that as women move up the ladder of success, they relinquish their feminine traits and adopt a more masculine mode of operation which is in consonance with the role expected from them which is “a set of behaviors, attitudes, and motivations culturally associated with each sex” (Kreuzer, cited in Davidson & Gordon, 1979: p. 2).

Researchers (Archer & Lloyd, 2002; Korabik, McElwain, & Chappell, 2008) have indulged in active and extensive debate on issues of sex and gender, with the former referring to the biological sex and the latter to the “psychosocial implications of being male or female” (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010: p. 153). Borrowing from existing studies, we have studied linkages in responses of men and women at the “psychosocial” level within organizations by keeping the sex differences constant. We examined the impact of “femininity” (constructs associated with gender identity) on leadership styles (constructs associated with task oriented and participative styles).

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between feminine identity and leadership styles (task oriented and participative).

Downward Influence:

Considerable attention has been paid to issues of power and influence (Rahim, 1988). Power is referred to as a potential activity to influence the target (Dahl, 1957). The activity by which power is exercised is influence (Mowday, 1978) which can be exercised by influencing team leaders; peers; customers, suppliers, etc.; and team members (Keys & Bell, 1982).

More than three decades ago, Kipnis *et al.* (1980) documented the following tactics for influence: assertiveness, coalitions, exchange, ingratiation, rationality, and upward appeal which were validated in subsequent studies (Ansari *et al.*, 1984). Researchers (Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Yukl & Tracey, 1992; Yukl, Falbe & Youn, 1993; Yukl, Kim & Falbe, 1996) added the tactics of inspirational appeal, consultation, legitimating, pressure, and personal appeal to the existing typology proposed by Kipnis *et al.* (1980). The effectiveness of leaders within organizations is gauged by their ability to secure compliance (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 1989) through use of appropriate tactic.

Ansari (1990) described influencing members as a leadership process towards achievement of some particular goal(s). "Influence is the essence of leadership. It is necessary to sell your ideas, to gain acceptance of your policies or plans, and to motivate and support and implement your decisions" (Yukl, 1998: p. 207). Leadership styles have been described as the characteristic manner of the leader/agent through which influence is exercised on the subordinates/target. This influence that the leader (agent) exercises over the subordinates (targets) has been referred to as "downward influence". Compared to upward influence tactics, literature on downward influence tactics is used by leaders to engage/influence members is sparse as the focus of researchers has been on validating upward influence tactics (Higgins *et al.*, 2003).

Downward influence tactics have been divided into "soft," "rational," and "hard" influence behavior (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985; Yukl & Falbe, 1990). Hard tactics refer to those that "are perceived by power-holders (agents) as not allowing the target person freedom to decide whether to comply, without incurring severe costs" (Kipnis, 1984: p.130); assertiveness, upward appeal, coalitions, manipulation, threat constitute "hard" tactics, and the "soft" tactics include inspirational appeals, ingratiation, exchange of benefits, rational persuasion, diplomacy, showing expertise and showing dependency, personalized help as they represent less aggressive, more psychologically manipulating means (Ansari, 1990).

This relationship between leadership styles and influence tactics has been researched extensively. Authoritarian leadership has been associated with legitimating process (Vroom & Jago, 1988), the LMX approach to exchange (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997), participative leadership to consultation (Falbe & Yukl, 1992), tyrannical (Bies & Tripp, 1998) and abusive (Tepper, 2000) leadership to pressure, transformational leadership to inspiration (Cable & Judge, 2003). Authoritarian leaders are shown to use the hard influence strategies more than the soft (Rajan & Krishnan, 2001). However, SIT has been reported to be more effective (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985) and more frequently used than hard influence tactics. Men have been attributed to employ hard influence tactics considerably more than women (Knippenberg & Steensma, 2003).

