

The Dynamics of Women Leadership in Managing COVID-19 Crisis

Dr. Shwati Sudha^a and Ankita Singh^b

National Institute of Technology, Jamshedpur-831014, Jharkhand, India

Email: ssudha.hum@nitjsr.ac.in^a

DOI: - <https://doi.org/10.47531/MANTECH.2021.25>

Abstract

Introduction: Leadership generates an environment in which people convert challenging opportunities into a remarkable success. The acknowledgment of an individual's armour of accomplishments is imputed to the leader's qualities. The leader's tools are hardly mentioned in the context. But, a good leader always takes more shares of the fault and fewer shares of the appreciation. As an individual rises in the hierarchy of the organization they take on numerous leadership roles which ultimately provide the authority to make critical decisions. Historically, gender precluded most women from taking the position of a leader in any organization. But, their determination to adjust to the male-dominated culture provided an exigent curve to this thought. This encouraged a transformed perspective to eliminate the invisible and impenetrable barriers associated with women's progress in the organization. Women leaders everywhere in the world today are on the lead, even in the worst situation of the COVID-19 crisis. The reason behind is the opportunities women seek in every difficulty in contrast to the difficulty in every opportunity. To maintain the organizational environment and to keep the morale of the manpower high is the key motto of women leaders during the crisis. This provokes an understanding of the extraordinary contribution of women as leaders in the organization.

Objectives: The research in the domain of leadership proliferated in the last few decades. But, the different styles in which women and men deal with leadership continue to encounter numerous unanswered questions. The study focuses on the qualities of women as Situational Leaders in the organization during the crisis. This highlights the following objectives of the study:

1. To identify women's strategy to handle the coronavirus crisis in the organization.
2. To demonstrate key leadership behavior required in the organization during the crisis.
3. To specify the dominant leadership behavior and style women exhibit during the crisis.

Research Methodology: The exploratory study is based on the collection of qualitative secondary data. This involves the technique of systematic review to sieve the data according to the objectives of the study.

Conclusion: *The study specifies the different concerns of women considered by them to implement the strategies during the crisis. This involves their concern towards risk, safety, and overall view of the crisis. The study also identifies different leadership behaviours necessary in the organization during the crisis. Among the different leadership behaviours, women often choose the development of people, optional rewards, and role models as the key leadership behaviour during the crisis. Hence, women exhibit a collaborative and democratic style of leadership in the organization. This is treated as the qualities of women for the position of Situational Leaders in the organization.*

Keywords- *Women, Leader, Situational Leader, Leadership Strategy, Behaviour, Leadership style, COVID-19 crisis*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is uncovering people's potential to become better despite the obstacles. Leadership abilities depend on an individual's strength & personality traits. Gender does not decide whether a person is a great leader or not. A leader is one who deals with hope, as said by Napoleon Bonaparte. The above definition emphasizes the Situational Leadership style conceptualized by Kenneth Blanchard & Paul Hersey in 1969. This refers to those leaders who opt for different leadership styles according to the situation. It is an effective way of leadership because it adapts to the needs and sets a beneficial balance for the whole organization, even during a crisis. A crisis is generally explained as a situation where the present scenario is not expected to end, and the upcoming scenario is not allowed to enter (Tomas & Avivah, 2020). The manpower involved in the coronavirus pandemic raised a crucial question in context to the presence of women (Julie, et al., 2020). Though women are at the front line in the health management sector, the opposite is evident for women leaders who handle the crisis. World-wide only 19 countries are governed by women as compared to 174 countries that are led by men. This accounts for less than 7% of the world's

leaders as women. According to the 2020 report of Global Health, 50//50 leadership positions in the organization are still dominant in males. The current trends signal gender uniformity at the CEO level still a few decades back (Anushika, 2020). When a health care system is deployed to fight the crisis of COVID-19, humans are considered as a whole and not only as a specific gender. This alarms that when women do not form part of a leadership position in the organization, their thoughts and issues are not brought to the table. This creates the issues to miss out on the policies that are quite obvious to affect women in this precarious situation. This strikes to grab lessons from the past health crisis of Ebola and the Zika virus. The then scenario led to a spike in the number of maternal deaths. This happened due to gender inequality on the leadership front which resulted in missing out on women's issues by the policymakers.

