

## **Leadership Traits: A Gender Issue?**

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### **Abstract**

*Women are gradually assuming important leadership roles in the social, business and political spheres. For this reason, the difference in leadership style and characteristics of men and women leaders has been the subject of controversial discussions both in society and in academia. Even though it is a current subject, there are few studies in the literature about it. This research aims to identify the characteristics and style of leaders to understand whether gender influences leadership style. For that, an integrative systematic review was developed in the Scopus, Web of Science and Scielo databases, between 2010 and 2020, chosen and analyzed 22 publications. Characteristics and leadership styles of men and women were found and related. It was found that gender may not have a direct influence on the style and characteristics of leaders, as they are influenced by the gender stereotype they assume. A woman can have more masculine style and leadership characteristics if she adopts the male stereotype, and vice versa. The results point to the need for more research on leadership style and gender, especially the development of more comprehensive quantitative studies and also qualitative research that focus on the experience of women and men leaders in organizations.*

**Keywords:** Leadership Traits. Gender. Leadership Styles. Woman. Man.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The discussion about the difference between male and female leadership, whether this difference exists or how each gender leads is a relevant and controversial issue. The way of leading can be different for both genders, as their personal and professional experiences, perceptions, culture, among others, are factors that influence the way leaders act (Silva, Gonçalves, and Cornelius 2017). Leading men tend to have more rational, logical, aggressive and authoritarian behavior, having an advantage in terms of financial results, whereas female leadership tends to prioritize people, displacement and the organization's culture (Gutierrez 2016). Women exercise leadership differently from men aiming to achieve, in associations, good cultural and social goals and not just satisfactory financial results (BOWEN, HISRICH, 1986; VOKINS, 1993; GUTIERREZ, 2016; AMARAL, 2019).

The equality of opportunities that the feminist movement has brought to women in recent decades has not yet reached its fullness (TORREÃO, 2007), and although there are more women in leadership positions, they still face barriers to reaching and maintaining high positions within associations (TRAVISAN; AUGUSTO, 2018). Even with the benefits of female leadership, a gender gap in the associations has not yet been closed and men still occupy the majority of senior positions and are considered the ideal model of leadership (UWIZEYIMANA; MATHEVULA, 2014; KUHLMANN et. Al., 2017)

For the Korn Ferry Institute, the number of women reaching leadership positions in associations is increasing, but a large number of them have not stabilized in the position for a long time. While they have been successful in changing the structures and behavior of ingrained talent, which act as barriers to increasing gender diversity at all levels of the organization, the issues that would drive sustainable results for women, especially in higher leadership positions still need to be faced and modified (STEVENSON, 2021).

For Korn Ferry, there are critical and difficult steps that make a difference for women who want to excel in leadership, such as identifying leadership potential in advance, as women have their skills examined more closely than their male peers and have to work harder and longer to reach the board. Women who aspire to leadership need to focus on the operational and have more horizontal experience in organizations (STEVENSON, 2021).

A comprehensive study by Korn Ferry in 2017 with CEOs of companies listed in Fortune magazine and others from large private companies highlights that women work harder and have longer careers than their male counterparts, were driven by a sense of purpose and by achieving results, are more likely to distribute power and credit among the team, most of them originate in the financial area and generally did not imagine themselves in leadership, in addition to having characteristics such as courage, risk-taking, resilience, agility and management of ambiguity (KORN FERRY, 2017).

McKinsey & Co published in 2020 the 6th Women in the Workplace study and among the results realized that with the Covid-19 pandemic, the challenges of women intensified increasing the double shift, without the support of schools and day care centers, increased domestic violence, among others. That's why many women are considering changing careers or leaving corporate life, and as a result, companies are at risk of losing women leaders in high positions or women with higher education, who would exercise that leadership and undermine the years of progress in towards increasing diversity (MCKINSEY & CO, 2020).

Although the presence of women in the corporate environment has been the object of study in recent years, and there are several studies about it both in academia and in business, when it comes to the difference in leadership style and characteristics of men and women leaders, it is noticed that there aren't many studies.

To understand whether gender influences leadership style by identifying the characteristics and style of leaders, this integrative systematic review intends to answer the following research questions: What styles and characteristics does each gender assume when leading? Does the leader's gender influence the style of leadership?

This review was built in 4 sections: Introduction; Methodological Procedures; Analysis and Results; Final Considerations.

In the next section, the methodological procedures will be presented.

## **METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

This study proposes to develop an integrative systematic review seeking to understand whether gender influences leadership style by identifying the characteristics and style of leaders.