Compliance can be secured by use of SIT which has been defined as ingratiation (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985) and ingratiation and exchange (Farmer *et al.*, 1997). Studying the strength of tactics, Falbe and Yukl (1992) found consultation and inspirational appeals to be the most effective and ingratiation, personal appeals, and exchange to be slightly less effective. Pressure, coalition, and legitimating tactics were found to be the lowest in the order. Ansari (1990), in a study of Indian managers found SIT to comprise ingratiation, rationality, use of sanctions, diplomacy, showing expertise, exchange of benefits, showing dependency and personalized help. He proceeded to discuss the correlation between

style of leadership and SIT and proposed that when leaders are high on autocratic behavior, they use controlling tactics as assertiveness and sanctions. However, non-controlling tactics as ingratiation and personalized help are used when leaders adopt participative behavior.

H2: “Soft” leader influence tactics (rationality, personalized help and ingratiation) will have a significant positive relationship with leadership style (task oriented and participative).

Leadership Styles, Gender and SIT

Social factors as gender bias and gender stereotypes contribute substantially to the underrepresentation of women in organizations (Ayman, 1993; Buttner, 2001; Payne, Fuqua, & Canegami, 1997; Swanson, 2000). As there is a lower representation of women in leadership position within organizations, their visibility is low and chances of progressing to leadership positions is also limited (Bass, 1985). However, in the last one decade, globally, there has been an increase in the percentage of women within organizations. While the presence of women in senior leadership positions is scarce, the overall number has substantially increased over the last two decades.

Though the enlargement of the shrinking pipeline by escalation of women to senior positions is commendable, one frequently heard lament is the nature of relationships with their team members, more specifically, in downward influence attempts, at the organizational level. Global studies on gender, leadership and SIT in the managerial context reveal that women adopt strategies which are not in tune with the accepted attributes of “feminine” traits. Research which discusses gender and SIT in relation to leadership styles is sparse. In this paper, we extrapolate the findings on gender, SIT and leadership style to identify if men and women in leadership positions adhere to gender congruity or traverse to styles which are in sync with job requirements.

There are two reasons which validate the necessity for this study. Lamude (1993) found that women in supervisory roles employ SIT more than their male colleagues. The tactics used appeal to values, emotions, affect and friendliness. Significant difference in choice of tactic for gaining compliance reflects the direct linkage between a relationship oriented style and influence.

The second driver for the study is the concept of gender congeniality which, in the organizational context, refers to the leadership roles defined by the organization and the adaptability of males and females to these defined roles. Eagly, *et al.* (1995) described gender congeniality as “fit between gender roles and particular leadership roles” (p. 129). It was found that in a male dominated environment, as military, men are more task oriented and in a female dominated environment, as nursing, females are more task oriented (Eagly, *et al.*, 1995).

An explanation for gender difference in styles of (1) leadership and (2) downward influence is the (in)ability of women to garner support from team members in an equally high proportion as men. Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) raise an important question on the leadership qualities of men and women as perceived by other members within the organization, which, in some objective sense, are equivalent in behavior and are perceived as more or less favorable. Their view has been echoed by Van Fleet and Saurage (1984) who argued that “there is ... considerable research showing that performance by females is frequently subjectively evaluated less favorably than identical performance by males” (p. 20). Contrasting view has been posited by Powell and Butterfield (1981) who report that, “female leaders are not evaluated or perceived differently from male leaders when engaging in the same behavior” (p. 1172).

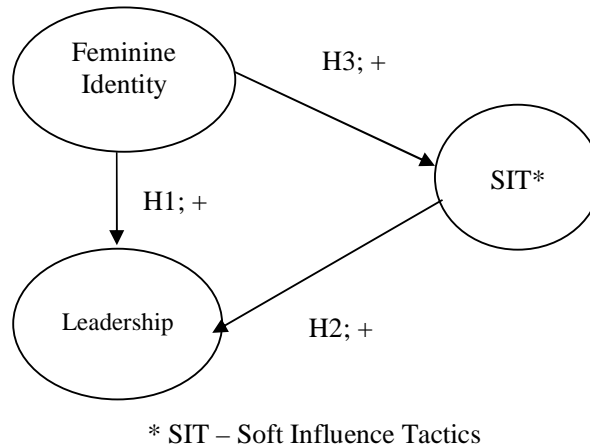
In a meta-analysis of 162 studies, Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that in formal settings women adopted similar styles of influence as men which was in contrast to the concept of “gender stereotyping”. In a subsequent analysis of 58 studies, it was found that men surfaced as leaders in groups which did not have any leader in the initial phase. However, in social settings women emerged as “social leaders” who maintained interpersonal relations with their team members which indicated that men followed a task oriented style and women, an interpersonal style (Eagly & Karau, 1991). Women were also found to be equal to men in situations where the groups had been in existence for longer spells (Eagly & Karau, 1991).

