

Women as Leaders

The More Things Change, the More It's the Same Thing

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Abstract

An ongoing challenge that women face in the business world is their place as leaders. Despite the progress that has been made in this regard, there still remains a substantial gender gap when it comes to obtaining high level executive roles. The purpose of this literature review is to examine the relationship between leadership and gender in the western world, and take that analysis a step further than simply looking at the leadership differences between men and women. This review aims to answer the following questions: First, do women leaders promote positive changes and outcomes in working environments? And if so, more so than men? Second, what are the barriers preventing women from being on the same level as their male counterparts when it comes to filling leadership positions? And third, what effect does culture and context have on gender and leadership? Our findings show that women are not as present in the executive suite as men, due to a number of barriers such as gender stereotypes, skewed evaluations and motherhood. In general, much of the literature has demonstrated that women's leadership characteristics are shown to be effective and it seems that the existence of both male and female traditional leadership qualities in a working environment is what allows both genders to thrive. Culture and context continue to play a key role in establishing and influencing perceptions regarding gender and leadership. The results of this research have made clear is that gender biases still exist in our society and play an enormous role in how leaders are brought into power.

Keywords: Change, women leaders, transformational leadership, gender gap.

Introduction

An epigram by Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr in the January 1849 issue of his journal *Les Guêpes* ("The Wasps") literally states "The more things change, the more it's the same thing." The pessimistic French expression *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* is very often cut down to just the first clause: *plus, ça change...* / "the more things change." *Plus ça change* indicates in both French and English a certain disillusionment or resignation regarding whatever is being talked about. For example, an organization makes all kinds of policy changes but the human resource issues are unfortunately unaffected. The phrase originally meant that "the huge changes that you often see happening in politics do not represent real change, and are covering up the fact that the status quo in society tends to remain unchanged" (Karr, 1849). It also suggests that change is a constant, natural part of life. It is a natural quality of

“things”. Therefore, the constant change of things is part of them “staying the same”. Once you realize this, you actually stop seeing each small change as something exceptional (and maybe threatening). This article deals with the current status and effectiveness of females in leadership positions. There are small changes but not enough.

Among senior leaders in North America, there still exists a gap between the genders today, despite some progress. According to the 2018 Fortune list, only 24 women (4.8%) were Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies. Although women have gained some representation over the years among Executive Committees of Fortune Global 100 companies, in 2017, women made up only 22% of these Executive Committee roles in the Americas (Catalyst, 2018).

What makes a great leader? The definition of leadership has seemingly evolved from the ability to impose the will of the leader onto others to induce obedience, respect, loyalty and cooperation (Moore, 1927; Eklund, Barry and Grunberg, 2017)--to the enhancement of behaviours, cognitions and motivations to achieve the goals of a collective group or team where all can benefit (Callahan & Grunberg, 2016; Eklund, Barry, & Grunberg 2017). Callahan and Grunberg (2016) identified a conceptual “FourCe-PITO” framework in order to capture key elements of today’s description of leadership. The Four C’s (“FourCe”), Character, Competence, Context, and Communication, occur across four different psychological levels--Personal, Interpersonal, Team, and Organizational (PITO).

Character: The researchers suggest that traditional managerial effectiveness is seen to be a masculine trait, and the more that a woman exudes those masculine traits, the more she is seen as inappropriate for a leader role, because she should not be “too manly”. In leadership roles that go beyond managerial positions, gender stereotypes may be even more present since an agentic/assertive leadership style may be more valued, and more traditionally associated with men, than the communal (expressive, friendly, participative) leadership style, which is usually associated to females. Exhibit 1 lists some examples of the two different styles of leadership.

