

Influence of Gender Bias on Leadership Development– A Study of Selected Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs) in Bangalore

G. RabiaJahani Farzana,
Department of Business Administration,
Government Arts College, Thuvakudimalai, Tiruchirapalli, India.
rabiafarzana@yahoo.com

Lakshmypriya K
Dept. of MBA, The Oxford College of Business Management,
14th Main, 17th B Cross, Sector 4, HSR Layout, Bangalore, India.
lakspriyain@yahoo.co.in

Abstract

Leader plays a prominent role in the success of any organization, non-profits in particular, as the success of an NPO is not just dependent on its level of activity but also on the competence of the leader. Leadership is not created by just one person, it is a collective effort. The word leadership has been widely used by political orators, business executives, social workers, philosophers and scholars both in speech and writing. Leadership is always carried out in the context of group, which, in the case of NPOs and other non-government organizations, comprises triple dimensions: Firstly, the group's own internal dimension that makes up the organization in which the leadership is carried out. Secondly, the area covered by the other organizations in the sector with which they carry out joint actions, whether this be through coordinators and second-level platforms or specific alliances and coalitions. Finally, the most public component of social leadership, focused on interacting with potential donors, the media, public administrations, companies and society in general. Much of the studies have focused on leadership in the for-profit sector. Non-profits are the engines of growth and reach out to those areas where for-profits do not. Leadership development aids the process of smooth succession which is almost forgotten by most nonprofits. Leadership roles exercised by men and women are differently observed. Today leadership success is no longer associated with possessing male traits. Yet statistics show that leadership roles are dominated by men. This study was conducted covering five non-profit organizations in Bangalore to understand the leadership development process in the organizations and to examine whether gender played any significant role in nurturing people to future leadership roles.

Keywords: Leadership, Non-profit institutions, Gender, Gender bias, Leadership development

1. Introduction

Leaders and their role in organizational, cultural and spiritual success are undoubted. Leadership role is always associated with leadership position. In fact the style of a leader reflects his/her attitude. Leadership roles do not really differ between men and women. Today leadership qualities are no longer associated with male traits of competitiveness, aggressiveness, self-confidence, decisiveness, and independence. Howard [1] quotes that women are more motivated by the purpose or meaning of their work, from men who focus more on compensation and job titles. Alice H.eagly et.al [2] states that female leaders are more cooperative and collaborative, less hierarchical and more oriented towards self enhancement. Over a period of time series of researches were conducted to find out the way men and women differ in terms of their leadership styles. Mento [3] survey on lack of women leaders in the nonprofit sector in the US, which focused on

surveying women employees' opinion on the issue, found that 57% of women in this sector including 72% of women between the age group of 18-34 aspire to hold the position of a CEO. It is interesting to note that the reason given by those who were not interested in the position was not fundraising or working with the board. Instead it was due to time commitment and stress involved in running an NPO. 44% of the women according to this report felt that organization favors men over equally qualified women for chief leadership position. Further studies conducted by Gangone [4] University of Denver on the Current state of women in leadership states that in US nonprofits with budgets more than \$25million, women constitute only 21% of leadership roles even though they constitute 75% of workforce. Siddiqi n.d [5] opines that in India research on this sector is scarce.

2. Leadership Roles

This study focuses on Ekstam's [6] cornerstones of leadership which is rooted on four aspects:

1. Role model
2. Communicator
3. Team builder
4. Developer

This model was chosen to access the extent to which these aspects of a leader fosters or hinders leadership development and whether there is any significant difference in terms of women and men when it comes to grooming leaders.

2.1 The role Model

According to Ekstam leaders is always a role model. The leader sets norms and directs the way in which employees should conduct within the organization for achieving organizational goals. It is important that the leader behaves in a way that befits the organizational norms and culture. The leader's positive perspective has an additive effect on employee performance. The leader who carries an attitude that employees work only out of coercion would end up having a set of employees who work only when coerced, on the contrary a leader who believes and delegates to his followers would have a set of motivated and self-driven workforce.