How do men and women leaders secure compliance from team members has excited differences and similarities in views and opinions on leadership styles and SIT. While most researchers spell out differences (Lamude, 1993; Carli, 1999; Carothers & Allen, 1999), some attribute it to circumstances corresponding to expected behaviors across genders (Lamude, 1993; Carli, 1999; Carothers & Allen, 1999). In general, women have been found to be less influential when using direct influence tactics (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992) whereas members have been influenced to a greater extent by male leaders who use direct and aggressive influence tactics (Burgoon, Dillard & Doran, 1983). Standifird, Pons and Moshavi (2008) posit that team members reported use of personal appeal and consultation (soft tactics) by male leaders significantly more than by female leaders. Women team members stated that consultation and inspirational speeches were used by leaders across genders and male members reported use of “hard tactics” by their leaders. Notably, the difference between men and women managers has been accentuated with respect to their styles, perceptions and

expectations. In our paper we study if differences in influencing styles can be attributed to the biological sex or “feminine” identity of the leader.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between feminine identity and SIT (rationality, personalized help and ingratiation)

Figure I (Diagrammatic representation of the hypotheses)



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Scales used

Leadership Styles: The leadership styles measure (Hersey *et. al.*, 1979) consists of 7 single item measures (their predicative validity has been tested in previous studies as Adler, 1983; Cobb, 1980) each of which tests the extent to which the statement can be validated with respect to the team member. Respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point scale (1= almost no extent; 5=to a very great extent) what they thought made them influential with their team members. For the purpose of the study we analyzed items which measured task oriented and participative leadership styles.

Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI): BSRI (Bem, 1974) consists of 60 items which measure masculinity (M), femininity (F) and androgyny (A). Respondents were asked to indicate the characteristics which best described them on a 7 point scale ((1 =never; 7= always). They had to specify how “frequently” the traits were true for them. For the purpose of the study we analyzed items which measured femininity.

Downward Influence: Downward Influence Strategy Measure (Ansari, 1990) consists of 60 single statement items measuring both hard and soft influence strategies. The scale had been devised on the basis of literature on downward influence strategies. 30 items measured soft influence strategies and

30, hard influence. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5 point scale (1 = never; 5 = very often) what kind of behavior they had adopted to influence in the last six months. For the purpose of the study we analyzed items which measured rationality, personalized help and ingratiation - SIT.

Sampling

Working in collaboration with HR managers of companies in four different sectors: hospitality, IT, FMCG and nationalized banks, we surveyed middle management professionals on their leadership styles, sex identity and the use of downward influence tactics. We specified that the questionnaire was to be completed by executives who had a minimum of 10 years of work experience within the organization. However, the HR managers put us in touch with so-called “influential managers” within the organization who helped us in the collation of the data through their personal contacts in different departments.