Exhibit 1: Agentic and Communal Leadership Styles

Agentic	Communal
Aggressive	Supportive
Determined	Interpersonal
Competitive	Empathetic
Driven	Friendly
Ambitious	Sensitive
Tough	Compassionate
Independent	Kind
Task focused	Helpful
Political	Gentle
Controlled	Affectionate
Self reliant	Sympathetic

Source: Adapted from Eagly and Carli (2007)

Competencies: Competencies such as management skills, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, emotional intelligence, relational skills, and the ability to influence are essential to leadership (Callahan & Grunberg, 2016). Emotional intelligence is one of the lesser used traditional skills and is defined as the ability to understand one's own emotions and the emotions of others, use those emotions in order to properly express feelings and perceive those of others, and understand and reason with those emotions (Mayer & Caruso, 2000). The Hay-McBer research group (Goleman, 2000) found that with greater emotional intelligence came greater leaders, and Callahan and Grunberg believe this skill can be learned and developed (2016). The literature tends to agree with this statement, with some studies claiming that women had slightly higher levels of emotional intelligence and others arguing that no gender differences existed when assessing levels of emotional intelligence (Eklund, Barry, & Grunberg, 2017).

Context: The leadership context is described as the characteristics of the group being led, the nature of the group's tasks and the organizational climate/culture where the leadership happens (Ayman & Adams, 2012). The context also represents the type of industries in which people work and how that influences which of the two genders are idealized as leaders.

Communication: Communication is very different across individuals. Females tend to communicate in a more emotional, elaborate and indirect way, and males' communication is often described as direct, concise and instrumental (Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001; Popp, 2003). The way in which females communicate may actually reinforce the perception that they are less effective leaders. Along the same lines as the effects of gender character on leadership, when women communicate in a typical manner, they are seen as less competent than men in a leadership position. However, when women take on a more "masculine" style, they can be perceived as pushy or arrogant. In the same way, men who use a more "feminine" style of communicating may be seen as weak or lacking confidence (Eklund, Barry, & Grunberg, 2017). This paradox led to the writing of this article.

Men and the symbol of masculinity have historically shaped leadership. Therefore, the masculine traits associated to an efficient leader became the standards that women were held to and evaluated upon. Consequently, women became classified as "intruders" in this male-dominated territory, denying them from experiencing opportunity and leadership success. Some women who decide to act in typical masculine ways and challenge the established gendered social order may have a difficult time doing so, because they must pull off this "transformation" while maintaining the authenticity of a leader (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The phenomenon that women do not occupy a significant space in the executive space of organizations is accurately described as the "glass ceiling" or "the leaking pipeline". Although women perform well in middle management positions, they fail to obtain high-level executive roles at the level of men (Painter-Morland & Werhane, 2011).

In the twenty-first century, we can no longer define men and women's characteristics and personalities solely based on their biological sex. Rather, we focus upon their gender which is a multifaceted, complex and meaningful phenomenon, that depends on gender schemas and stereotypes, gender-role identity and gender-role traits, attitudes, and values. What seems to be of utmost importance is how gender may contribute to self-perception and perception by others, and that this understanding may be what allows leadership effectiveness to be optimized (Eklund, Barry, & Grunberg 2017). This is one of the challenges of this article.

Some Advancements in Working Environments

Transformational and Transactional Leadership

In 1990, Judith Rosener reported that women used a transformational style of leadership to motivate people and work toward a common goal that would benefit the group. Men were described as using a transactional leadership style which was position-based, and focused on subordinates' performance which was either rewarded or sanctioned.

However, in Susan Eisner's 2013 study, the leadership styles of executive men and women were founded upon the following factors: personal-based power versus position-based power; emphasis on people and relationships versus tasks and results; traits that focus on energizing, encouraging, and enhancing others' self-worth versus traits that focus on sharing power and influence; and finally, a transformational versus transactional approach to leadership. Eighty executives were interviewed, 40 men and 40 women, to determine their leadership attributes.