Organizations need to ensure the women's presence on board to improve the present disastrous condition. Countries with women as leaders suffered six times fewer confirmed death from COVID-19 as compared to countries led by men (Kayla & Alexander, 2020). In addition to this, the female-led governments are more

effective and rapid to soften the blow, with peaks in daily death rates again six times as low as the rate in countries governed by men. Finally, the average number of days with confirmed deaths was 34 in countries ruled by women and 48 in countries governed by the male. This gives rise to explore the domain of leadership style during a crisis where gender plays a significant role.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

David McGuire, James E. A. Cunningham, et al. (2020) found the pivotal role communication plays in crisis management and mentions how positive and constant communication accelerates trust and unity among the population.

The study of Jennifer Cherneski (2020) found that female leaders show resilience, emotion, and vulnerability to lead their countries through this uncertain time of COVID-19.

Julie Gedro, Nicola Marae Allain, et al. (2020) found the actions women took to address the crisis by ensuring that employees were kept safe and well (physically, emotionally and psychologically) and shifted to remote work arrangements.

Kayla Sergent and Alexander D. Stajkovic (2020) found states with women governors had fewer COVID-19 deaths compared to states with men governors. The study also mentions that women governors were more empathetic and confident during the crisis.

Luca Coscieme, Lorenzo Fioramonti, et al. (2020) found that female leaders acted quickly, implemented measures of lockdown early, and are more likely to take up positions of leadership in societies that value equity, solidarity, and collaboration.

RESEARCH GAP

The COVID-19 pandemic affected many countries with respect to political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and health crises. The remarkable role of women in different countries as leaders is inevitable. Different research states the prompt and decisive actions taken by women during the COVID-19 crisis to lower its impact curve and ultimately save lives in their respective countries. Hence, the COVID-19 pandemic provides evidence towards the strong performance of female leaders in the time of crisis. This provides a discussion forum to highlight the leadership qualities of women as part of the decision-making authorities during the crisis tenure.

OBJECTIVES

While many determinants are shaping outcomes during the pandemic, leadership is one of them. Leader's abilities prove them as most or least effective in these situations. This becomes more interesting if the discussion is particular about women leaders. Hence, the study shed light on the following objectives:

1. To identify women's strategy to handle the coronavirus crisis in the organization.
2. To demonstrate key leadership behavior required in the organization during the crisis.
3. To specify the dominant leadership behavior and style women exhibit during the crisis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The exploratory study is based on the collection of qualitative secondary data. Based on the content similarity, research papers are selected for the review. A pattern of the systematic review is followed to analyze the data from different articles and journals. The data analyzed is then sieved for

the study to provide a valuable contribution in this domain.

FINDINGS

While many countries tussle with the intense COVID-19 crisis, two countries New Zealand and Iceland, declared the impact as over. It is not just a mere fortune that both countries are governed by female leaders. Jacinda Ardern and Katrin Jakobsdottir, the Prime Minister of New Zealand and Iceland, respectively, received noteworthy and well-deserved appreciation for their leadership strategies during the COVID-19 crisis. Along with New Zealand & Iceland, the list also includes Estonia and Taiwan from the top 10 performing countries (Raj, 2020). Prime Minister German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen also appreciated situational leadership during this crisis. Luca et al. (2020) stated that though women account for less than 7 percent of the world's leaders, their cutting edge response to this crisis is remarkable worldwide. But it is not enough. Some of the worst-performing countries in this situation are governed by men. The situational leadership exhibited by women to fight with COVID-19 is different from the traditional form of leadership. The modish style is collaborative, empathetic, and involves transparent communication. This sense of leadership helped them to unite people for the fight against the COVID-19 crisis (Sugandha & Akhil, 2020). This involves the following three major concerns as part of their strategic plan to deal with such precarious situations.

- Women's concern for risk: An increased sensibility towards risk leads to takes different decisions for both men and women. While men take more risks under stress, women

lower this practice in a similar situation. Women give valuable time to think and act before taking any risk. Hence, for women, stress leads to improved performance to take decisions.

- Women's concern for safety: Organizations with more number of women demonstrate a safer working environment in comparison to firms with less number of women. The other angle of safety concerns is to address unsafe conditions either at the workplace or at home. Hence, the issue of domestic violence aggravated during a crisis requires leadership & awareness more often supported by the women in charge.
- Women's concern for the complete picture: Men are more targeted in their approach to deal with any problem, while women choose an interconnected approach for this. To recalibrate things, this interconnected approach seems like the best fit during the pandemic crisis. This provides them a complete picture of the scenario. Hence, with the use of logical and intuitive parts of their brain, women leaders choose a different technique to solve the problem.