2.2 The communicator

Communication is one of the vital requirements to be successful leader. It's not just about political leaders in history or otherwise known for their oratorical skills but it's also about leading a team to organizational goals, where leader's communicative abilities hold the key. Manshoor Hussain Abbasi [7] many studies have been conducted to find out the significance of communication which shows that communication goes beyond just social skills. The cognitive, affective and behavioral aspect is focused more in managerial research. The impact of communication competence on inspiration and cognitive skills brings out the leader's capacity to empower his workforce. Torun Dewan [8] in his study states that a clear communicator is a leader whose language leads to a common understanding of the message and the policy implications of that message whereas a poor communicator would be unable to create such a common understanding even though he may be good at speech and good in language. The leader works for an open dialogue and create involvement of employees. The open attitude towards information is important as employees would be subject to role conflict and role ambiguity when information is withheld. Any change in the organization system and policies should be communicated openly to employees to facilitate responsibility and accountability. His/her role as a team builder is built on the ability to go beyond just communicating to team members, it's a source of inspiration and feedback about their success, expectations and shortcomings. Communicating short comings or failures is a litmus test for a good leader.

2.3 Team leader

Today organizations are structured around teams like never before. Martin [9] in his research shows that teams are central to organization success. Hence, the role of leaders in managing the team and team process is of utmost importance. Delegation and shared roles of leadership is prominent in team management. Team leadership models are different from traditional leadership models. In Frederick P. Morgeson [10] Team models are characterized by recurring cycles which are mutually dependent namely, the action phase and transition phase. In transition phase teams engage in evaluation or planning activities to achieve organizational goals, while in action phase teams perform work activities which are directly linked to goal accomplishment. As teams work through these phases they encounter numerous challenges. The viability of teams to organizational, environmental and team related factors are high. In this context the leader has to build a focused and self-driven team which can work above the challenges. In short, the leader has to promote team effectiveness through the process of team satisfaction. Finally, the source of team leadership also influences the effectiveness of teams. The concept of internal vs. external leadership and formal vs. informal leadership has always been a subject of serious discussion for this reason.

2.4 Developer

The central function of leadership is building a motivated and capable team through coaching and guidance. It is important that the organization itself is healthy and fosters a positive culture by inspiring team members and building a climate of innovation by encouraging ideation from employees and involving them in decision making. The leader's role as a developer is driven by a supportive work environment nurturing skills and development, the belief of the participant that people can improve their skills, opportunities for receiving and discussing individual feedback, the quality of management process supporting and reinforcing developmental activities.

3. Leadership Deficit

Leadership deficit is a serious crisis most NPOs face due to various reasons. The problem of leadership deficit has been discussed and researched from various stages and factors. Wolfred [11] in the report on 'Leadership Lost: A study of executive Director Tenure and experience, looked at the professional experience, compensation, tenure trends, executive training and support of nonprofit leaders and ways in which executive leadership is retained and supported by NPOs. In 2006 Bell et.al [12] came out with their finding that, three fourth of the executive directors surveyed had no plans to stay over the next five years with their organizations while another 10% were already contemplating exit. A large number of nonprofit leaders and founders are almost at their retirement stage, challenges at this juncture is that many NPOs have scanty talent pool in hand and immense challenges and opportunities in the real world. Teegarden [13] study found that 23% of executive director's planned to leave their jobs in the next two years while a 65% planned to exit by 2009, followed by the baby boomer generation of 57% who will retire by 2010 and another 43% by 2020. The study made by Bridgespan group shows that leadership development and succession planning process for senior executive position is the single greatest weakness faced by nonprofit organizations. The senior leaders are seen as linkages and stabilizers said Margaret C. McKee [14] and hence their departure would result in the firms' disequilibrium. With most NPOs having a process of informal succession, there is a need to secure and stabilize procedures at the top. Relay succession proposed by Vancil, Froelich, McKee, Rathge [11] is the most opted form of insider succession in many NPOs. But it is still a debatable choice if insiders or outsiders are the best fit. Though NPOs feature almost on par with for-profit organizations, NPOs even in the new millennium is confronted with the same workforce issue of getting the right talents and retaining them. Succession process to a great extent is affected as we move from the baby-boomer generation to Gen X and Gen Y. The younger leaders are not attracted to these traditional styles or model and are trying to find new ways to organize and structure work. They are looking at models of shared and participating structures, but given the state of poor succession planning it