Results of this study showed that both men and women appear more likely to have power that is personal-based rather than position-based, and that men are more likely than women to have each type of power base, that is, people/relationship emphasis and task/result emphasis. At least 85% of both men and women studied showed that they emphasize both people/relationship and task/result, and men more so than women in each of these aspects, which is not predicted by foundational literature. The majority of the men and women in the study showed that they use enthusiasm and energize others when they lead, and more than 75% of both sexes encourage participation. Only 50% of men and 38% of women share power and influence, and it was shown that women enhance others' self-worth more than men, 78% versus 65%. However, at least 50% of the men studied possessed all four traits, which is not what was predicted by previous research in the literature. Both the men and women in the study were more likely to demonstrate a transformational rather than a transactional approach to leadership, however 12% more women showed a transformational approach and 8% more men showed a transactional approach. Risk-taking and comfort with problems and challenges surfaced more in the men's interviews than with the women. This study revealed much more alignment between the traits of male and female executives interviewed than the literature might predict. The results show an absence of the gender-linked tendencies outlined by the literature as well as the typical mis-perceptions that women were lesser than their male counterparts.

Most research has regarded the transformational leadership as more effective than the transactional leadership (Jogulu & Wood, 2008). The key message here is that although women are usually more likely to demonstrate this kind of leadership, it is men who are rewarded the most for using it (Schyns, Elverfeldt, & Felfe, 2008). Men are praised for demonstrating transformational leadership qualities whereas the opposite seems to be true for women (Appelbaum et al., 2013a).

Moreover, the "double bind dilemma" described by Catalyst (2007) further supported the notion that women who exhibit masculine leadership characteristics tend to be rejected as unfeminine, and furthermore unsuited for leadership when they demonstrate feminine leadership characteristics. The findings in Eisner's study suggest that men's and women's leadership may have come full circle, and that today's men and women executives may be adapting to a new leadership style, taking characteristics traditionally associated to the other gender and keeping

some of the traits of their authentic selves (2013). This was puzzling organizationally but supported in several studies.

Effectiveness of Women Leaders

According to Gallup's 2015 State of the American Manager Report, there was a higher engagement reported for employees (regardless of whether they were male or female) who had female leaders. It was found that female leaders scored higher than males in 11 out of 12 engagement categories (Sindell & Shamberger, 2016).

Women bring value to the leadership equation, which sheds light on the existing views on how to earn and use power, as well as how to have an enriching professional and personal life. The unique values that women bring to the table are threefold. First, they are not motivated solely by money and status. Second, they manage their career progress based on achieving their own personal competency; they believe they earn rewards based on their accomplishments. Third, relationships are a key part of their success in leadership. Women prefer to work in a collaborative environment and empower others in order to achieve financial success. Fourth, they tend to create a balanced harmony of work and family (Koland, 2015).

In a Pew Research Center (2008) survey of 2,250 adults, Americans indicated that women make better leaders when evaluated in terms of honesty, intelligence, work ethic, ambition, compassion, communication and creativity. The survey results showed that 69% of participants thought women and men made equally good leaders, and 21% said that men made better leaders. The CEO of Coca-Cola Company stated that women represent the fastest growing economic force in the world controlling over \$20 trillion in spending power worldwide Kent (2011). Other research has shown that corporations with more women in their executive suites performed better financially by 50% or more on measures of profitability (Catalyst, 2006; Fairchild, 2014; Rosin, 2010). Lang, president of Catalyst, as cited in 2005, said, "Increased globalization and shifting demographics dictate that diversity and the advancement of women on corporate boards [and in executive suites] are strategic imperatives that 21st Century companies cannot afford to ignore".

Conversely, in Kenneth et.al. (2015) research, which was designed to analyze the perceptions of leader's effectiveness and leadership preference based on gender through video samples of dramatized leaders, showed results consistent with male leaders to be not only preferred but more effective than female leaders. The results showed that although subjects found participatory leaders to be more effective and also preferred such a style over authoritarian leaders, male leaders were rated to be more effective and more preferred over female leaders (Kenneth et al. 2015).

Complexity Leadership and Gender

Organizations are complex systems and therefore demand that the leaders within them be participative in nature, capable of allowing for dissent and disagreement, building trust and celebrating differences. Complexity Leadership Theory describes a relational form of leadership. It identifies three forms of leadership: administrative (managerial form of leadership associated to administrative function of the organization), adaptive (informal, intentional interactions in leadership) and enabling (an in-between of the other two styles of leadership to allow for adaptability within an organization; Painter-Morland & Werhane, 2011).