There are different methods of systematic literature review, and in this research the integrative systematic review was chosen. This modality allows for a broader scope, aiming to integrate theoretical and empirical publications, with quantitative or qualitative approaches (ESPER; CUNHA, 2014). The integrative systematic review is comprehensive and includes several types of research combining data from theoretical and empirical literature (WHITTEMORE; KNAFL, 2005), allowing the synthesis and analysis of productions on the subject and obtaining information to assess the relevance of the procedures that were used to prepare the review (BOTELHO; CUNHA; MACEDO, 2011).

In this research, the proposal of Botelho, Cunha and Macedo (2011) was adopted, considering the importance of establishing a rigorous checklist for the 6 phases of the integrative review and thus reducing the risks:

- Phase 1 - identification of the theme and selection of the research question;
- Phase 2 - establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria;
- Phase 3 - identification of pre-selected and selected studies;
- Phase 4 - characterization of selected studies;
- Phase 5 - analysis and interpretation of results;
- Phase 6 - presentation of the review.

To fulfill phase 1, it focused on the research problem that consists of understanding whether gender influences the leadership style, identifying the characteristics and style of leaders. Thus, the research was developed in the light of theory, raising important reflections to answer the following question: What are the styles and characteristics that each gender assumes when leading? Does the leader's gender influence leadership style?

Thus, we opted for the strategy of performing the search in Elsevier's Scopus database, as it is the largest database of abstracts and citations of peer-reviewed literature, offering a comprehensive view of the world's scientific production. We also chose to search Clarivate Analytics' Web of Science database, as it provides subscription-based access to several comprehensive and international databases. In addition to the international databases, a search was also carried out in the Scielo database, as it is an open-access database that includes an interesting collection of Latin American periodicals, that's why at Scielo the constructs are used in portuguese.

The constructs used for the searches were: Leadership; Gender; Leadership Styles; Woman; Man, as a search strategy, we chose to combine the five key terms. Boolean operators AND, OR, asterisk, and quotation mark, were used for a broader search scope. For phase 2, the search was first carried out in the 3 databases in general, then a search restricted to the last 10 years was carried out and articles within the period 2010 to 2020 from all thematic areas were considered and analyzed. When performing the searches with the combination of the 5 constructs, 183 publications were found in the three databases. In phase 3,

the 183 publications were downloaded, the titles, abstracts were read, and the pre-selection of studies was carried out, thus, 64 studies were pre-selected, as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Database search result.**

Database	Search strategy	Total of publications	Publications 2010-2020	Chosen publications
SCOPUS	(LEADERSHIP) AND (GENDER) AND ("LEADERSHIP STYL*") AND (WOM*) AND (MAN OR MEN)	133	78	15
Web of Science	(LEADERSHIP) AND (GENDER) AND ("LEADERSHIP STYL*") AND (WOM*) AND (MAN OR MEN)	142	103	47
SCIELO	(LIDERANÇA) AND (GÊNERO) AND ("ESTIL* DE LIDERANÇA") AND (MULHE*) AND (HOME*)	3	2	2
Total of publications		<b>278</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>64</b>

Source: Elaborated by Authors.

Then, 64 articles were organized, with no access to 11 of these publications being possible, and 3 duplicates were removed, leaving 50 publications. Thus, when the 50 publications were fully read and critically analyzed, those that had greater adherence to this review were chosen. In this review part, texts that even mentioning the descriptors used in the research did not deal with the difference in leadership style between men and women were excluded. Thus, there were 22 publications that were considered able to contribute to this study, which, after being read and critically analyzed, served as the basis for this integrative systematic review.

In phase 4, the selected studies were categorized and analyzed, the synthesis matrix was elaborated, and the selected studies were critically analyzed. In phase 5, the analysis and discussion of the results that originated section 3 of this research was carried out. In phase 6, the document that resulted in this integrative systematic review, research gaps and proposals for future work on the subject was prepared.

Each study was evaluated for its quality, identified important concepts, compared analytically and thus a conclusion was reached on the evidence found in the literature, seeking to demonstrate the frontier of knowledge regarding the subject.

In chapter 3, the 22 selected productions will be analyzed with their respective contributions to the theme.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this study, 22 articles that adhered to the research were selected. Important findings about the style and characteristics of women and men leaders and the influence of gender on leadership style were drawn from these articles. To facilitate and give an overview of the findings, a table was created (Table 2) where the 22 studies are listed.