There were three parts to the survey: Part A dealt with sex identity; Part B: downward influence tactics; and Part C: Leadership styles. The number of items in the survey was not restricted to the constructs we were studying so that we could, at a later stage, build on the data and do a comparative study. While companies in terms of age and size were not comparable across sectors, we tried to ensure that the companies selected within each sector were measurable in terms of their size (mid-sized companies) and age. The survey was conducted electronically for three of the sectors, viz. hospitality, IT and FMCG. However, for the nationalized banks, multiple copies of the questionnaire were made and they were sent through snail mail. We targeted 10 companies for each sector. However, the response rate was 75 % for the IT sector but only 50 % for the other sectors. Each company was requested to complete 20 questionnaires which were to be filled in by 10 men and 10 women. Overall, 800 questionnaires were sent out. We received 379 completed questionnaires out of which 66 had been completed by women across sectors. It has been reported in the report by Society for Human Resource management that the presence of Indian women in managerial positions ranges between 3% to 6% (SHRM Report, 2009: p. 7) which is represented by 17.4% of the respondents or 50 % of the accepted return rate of 35.7% as recommended by Baruch (1999) and hence acceptable. Additionally, as the focus of the study was not on biological sex but sex identity. Hence, building on numbers was not the key issue for our research. The dependent construct in the study was leadership style and independent constructs were soft influence tactics (rational persuasion, personalized help and ingratiation) and feminine identity.

Reliability and Validity Protocols

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was done on the data collected using AMOS 18, statistical software to ensure internal consistency (reliability) and validity of the measures in accordance with

the suggestions by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Churchill (1979). In CFA, indicator variables are selected on the basis of prior theory and data is used to see if the factors load in line with the proposed factor structure. CFA is preferable to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) as it seeks to determine whether the factors and the loadings of indicator variables conform to expectations on the basis of *a priori* specifications of factor structure and also allow for the specification of measurement errors (Venkatraman, 1989).

Data Analysis & Results

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the overall reliability and validity of the model was measured. In the second stage, the relationships among the constructs using the covariance based Structural Equation Model was measured, which is discussed in the following subsections.

Unidimensionality, Convergent Validity and Construct Reliability

Unidimensionality of all the latent constructs in the specified model was evaluated by doing CFA on the data. The following model statistics obtained were evaluated to assess the goodness of fit for the proposed model: chi-square statistics, RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, CFI, and Tucker–Lewis index. The chi-square statistic was 107.98 (degrees of freedom (df) = 59, $p > 0.001$), with the normed chi-square (chi-square/df) ratio having a value of 1.83, less than 2.0, indicating acceptable fit (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) value of 0.958 obtained measures the proportion of variance that is accounted for by the estimated population covariance. The GFI is above the higher cut-off recommended by Miles and Shevlin (1998). The adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI) index, which adjusts the GFI based upon the degrees of freedom was 0.936, indicating acceptable fit of the model. The comparative fit index (CFI), which is least affected by the sample size, was 0.951, indicating good fit (Bentler, 1990). The Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.935, well above 0.90 as recommended by Bentler and Bonnet (1980). In case of RMSEA, a cut off value close to 0.06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) or an upper limit of 0.07 (Steiger, 2007) seems to be the most acceptable standard among researchers. RMSEA value of 0.047 obtained falls well below the cut off value, indicating good fit of the model.

Construct and discriminant validity was further established by comparing the proposed three-factor measurement model with single-factor model in terms of various fit indices. The alternative model was a single latent factor with all the indicators loading on it. It was clear from the results (Table I) that the proposed measurement model was superior to the one factor model. The fit of the single-factor model was clearly less adequate than the proposed measurement model, and the change in chi-square between the two models was also significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 602.45$, $\Delta df = 60$).

Table I

Fit Indices	χ^2	df	RMSEA	NFI	GFI	IFI	CFI
Proposed Measurement Model (Three-Factor)	107.98	59	0.047	0.899	0.958	0.951	0.951
Single-Factor Measurement Model	710.43	119	0.115	0.562	0.777	0.606	0.602

Reliability and convergent validity of all the constructs are primarily supported by the fit indices which are well within the recommended range in each case. Further, the fact that individual factor loadings of all the items were significant gives secondary support to convergent validity. Thus, all of the proposed dimensions of feminine identity, leadership style and SIT are unidimensional, having strong convergent validity with indicators of each latent construct converging or sharing a high proportion of variance in common.

The average variance extracted (AVE) and construct reliability of all the three constructs were calculated manually as in table II. AVE was more than 0.50 in all the cases, indicating significant level of variance accounted for. Similarly, construct reliability was well above the minimum accepted level of 0.50. To assess the convergent validity, the acid test is that, the AVE should be larger than the square of inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Lacker, 1981), which again is true for the proposed model, indicating high level of convergent validity. This establishes the internal consistency of the dimensions being studied and is reliable for further study.