The administrative approach to leadership is fairly "masculine" in nature. The traits associated to this type of leadership can be described as tough-minded, objective, impersonal,

efficient, hierarchical, strategic and task-oriented. Contrarily, the adaptive approach to leadership is egalitarian and focuses on cooperative relationships instead of hierarchical ones. It is a more “feminine” leadership style. It is characterized as innovative, and as the word itself states, it is adaptable in nature. The adaptive style has some masculine traits associated to it as well. Adaptive leaders can be assertive, which tends to be a masculine trait, however not in a hierarchical sense, but rather in an emergent way. It operates in a relational way (personal power) rather than an authoritarian way (position power) and is motivated by fulfilling responsibilities in relationships versus being in power or on top (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009).

Therefore, Complexity Leadership Theory can be seen as “feminine-friendly” and foster interconnectivity rather than hierarchy within an organization. It also shows that there is room for masculinity and femininity in the workplace. The traditional administrative leadership with its focus on business results represents the bureaucratic style with which society has become familiar. The relational side of adaptive leadership represents the feminine side. The reality is that many decisions that need to be taken within an organization require both administrative and adaptive approaches (Painter-Morland & Werhane, 2011).

Barriers Created by the Gender Gap

Specific gender stereotypes become ingrained in our societies and ultimately organizations because of children who, particularly during adolescence, conform to the cultural definition of male and female traits simply due to the fact that it is easier to assimilate society’s stereotypical norms, according to a theory and research of over 35 years ago by Sandra Bem (1981). While parents can teach a more equal approach to gender and male and female roles in society, children will often be exposed to sex-typing once they are out and about at school, daycare, or other social settings. Bem’s Gender Schema Theory describes a subschema of heterosexuality, whereby men and women are seen to have strong gender differences from one other.

Both women and men remain categorized by their sex-role; women are seen to have communal behaviours and men, agentic behaviours. The agentic leadership style, when attributed to men is seen as normal and acceptable but when women use the same style, exhibiting characteristics such as assertiveness, toughness and competitiveness, they no longer fit in with the stereotypical definition created for them and this may become uncomfortable for some. These women are marked as different due to their social role incongruity and are seen as deviant as they “do gender differently” (Mavin & Grandy, 2011). Furthermore, they often pay for this personally in terms of career paths.

Mavin’s research has found that although some women find it more difficult to behave in a “masculine” way, other women may find it more comfortable (2009). However, this can potentially marginalize women further, as they can be seen as “outgroup” members as they do not legitimately occupy masculine space (Powell, Butterfield, & Bartol, 2008). The women that do successfully lead in an agentic way are questioned on their competence and performance as their behaviour does not line up with their sex-role (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and are always compared to their male counterparts. Women then need to ensure that they are masculine enough to be appropriately strong in a political context, and not too feminine to sustain that strength without losing the woman identity (Bligh & Kohles, 2008). This is a tightrope to walk on unfortunately.

An investigation conducted by Duehr and Bono (2008) found that stereotypes have changed as compared to decades ago, at least from the male perspective. It was shown that males

and females are starting to refer to women as less passive and submissive, more confident, ambitious, analytical and assertive (Ferreira Vasconcelos, 2018). It may be a beginning but falls short of being equitable.

Walker and Aritz (2015) examined the gender leadership gap through their observation of male and female participants in randomly assigned, mixed gender groups. They analyzed the discourse of those competing for leadership positions in order to further examine the effects of leadership style on leader attribution. Their findings indicated that there may be a gender bias on the part of both males and females. The results of their work demonstrated little evidence that males and females are looking for different traits in leaders, but both genders showed a clear tendency to perceive males rather than females as leaders even when women exhibited discourse techniques typically associated with masculine style. These researchers also found that women were leaders in the majority of groups but were not recognized as such by both male and female team members (Walker & Aritz, 2015).