is not possible to experiment these in NPOs, as leadership transition is mostly emergency or replacement in nature.

The role of a CEO or executive director in an NPO does not have the kind of prospectus that younger generation is looking for and the position does not hold much in terms of innovation and creativity. Gen X and Y are more driven by innovation and creativity that keeps them challenged and hooked rather than the baby boomer generation who, though were frustrated and expressed dissatisfaction with their roles adapted to it. The studies of Cryer [15] shows that 24% of young professionals in non-profit sector found their jobs with them through internships. The vacancy levels seem to be a serious concern in most of US nonprofits Way [16] opined that in just less than half of the mid-sized nonprofit organizations active development of future executives is done. Others do not have a future plan for their executives or employees, which results in these executives moving on to better opportunities and pay. In effect nonprofits are grooming leaders for other organizations.

The younger leaders feel unrecognized and their roles are marginalized by the baby-boomer generation. Mostly younger generation are consulted for technical expertise but are overlooked when it comes to strategic decision making. Meager executive salaries also add up to making NPOs a lesser option for the young leaders. Hence, the younger generations looks at leading nonprofit as a thankless job requiring great sacrifice with few visible rewards. For-profits offer creative packages, flexible work hours and training when compared to NPOs. Finding and grooming a successor is a difficult task coupled with issues of leadership transition, irrespective of insider or outsider designated for the position. Studies conducted by Gangone [4] University of Denver on the Current state of women in leadership states that in US nonprofits with budgets more than \$25million, women constitute only 21% of leadership roles even though they constitute 75% of workforce. By exploring and addressing the issues related to female mobility, the possibilities to enhance individual and organization performance are immense. In India According to Rego [17] Many NGOs are having difficulty attracting educated professionals, especially those willing to work in rural areas. Trained MSWs have lucrative opportunities working abroad and it is also becoming increasing difficult to retain talent in the face of fast growth in the corporate sector. BPOs, banks and other growing sectors are able to poach employees away with offers of much higher salaries and advancement opportunities. NGOs have adopted a couple of strategies in this regard. Some institutions have begun hiring recent graduates and providing them a year-long training with the expectation that they would stay on. Another approach is recruiting talent from rural communities and providing training to enable them to work in the field. This strategy is effective in that rural recruits are familiar with local communities and are more likely to stay on the job. The limitation, however, is that these local recruits lack confidence (to interact with government officials and funders) and managerial skills.

4. Gender bias on leadership

Leadership has been a male prerogative over the years in corporate, military, political and other sectors in the society. Today the number of women joining the workforce is very impressive but very few of them make it to leadership positions and strategic roles. Prior researches have shown that women are underrepresented in top leadership roles stated Eagly [18]. There is sufficient literature available about women in political leadership much less is known about women in leadership positions in Public sectors and nonprofit sectors according to Alice H. Eagly[19]. Over the past 30 years women has shown bold presence in philanthropic ventures. Yet, Leadership development and leadership positions have been highly associated with men through the ages. The gender bias nurtured by culture and society interfere with the organizational systems. Women currently constitute only 2.2 % (fortune 500 CEO, 2014) In Europe its 1.8% and in India 11% of women are large company CEOs (EMA partner international,2010). Research suggest that women who reach leadership position in NGOs have to develop specific coping strategies to deal with social and cultural pressures they face. Hailey [20] states there is a common impression that