Table II

Construct	Feminine ID	Leadership Style	Soft Influence Tactics
AVE	0.5292	0.5066	0.5215
Construct Reliability	0.77	0.67	0.76
Squared inter-construct correlations	0.169; 0.099	0.169; 0.268	0.099; 0.268

The Path Model

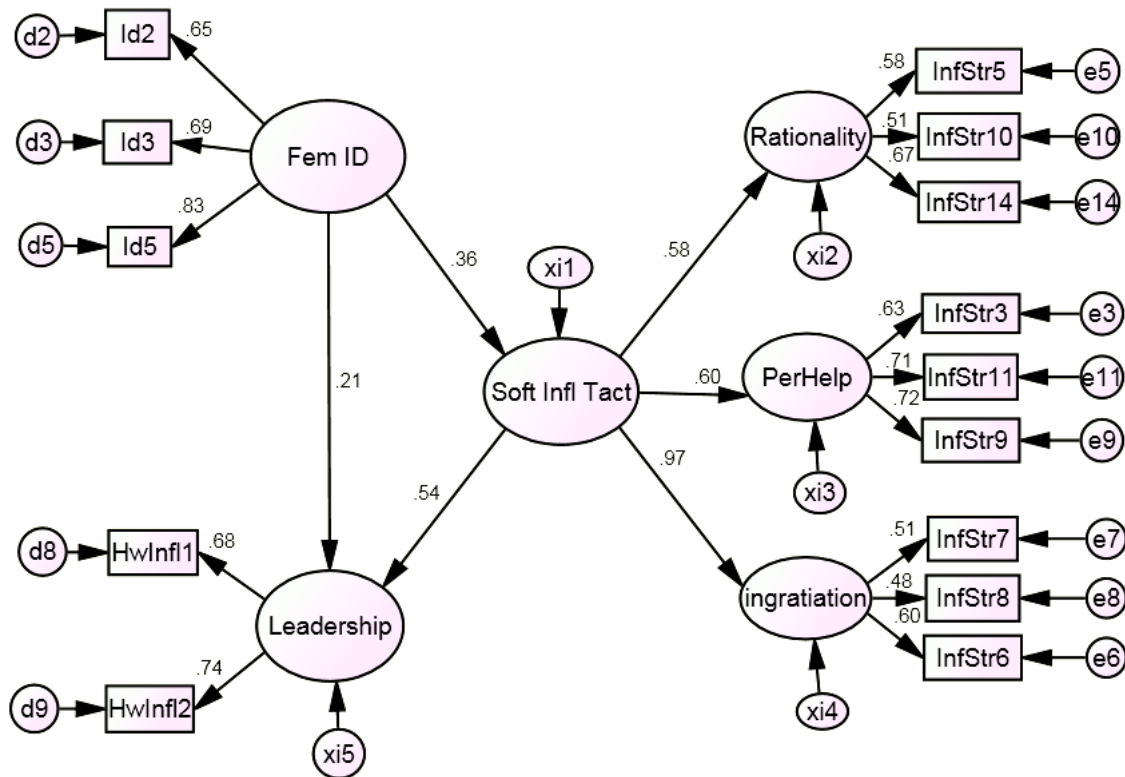
Structural Equations Modeling (SEM) using AMOS 18.0 was done on the data set to test the causal relationships specified in the model as shown in Figure 1. The problem of missing data across the sample of 379 respondents was small at a calculated value of less than 10 percent and the mean value of the variable was used to substitute the missing values. The causal relationships among constructs

were explored and tested. Model fit determines the degree to which the structural equation model fits the sample data. Indicators were deleted on the basis of modification indices to increase the fit indices and the final model is presented in Figure II and various fit indices are discussed below.