The notion that women who adopt the same behaviors as men in order to drive success are seen as less likable or effective than their male counterparts has been frequently analyzed. Research conducted by Skyline Group International (2016) and the Organizational Intelligence Institute (2018) discovered that the effectiveness perception when women exhibited masculine traits was lower in 57% of the 28 leadership competencies studies. Comparatively, men were perceived to be less effective when utilizing female behaviour in only 39% of competencies (Sindell & Shamberger, 2016). It is of interest to note that females were found to be more critical of women who adopt masculine leadership characteristics; for 43% of the leadership competencies assessed, only females had evaluated the other females as less effective (Sindell & Shamberger, 2016).

There is a fair amount of research that supports the suggestion that women are more likely to reject successful women. Parks-Stamm et al. (2008) suggest that the reason for this occurs because women do not like to compare themselves with other very successful females and will find women occupying traditionally male-gendered jobs as less likeable (Kenneth et al. 2015; Heilman et al., 2004). They also found that women who had been given feedback regarding their own potential to reach managerial roles were less likely to “penalize” other successful women (Kenneth et al. 2015). In an earlier study, Warning and Buchanan (2009) created videos of male and female managers and studied the way female managers were viewed. It was found that both genders exhibited a strong preference for male leaders. Their results indicated that women may perceive other women to be good leaders, but do not want to work for them. Their research also showed that the longer a woman has been in the workforce, their preference for a male leader increases (Kenneth et al. 2015) which further complicates this enigmatic challenge.

Another study which analyzed participants’ (N = 60,470) evaluations of their current managers found that a number of women prefer to be led by males due to “face-to-face competition” experienced with female managers. In this investigation, the majority of participants (54%) reported no preference in regard to the gender of their leader, however it should be noted that the remaining participants prefer male leaders over female leaders in a ratio of 2:1 (Ferreira, 2018; Elsesser & Lever, 2011).

It has been stated that women often have to work harder than their male counterparts to achieve the same results in contemporary organizations. The literature has shown that the evaluation of women in both management and leadership roles is highly subjective. There has been evidence to show that leadership evaluation (performance appraisals) has been skewed,

discriminatory and prejudiced due to the unclear guidelines in the evaluation processes themselves. It has even been suggested that the lack of female leaders in organizations could in part be due to the gender bias in evaluations (Heilman, 1995, 2001; cited by Jogulu & Wood, 2008, p.603, & Appelbaum et al., 2013b).

There is also the family issue to consider; the idea of motherhood--that puts women at yet another disadvantage. Organizations penalize not only women who have children or who are planning to have them, but also all women of childbearing age, even the ones who do not intend to have them. Some women put a halt on their professional advancement to spend time with their families, and those who try to have it all face the struggle of balancing family time and having a successful career (Cabrera, 2009; Brown 2010). Despite the fact that the number of households with two working parents has continued to rise, the traditions and societal pressure regarding the unequal responsibilities of child, parent, and household care has been slower to change thereby restricting women's career advancement (Eden and Forquer 2017). In the USA, there are 4-6% more Generation X and Millennial women holding bachelor's degrees as compared to men, however there are up to 10% fewer women who are employed full-time within these same generations (Pew Research Center, 2015, Eden & Forquer 2017). These statistics are quite perplexing, however.

Contextual Considerations

Culture and contextual considerations are critical to the understanding of society's expectations and perceptions of male and female roles. The significant differences in gender equality across countries, as highlighted by Eden and Forquer (2017) suggests underlying cross-cultural differences regarding the societal acceptance and support for changing expectations of women and men. While gender equality has made advances in most countries around the world, there seems to be a widening gap across countries based on their human development levels. Two statistical measures were analyzed; the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) (Eden & Forquer, 2017).

The average worldwide GII declined between 2000 and 2014, with a 15.21% overall increase in gender equality. It is important to note however that the ratio of average GII scores for the richest and poorest country human development index groupings rose throughout the same period. The GGGI demonstrates a smaller gap that seems to be narrowing over time. The analysis of both indexes conclude that the world remains far from reaching a status of gender equality (Eden & Forquer, 2017). Culture and context are central to the understanding of gender inequalities and are critically important to consider and research further when proposing direction for change policy, strategy and operational decisions (Eden & Forquer, 2017).