women NGO leaders adopt a motherly comforting role, rather than a strong forthright style of leadership. James [21] opined that a woman is labeled as a ‘man, manly’, when she brings success; a term commonly applied to women activists. Leadership development programs mostly do not focus on developing women leaders, they are expected to over perform to ensure promotion or being appointed in leadership positions. Howard [1] quotes that women are more motivated by the purpose or meaning of their work from men who focus more on compensation and job titles. Alice H.eagly et.al [2] states that female leaders are more cooperative and collaborative, less hierarchical and more oriented towards self enhancement. Over a period of time series of researches were conducted to find out the way men and women differ in terms of their leadership styles. Femida Handy [22] Women’s nonprofit organizations have long played an important role in the lives of women in many parts of the world. In India, well-educated and affluent women found socially sanctioned work outside the home in the voluntary sector. They worked as volunteers under the aegis of religious organizations and for social service nonprofits dedicated to the alleviation of poverty. Participation in nonprofits in India gave women an opportunity to enter the social and political spheres in ways often denied to them by the for-profit and public sectors.

The traditional cultural norms and expectations of women and their work life pose challenges to equate male and female leadership positions. McInnes [23] stated that barriers for women aspiring to become leaders were highlighted in a study, Progress in Inches, Miles to Go, conducted by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Leadership. Some of the barriers are:

- Patriarchal corporate culture,
- Lack of role models,
- Lack of opportunities for critical work experience and responsibility, and
- lack of networks and mentoring

5. Methodology

The study consisted of five nonprofit organizations in Bangalore. The names of the institutions are being kept anonymous as per the agreement with the NPOs. The NPOs were chosen based on their activity namely two shelter-welfare-rehabilitation center, two trusts and one cooperative. The organizations visited had almost without exception developed effective models and aspire to scale their operations to serve more people and communities. 50 respondents participated in the survey out of which 45 has been used for the study based on scrutiny and elimination of the information. The objective of the study is to find out if there is gender bias in leadership development in nonprofit sectors from people in leadership roles. The variables under study are autonomy, delegation of decision making powers, open dialogue, mentoring, team leader role and innovation & empowerment. Chi square test has been used to establish if there is any significant impact of gender on the leader’s attitude on these variables.

5.1 Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant difference between men and women in terms of leader delegating responsibility, autonomy & decision making powers, innovation and empowerment

H1: There is significant difference in terms of leader’s approach in delegating responsibility, autonomy & decision making powers, innovation and empowerment between men and women.

H0: There is no gender bias in the leader in terms of open dialogue

H2: There is gender bias in the leader in terms of open dialogue

H0: Leader’s capacity to accommodate and address the needs and interest of the employees is not gender dependent

H3: Leader's capacity to accommodate and address the needs and interest of the employees is gender dependent

H0: There is no significant difference in terms of men and women when a leader delegates in a team.

H4: There is significant difference in terms of men and women when a leader delegates in a team.

H0: There is no significant difference between genders in finding a mentor in the leader.

H5: There is significant difference between genders in finding a mentor in the leader

6. Discussion

The results of the study provide information with respect to various factors which fosters or inhibits leadership development. Women have been sidelined in terms of climbing the ladder though today we have few women to quote in leadership positions.

Table 6. 1. Respondent Profile

Parameter	Percentage (%)
Gender Female	62
Male	38
Level Strategic level	5
Middle level	67
Lower level	28
Years of experience in NPOs	
Less than 5 years	10
5 – 10 years	20
11- 15 years	38
16- 20 years	22
21- 25 years	7
Above 25 years	3

Source: primary data

The respondents as shown in Table 6.1, constituted both male and female employees in the NPOs where 62% were female employees and 38% male. The study being on leadership development process 67% of respondents were chosen from middle level and 28% from lower level to find out their perception regarding the leadership process in the organization.