The chi-square statistic was 151.13 (degrees of freedom (df) = 71, $p > 0.001$), with the normed chi-square (chi-square/df) ratio having a value of 2.13 indicating acceptable fit (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The GFI was 0.948, which is above the higher cut-off recommended by Miles and Shevlin (1998). Similarly, AGFI was 0.922, indicating acceptable fit of the model. The value for CFI was 0.926, indicating good fit (Bentler, 1990). The Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.905, above the cut-off value of 0.90 as recommended by Bentler and Bonnet (1980). A value of 0.055 for RMSEA also indicates good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Steiger, 2007)

Thus, all these fit indices are well within the generally accepted limits, indicating a good fit of the proposed model to the data set. The standardized regression weights for all variables constituting each dimension were also found to be significant at 0.01 levels.

Figure II (Structural model with loadings)



DISCUSSION

The study has examined the relationship between feminine identity and SIT (rationality, personalized help and ingratiation); feminine identity and leadership styles (participative and task oriented); SIT and leadership styles in the Indian context. There has been considerable research on understanding the styles of functioning of men and women within organizations (Deal & Stevenson, 1998, Kunkel & Burleson, 1999), downward influence (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985; Yukl & Falbe, 1990), and upward influence (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Gabarro, 1979; Higgins *et al.*, 2003). In this paper, we have restricted our approach to the study of downward influence as it is of greater significance within an organization than upward influence (Franklin, 1975).

With more women entering into managerial positions and gradually moving to leadership positions, it is important to understand how women manage teams in an environment which is associated with men and governed by “masculine” traits. In this assessment, notably, the influence of social habits plays a role in facilitating understanding of what constitutes the “right” and the “deviant” behavior. “Right” behavior in the present context would typify “gender congruity”. While there are multiple studies which argue in favour of gender congruity (Carli, 2001; Carli & Bukatko, 2000) and its relevance in the organizational context, there are almost an equal number of studies which focus on sex identity as a determining factor for organizational behavior (Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo & Lueptow, 2001). Our study accepts the need to study leadership patterns adopted by men and women and builds on the research which argues in favor of similarities between men and women in leadership positions and influence based on “femininity”. In the present study, we have excluded analysis of “masculinity” as it is a well established point that most organizations operate with a masculine culture, to which women also subscribe. To the best of our knowledge, there is no literature which discusses the relationship between sex identity and influence, more so in the Indian context. Hence, we build our study on the research findings on gender and influence and extrapolate the same to understand the role of “femininity” in execution of organizational tasks.

Results suggest that feminine identity rather than gender interacts with other variables to affect leadership styles. In the influence context of this study, tactics associated with soft influence were selected, irrespective of whether they were used by male or female participants. In consonance with gender congruity, rationality, personalized help and ingratiation were likely to be used by women (Lamude, 1993). However, as our study focuses on “identity” rather than biological sex, we extrapolated the findings of researchers on gender and influence to identify if there was a correlation between gender and gender roles. Our findings indicate that irrespective of gender, men and women high on “feminine” traits used SIT. As the data was collected from five different sectors, we can safely assume that the trend in most organizations, in India, is to adopt a softer approach with team

members. Indian managers, report studies, adopt a soft, subtle and informal style of influencing their team members (Singh & Singh, 1994). This is in sharp contrast to the western models of influence where harder tactics are used to secure compliance from the team members. Additionally, leadership approaches are also governed by the attitude of the team members and their willingness to cooperate (Yukl, 1998). Within the Indian context where the relationship between leader and member is relational, adoption of soft tactics is justified and most suited.

Consistent with the past findings on gender and style of leadership, we focused on participative and task oriented leadership styles for the following reasons. First, women have been found to use a more participative style of leadership while men, a more task oriented style (Eagly & Karau, 1991; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Second, based on the relational aspect of leadership and urgency of the task, both these styles are essential for leaders. One falls under the interpersonal category and the other, under authoritarian. Third, most of the organizations, in the Indian context, are moving from authoritarian to democratic and participative style of leadership (Singh & Singh, 1994). However, given the nature and urgency of business transactions, task oriented leadership is required. Arguably then, we needed to study the correlation between feminine identity, participative and task oriented leadership to narrow the gap between so-called masculine and feminine styles of leadership. Do leaders, irrespective of sex, possess these styles or remain confined to the documented male and female styles of securing compliance?