Workplace setting and organizational culture also greatly impact the norms and social identities established within an organization. It has been explained that "organizations are mini-cultures that provide sources and sites of identification for individuals" (Aaltio & Mills, 2002; Jenkins, 1996; Walker & Aritz, 2015). Organizations develop member identities by categorizing members into roles which have specific meanings and create norms which those members use to interact with one another (Schnurr, 2009; Walker & Aritz).

Organizations create leaders and their respective subordinators through these processes (Walker & Aritz, 2015).

The assessment as to which sex is a more effective leader depends largely on the industry. The chart below describes the percentage of males and females who believe that a

given sex would do a superior job in running a business than the other, with all additional factors being equal (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Exhibit 2: Leader Gender vs. Industry

Does a Leader's Gender Matter More in Some Industries than Others?			
% saying, all other things being equal, a man/woman would do a better job running a...			
	Woman would do a better job	Man would do a better job	No difference/ Depends (VOL.)
Major hospital	37%	14%	44
Major retail chain	37%	15%	43
Large bank or financial institution	29%	19%	47
Computer software company	18%	29%	47
Large oil or gas company	11%	46%	37
Professional sports team	8%	54%	33

Note: "Don't know/Refused" not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Nov. 20-23, 2014 (N=1,004)

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It is clear that there is a strong tendency to perceive a certain sex as being superior for leadership to the other based on the industry in question. (See Exhibit 2). Men and women seem to agree when assessing who would do a better job in a given industry. In the case of a professional sports team, women are more likely than men to believe that a female would do a better job; 11% vs. 5% respectively, however 51% of women would still say that a man would do a superior job in this case (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis aimed at testing the effect of various moderators to Role Congruency Theory (RCT; Eagly & Kara, 2002). RCT suggests that the perceived incongruity between the characteristics required by leadership roles and with that of women leads to a general prejudice towards females (Paustian-Underdahl, et al., 2014). The extent to which an organization that is male-dominated influences gender differences in leadership effectiveness was evaluated. It was determined that male leaders tended to be more effective in some organizations that were more male-dominated by nature such as government, and others exhibited non-significant differences. Non-significant gender differences were noted in the female-dominated organizations; however, women were seen to be more effective than men in business settings. (Paustian-Underdahl, et al., 2014). So, what needs to be done to help correct this issue and problem in need of a solution?

Some Recommendations on How to Close the Gap

Koland's (2015) research study found that corporate restructuring would seemingly be the answer to closing the gender gap. The shift in leadership culture would have to be one that recognizes, rewards, and models the values and perspectives that women bring to the table as much as those brought by men. This proposed corporate restructuring is evidently not an easy feat, as it was still a recommendation in 2015 and not actualized previously to close the gap. Corporate executives need to be on board to create a business strategy that would support gender equality amongst them. The top-level talent management function would then have to do its job to maintain that high potential talent through the leadership pipeline to ensure that gender diversity continues to be represented in the business world.

Women's ability to become leaders in business should improve once the negative stereotypes that have been attributed to them disappear. This assumes that women should defy those stereotypes by acting more like men, in order to be equal to men (Kray & Kennedy, 2017). Talented women must follow the masculine lead in order to be seen "on culture" in the executive suite. They also need to bring along with them the unique values and perspectives that are associated with them. The double bind theory explains the challenges women face in this regard, in that they need to adapt their behaviours to the masculine lead to be accepted, but keep their authentic feminine characteristics to not seem totally fraudulent. The integration of women's values and perspectives with those of the historically masculine seems to be the current belief on how to close the gap.

The behavioral adaptation that women must go through to achieve a leadership position continues to be a challenge, which may explain why the leadership gap persists. The cost versus the benefit still seems to be very high for women in the workplace to reach executive status. There are presently still too few women in the executive suite to allow female persuasion to be self-sustaining. It seems that indeed, a business level strategic initiative might be the answer for cultural change in the long-term, with financial rewards being the main argument for the change (Koland, 2015). However, attempting to change culture is most challenging and often unsuccessful as per the research and real-world case studies.