Table 6.2. Correlation analysis of three variables (autonomy, leader's willingness to handover responsibility, effectiveness of the leader)

Construct	Autonomy	Resp_handover	T_lead & Member
Autonomy	1		
Resp_handover	0.072895	1	
T_lead & Member	0.226341	0.350828813	1

Source: correlation analysis

The above analysis in the Table 6.2, indicates that there is a positive correlation between the ability of a leader to give sufficient autonomy to his/her subordinates and his/her effectiveness as a team leader (0.22). The leader's willingness to handover responsibilities in his/her absence and effectiveness as a team lead as well as team member shows a positive correlation (0.35) as well as between giving autonomy and handing over responsibilities (.072). The above analysis shows there is a positive relationship between these variables and these are vital in any leadership development process in an NPO.

Table 6.3. Summary of Chi-square analysis

Constructs Gender influence on	Calculated χ^2 value	Table Value at 5% Level	Degree of Freedom	Null Hypothesis Accepted/ Rejected
Autonomy	10.11	9.488	4	Rejected
Decision making	58.17	9.488	4	Rejected
Innovation	13.68	9.488	4	Rejected
Open dialogue	5.09	9.488	4	Accepted
accommodativeness	1.98	9.488	4	Accepted
Team leader/delegation	10.24	9.488	4	Rejected
Mentor	3.43	9.488	4	Accepted

Source: data analysis

The analysis drawing chi-square values in Table 6.3, to find if there is any significant influence of gender in a leader giving autonomy shows that the calculated value 10.11 is greater than the table value of 9.48 at 5% level of significance which indicates that there is significant difference in a leader's attitude in giving autonomy to female incumbents over male. The leader believes in male employees being given more autonomy and delegating work ($\chi^2 = 58.17$) is greater than table value of 9.48 at 5% significance in this case. When it comes to accepting ideas and giving opportunity for innovation leaders are highly biased about women employees, they lack the trust to allow women to come up with new ideas and contribute effectively to building new models of success and sustainability ($\chi^2 = 13.68$).

Leaders in the NPOs encourage open dialogue and discussion of policies, initiatives and changes but there is significant influence of gender bias here as women employees are given lesser opportunities for open dialogue and discussion ($\chi^2 = 22.74$) though when it comes to discussing problems of fund raising and day to day problems in running the NPOs women are also encouraged and women and men are given equal opportunity in expressing themselves (5.09) and finding solutions to the same ($\chi^2 = 1.89$). The leaders attitude in accommodating the needs and interests of employees in the NPOs under study is gender independent ($\chi^2 = 1.98$). The leader's role as a team leader is highly recognized by not just For-profits but also by NPOs today but it's found that there is bias exercised when it comes to delegating in a team. The role played by leaders as team leaders in these NPOs seems to highly driven by the belief that men can perform better than women in terms of managing teams and handling team dynamics be it cooperation or conflict ($\chi^2 = 10.24$). Both male and female employees feel that the leader does play the role of a mentor irrespective of their roles ($\chi^2 = 3.43$).

7. Recommendations

Study reveals that most of the employees (both male and female) feel that there exist bias regarding a female employee's capability and efficiency in handling crisis situation which most NPOs go through. The first step towards equity in leadership roles is to eliminate the bias through proper training programs, focused on creating positive outlook towards women and their competencies rather than confining them to typical roles in the organization. The organizational policies of promotion and succession planning should focus

on having employees from both genders. The role of a mentor in developing leaders is crucial and it is important to communicate and invest enough time in grooming men and women equally for such positions.

8. Conclusion

The problems faced by NPOs are very challenging and distinct from for-profit sector. Leadership roles are of prime importance, in terms of strategic planning for sustainability with more NPOs coming under scanner for various reasons. Women are highly involved in most NPOs but the percentage of women who adorn leadership positions are scarce across the world. The study clearly indicates that when it comes to giving autonomy in decision making and opportunities for innovation and ideation women are overlooked. The leadership deficit that is looming over the NPOs coupled with the gender bias is adding to leadership crisis in the NPO sector, which is otherwise under pressure due to the baby boomer generation retiring and hardly any succession plans in place.

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