Apart from the unique strategy plans implemented by women, there are certain leadership behaviours required in the organization during the crisis. These behaviours adopted by women are critical to safely navigate the crisis and perform well in the post-pandemic period. The leadership behaviours of women are based on different dimensions of the organization. This involves Responsibility, Competence, Power and Unity, Guidance, Accommodation, Creativity, Enthusiasm, Teamwork, and Organizational Environment. The

mentioned dimensions represent the following eight leadership behaviours required in the organization during the crisis.

- **Command and Disciplinary Actions:** To keep track of individuals' performance, include errors and paucity against goals and implement appropriate disciplinary action when needed.
- **Effective Communication:** To communicate persuasively, with charisma.
- **Optional Rewards:** To define expectations and responsibilities clearly and provide optional rewards in return to the achievement of targets.
- **Inspiration:** To demonstrate an appropriate and practical vision of the future for its implementation
- **Participative Decision Making:** To build a workforce where every individual is motivated to contribute to decision making
- **Development of Manpower:** To spend time to mentor and listen to individual problems and demands.
- **Rational Stimulation:** To encourage the manpower to take the risk and exhibit creativity.
- **Role Model:** To focus on respect development and consideration of ethical consequences of decisions.

Different research suggested that women are more likely to be thrust into leadership positions in times of crisis, while men are more likely to achieve these positions during times of prosperity (David et al., 2020). This difference takes place due to the key behaviours opted by them during the COVID-19 crisis. The dominant leadership behaviour handpicked by women leads to a change in their

leadership style in comparison to men. This further increases the likelihood that followers respond differently to messages from women leaders compared to men leaders. From the mentioned eight leadership behaviours, women opted more often for the following three key leadership behaviours: Development of people, Optional Rewards, and Role Model. Men opted more often for only one key leadership behaviour that is Command and Disciplinary Actions, during the pandemic crisis. Men and women equally opted for the following four key leadership behaviours: Inspiration, Participative Decision Making, Rational Stimulation, and Effective Communication. Leaders need to create an environment in which people discuss their thoughts and ideas, encounter questions and doubts, and present their views without any fear of its aftermath.

Men connect psychological concern for safety with proficiency and command, while women connect it with health and protection. Men typically use problem-focused whereas women tend to seek social support using emotion-focused coping. Jennifer (2020) stated that women leaders show resilience, emotion, and vulnerability to lead their countries through the uncertain time of COVID-19. Hence, women tend to exhibit a collaborative and democratic style of leadership which enhances the process to circulate information, formulate new ideas, and implement brainstorming, which ultimately increases coordination and promotes participative decision-making. On the contrary, men use a command and controlled approach during the crisis. Women blend both the styles mentioned above and exhibit the qualities of highly effective Situational Leaders. Kayla and

Alexander (2020) mentioned that women governors were more empathetic and confident during the crisis.

CONCLUSION

The study found that men are career-focused and try to attain maximum financial benefits from work, whereas women consider work as a significant part of their professional journey. Therefore, women consider their careers as an aspect of development. Women view leaders as those who share their knowledge and communicate with their colleagues to guide the manpower even in such a disastrous situation of the COVID-19 crisis. When women bring this practice into management aspects, it makes them more effective leaders. The potential and abilities of women as leaders are undeniable. Women as leaders portray passion, enthusiasm and the capacity to help and guide others. Women also demonstrate an innate ability to dream big, challenge assumptions and inspire manpower in the organization. They know very well how to translate magnificent ideas and thoughts into concrete action and outcomes. This happens due to the strategy plan women use to handle the crisis. The study specifies the different concerns of women considered by them to implement different strategies. This involves their concern towards risk, safety, and overall view of the crisis. The study also identifies different leadership behaviours necessary in the organization during the crisis. Among the different leadership behaviours, women often choose the development of people, optional rewards, and role model as the key leadership behaviour during the crisis. Both men and women equally choose inspiration, participative decision making, rational stimulation, and effective communication as the

key leadership behaviour. Men only prefer command and disciplinary actions as key leadership behaviour during the crisis.

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