Women within an organization may choose to behave in a feminine style which is congruent with perceptions and expectations or may decide to adopt a “masculine” style which is incongruent with their expected evaluation. Notably, these evaluations are based on the stereotypes of employees concerning leadership styles across genders. Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that within the organizational context women are more interpersonally oriented and collaborative, while men are more task oriented and dominating. Hence, women leaders are perceived favorably when in the democratic and participative style and negatively when they are task oriented. Logically then, the reverse would hold true for men. The results of the study indicate that men and women, high on feminine identity, will adopt both, participative and task oriented leadership styles. While participative style of leadership is democratic, task oriented is committed to achieving the target (Singh & Singh, 1994).

Earlier researchers like Meade (1967) Murphy (1953) suggested that authoritarian style of leadership was the most appropriate in India. However, the theory lost ground in favor of a people oriented leadership style (democratic, participative) which was universally acceptable (Pandey, 1976; Singh & Pestonjee, 1974). Participative managers were found to use a mix of rational (as, personalized help)

influence tactics to get their way. However, not all researchers are in consonance. Sharma (1973) discusses “initiating structure” among headmasters. Saiyadain (1974) documents the need of individuals, high on social competence, to gain satisfaction from autocratic leaders. Task oriented managers were found to use expertise and reasons. However, our study found that not only women but also men with feminine identity use the same style. The same again holds true for task oriented leadership style which has been associated with men (Eagly & Karau, 1991; Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

The results of the study reveal that sex identity, more specifically feminine identity rather than the gender determines the choice of tactics used for securing compliance and leadership style within an organization. Implications of this study are relevant in the organizational context. From the HR perspective while it is good to talk about gender equality and enhancing number of women within the organization, it is more important to match the sex identity of the employee, be it man or woman, with the job requirements and secure compliance to the task and role being performed. The results are in confirmation with the theory proposed by Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo and Lueptow (2001).

Concerning leadership, this study provides a new dimension by extrapolating findings on gender and leadership (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 1991), gender and downward influence (Lamude, 1993; Carli, 1999; Carothers & Allen, 1999) to an understanding of the role of sex identity within the Indian organizational climate. Within this scenario, the study is the first of its kind. The advantages proposed by the study can be extended to other organizational climates across the globe for an understanding of what can make leaders “click” with their team members, or enhance leadership in a typical organization.

Practical Implications

The results of the study indicate that there should be a shift in focus from gender to sex identity of the employees within the organization. The HR practitioners should ascertain the culture of the organization, the requirements for leaders both in team setting and achievement of organizational goals and attempt recruitment to satisfy the criteria. Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) posit that leadership traits demonstrated by men and women and the acceptance of the same as favorable/unfavorable is contingent on the perceptions of other members within the organization. Hence, when men and women are engaged in similar behavior, there are minimal differences in perceptual evaluations (Powell & Butterfield, 1982). Though there are many findings which corroborate the “no difference” results, leaders have been found to adhere to “gender role

expectations” in which their behavior is “congruent” with the perceptual expectations of the team. Providing employees with a clear road map on what are the requirements within the organization maybe a first step to bring about a change in the gender role expectations. In the HR function developing and nurturing leaders, without consideration of biological sex, is important (Powell, 1982). Leaders are expected to work in teams, develop team members and identify targets which are congruent with organizational expectations. The goals, maybe short term or long term, and may require a specific leadership style. In the Indian context, the nurturing style of leadership greatly impacts organizational commitment (Ansari, 1986) and HR effectiveness. However the style of leadership is also dependent on the culture of the organization. The best style of influencing with long lasting effects, posit researchers, is one which is moderated by the culture of the organization (Tripathi & Tripathi, 2009). Thus organizations should attempt a culture review. If the culture requires a participative or task oriented style, the lateral hiring should focus on both men and women with a feminine identity. Assessment of the psychological structure of both men and women and organizational culture will help increase the representation of women within organizations and in leadership positions.