Conclusion

This article and literature review sought out to answer three questions. First, do women promote positive outcomes in the organizations for which they work, and do they do so more than men? Second, what are the barriers to successful leadership for women? And third, what are the contextual aspects that need to be considered in order to understand women's place in the corporate world?

The literature showed some conflicting results when comparing the effectiveness of male and female leadership. Although most research findings are consistent regarding which style of leadership has the greatest impact, the perception of which of the sexes is more effective as a leader is unclear. What has been made clear is that gender biases still exist in our society and play an enormous role in how leaders are brought into power. Despite this, societal norms seem to be changing, with the acceptance of same-sex relationships and gender fluidity, and thus stereotypes of genders are evolving. In the past, men's higher social standing in many cultures had more power and influence, but because of recent changes, the topic of gender, gender roles (regardless of biological sex), and leadership becomes a discussion that is increasingly more interesting to have (Eklund, Barry, & Grunberg 2017). An evaluation of extant literature revealed

that women and men are just as effective in leadership roles; however, it is the difficulty that women experience in order to showcase their capability and credibility that make it challenging to compete with men for those roles (Ridgeway & Correll, 2000; Koland, 2015).

As Koland (2015) discussed in her research, a business structure that would recognize and reward women in the same way for the same types of accomplishments as men would favour equality in the workplace. It has also been said that if women develop more masculine characteristics, that they would be more comparable to their male counterparts and thus, be given the opportunity to be more successful leaders. In order to complete this task, corporations must be open to the creation of development programs that would focus on helping women build on those characteristics and leadership traits, with male mentors to focus on coaching women on the use of power, emotions, negotiations, politics and competition (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007; Koland, 2015).

The literature has traditionally outlined the feminine and masculine characteristics of leadership, but recent studies show that today's executives may have started to adapt both of the gender-linked traits in order to become successful leaders. Women's progress in senior leadership positions along with the perceptions around their ability to occupy these roles is largely influenced by culture and context.

Currently, gradual changes on how organizations expand their female representation have been seen. "Modern organizations are working towards and actually needing a modern leadership style that is characterized by more stereotypically female qualities, such as concern for others" (Jogulu & Wood, 2008; cited in Schyns et al., 2008, p. 597). However, "there are still very few women in leadership positions despite persuasive evidence of their positive effect on profitability." Although the picture has gradually changed in terms of female representation in top leadership positions, the question remains; when will the barriers that women face when trying to climb to the top echelons of the corporate world disappear? (Appelbaum, et al. 2013b).

Animo-Metcalf (2010, p. 636) suggests that "gender bias in assessment, far from becoming a remnant of the past, has become so subtle and complex that it is difficult not to believe that resistance to change has made the phenomenon almost indestructible." For this reason, "the policies that have thus far been implemented to eliminate or ameliorate gender inequality have not resulted in the degree of success that was hoped for. It is true that some of the worse gendered inequalities in employment, at least in some parts of the world, have been ameliorated, but nowhere have they been eliminated and in many places, huge inequalities remain" (Durbin & Fleetwood, 2010, p. 228).

The opening statement in the introduction of this article in French "*plus 'ça change, plus c'est la même chose*" appears to still be the challenge and enigma affecting women as they attempt to climb the leadership ladder or have done so and perhaps stuck at one of the rungs with nowhere to go. Translated from French it means: "The more things change, the more it's the same thing". The question is: When will the barriers that women face when trying to climb to the top echelons of the corporate world disappear? Research shows that gender biases still exist in our society and play an enormous role in how leaders are brought into power. Evidence and research indicate that women and men are just as effective in leadership roles, but it is the difficulty that women experience in order to be able to showcase their capability and credibility that make it challenging to compete with men for those roles (Ridgeway & Correll, 2000; Koland, 2015).

There are small changes but not enough. We still have a long way to go in terms of the complete elimination of gender biases in our society. Further research about gender perception in

leadership will help us better understand how to change those perceptions and close the gender gap. That is the real challenge.

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