Our results suggest that men and women with a feminine identity are neither soft nor all- acquiescing. They demonstrate leadership traits which fall on the two extreme corners of the continuum – task oriented and participative. Hence, not only employees in leadership positions but overall employee consortium within the organization has to undergo a process of “unlearning” and then “relearning” and “redoing” perceptions and expectations.

Showcasing achievements of men and women in similar tasks can be a good beginning point at restructuring perceptions. Communication of messages through a centralized system, with multiple repetitions can change the way expectations are developed. Adopting processes and procedures which advocate job requirements rather than gender equality will improve the overall work culture within the organization. Focusing on feminine identity can also develop a participative environment within the organization with full awareness that in times of stress or tension, it can change to a task oriented style.

Assigning a label to the target as work competencies, rationality, concern for others and hostility towards team members will help change the perceptions of employees with focus on the success quotient of leaders (Dennis & Kunkel, 2004a). Adoption of these policies will give the organization the competitive advantage as companies and employees will transcend beyond limited understanding of leaders as “men” and “women” to competent leaders capable of leading a team and achieving targets. Notably, appreciation of a diverse culture requires gender sensitization training workshops (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). While sensitizing employees to operational efficacies of men and

women, it should attempt to demonstrate in multiple leadership situations the minimal differences between the two sets of subjects (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Attempting to bring about a change in the mindset of the people will be difficult and has to be woven in the decision making process which lays emphasis on merit and performance (Heilman, 2001). Removing perceptual bias through logical reasoning and performance measures will automatically create a gender equitable climate.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present study was based on analysis of responses of employees at the professional level. Hence it may be difficult to generalize the findings and apply them to all situations. Additionally, the data was collated using informal networking, targeted sampling (Watters & Biernacki, 1989). While it helped us to secure the required data, there are some disadvantages associated with this technique, which is akin to snowball sampling. There could be a selection bias when informal networking is used for securing data. Though the study did not focus on gender but on the personal identity of an individual, be it man or woman, our attempt at securing equal number of male and female respondents at each level was not very successful. Future researchers can use random sampling to ascertain and validate the findings for all situations.

One of the reasons attributed to inability of women to lead in senior positions is the demonstration of leadership style, which is participative (Eagly & Karau, 1991). However our study found that not only women but men too, with feminine identity, use a similar style. The same again holds true for task oriented leadership which has been associated with men (Eagly & Karau, 1991, Eagly & Johnson 1990). Cleveland, Vescio, & Barnes-Farrell (2005) argue that women are given jobs which require less technical skills. Notably then, the move of women to higher echelons in the company, where strategic decisions are taken, is staggered or not considered. However, by examination of the psychological makeup of the individual, rather than the biological sex, HR can bring about a greater cohesion and alignment between job profile and employee, be it man or woman.

Exploratory research could study the masculine identity of leaders and identify if similar traits are present in men and women in senior leadership positions. The finding will be of relevance to HR in job allocation, retention and lateral recruitment. Women can then be escalated to positions which require a mindset typical of the job and not gender. We would like to encourage researchers to work in this direction, given the impact on HR policies, pragmatic relevance and scarcity of work in this area.

Only one form of sex identity, feminine, has been tested. This condition was selected so that we would be able to test extensively the relationship between leadership constructs and SIT. Similarly,

other studies on masculine identity might yield different results. Based on literature on all three variables, viz. feminine identity, leadership styles and SIT, we selected constructs which would have a direct bearing on the gender of the employee. This provided us with an opportunity to have sufficient number of situations and thus make it statistically robust to generalize the findings. Future research is needed to understand if the same findings hold for other conditions, viz, masculine identity; other styles of leadership and hard influence tactics.

In this study, we have hypothesized and argued that there is a significant and positive correlation between feminine identity and leadership style; feminine identity and SIT; and SIT and leadership style. The results reveal that HR practices should include a comprehensive and well designed psychological test for employees so that issues of gender diversity and inclusivity are automatically addressed without energy and resources being devoted to concepts as “empowerment” and “equality”.

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