**Table 2: Chosen publications.**

Authors	Title	Year
VIKENBURG, C. J.; VAN ENGEN, M.; EAGLY, A. H.; JOHANNESSEN-SCHMIDT, M. C.	<i>An exploration of stereotypical beliefs about leadership styles: Is transformational leadership a route to women's promotion?</i>	2011
ANDERSEN, J. A.; HANSSON, P. H.	<i>At the end of the road? On differences between women and men in leadership behaviour</i>	2011
GARTZIA, L.; VAN ENGEN, M.	<i>Are (male) leaders "feminine" enough? Gendered traits of identity as mediators of sex differences in leadership styles</i>	2012
RUILLOBA-NUÑEZ, J. M.	<i>Liderazgo político y género en el siglo XXI</i>	2013
JONES, R. C.; SWISS, L.	<i>Gendered Leadership: The Effects of Female Development Agency Leaders on Foreign Aid Spending</i>	2014
FUNK, K. D.	<i>Gendered Governing? Women's Leadership Styles and Participatory Institutions in Brazil</i>	2015
CUADRADO, I.; GARCÍA-AEL, C.; MOLERO, F.	<i>Gender-typing of leadership: Evaluations of real and ideal managers</i>	2015
KISER, A. I. T.	<i>Workplace and leadership perceptions between men and women</i>	2015
SAIKI, D.; KANDIAH, J.; BEARD, K.; JONES, J. J.	<i>Leadership Styles and Collaboration Among Members of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences</i>	2016
GIPSON, A. N.; PFAFF, D. L.; MENDELSON, D. B.; CATENACCI, L. T.; BURKE, W. W.	<i>Women and Leadership: Selection, Development, Leadership Style, and Performance</i>	2017
ALONSO-ALMEIDA, M. D. M.; PERRAMON, J.; BAGUR-FEMENIAS, L.	<i>Leadership styles and corporate social responsibility management: Analysis from a gender perspective</i>	2017

GARCÍA, M. S.; SALAS-ARBELÁEZ, L.; MARTÍNEZ, É. G.	<i>Estilos de Liderazgo de Hombres y Mujeres en las Pymes</i>	2017
PLACE, K. R.; VARDEMAN-WINTER, J.	<i>Where are the women? An examination of research on women and leadership in public relations</i>	2017
RODRÍGUEZ, P.; MONTEQUÍN, V. R.; MORÁN, H.; ARRIBA, L. de	<i>Gender influence in project management: analysis of a case study based on master students</i>	2017
SABHARWAL, M.; LEVINE, H.; D'AGOSTINO, M. J.	<i>Gender Differences in the Leadership Styles of MPA Directors</i>	2017
RUIZ ACOSTA, L. E.; CAMARGO MAYORGA, D. A. C.	<i>Estilos de liderazgo político de las presidentas elegidas democráticamente en Latinoamérica: un estudio usando modelos probabilísticos</i>	2018
GUILLET, B. D.; PAVESI, A. HSU, C. H. C.; WEBER, K.	<i>Is there such a thing as feminine leadership? Being a leader and not a man in the hospitality industry</i>	2019
IBAÑEZ-CUBILLAS; P.; PINTO, M. M.	<i>Una exploración del e-liderazgo en comunidades virtuales de práctica</i>	2019
BRANDT, T.	<i>Relationship of Psychological Capital and Transformational Leadership: Comparison of Women and Men</i>	2020
MARTINEZ-LEON, I. M.; OLMEDO-CIFUENTES, I.; MARTÍNEZ-VICTORIA, M. C.; ARCAS-LARIO, N.	<i>Leadership Style and Gender: A Study of Spanish Cooperatives</i>	2020
PROWSE, J.; PROWSE, R.; PERRETT, R.	<i>'Women take care and men take charge': The case of leadership and gender in the Public and Commercial Services Union</i>	2020
SIMS, C.; CARTER, A.; PERALTA, A. M. D.	<i>Do servant, transformational, transactional, and passive avoidant leadership styles influence mentoring competencies for faculty? A study of a gender equity leadership development program</i>	2020

Source: Elaborated by Authors.

Observing Table 2, it is clear that this is a current issue that has been receiving greater attention from the scientific community, as it appears that the vast majority of studies that adhere to the research were published in the last 6 years, attesting to the importance and topicality of the theme.

Analyzing gender stereotypes and leadership styles, the results of some studies showed that women tend to adopt the transformational leadership style (ALONSO-ALMEIDA; PERRAMON; BAGUR-FEMENIAS, 2017; SABHARWAL; LEVINE; D'AGOSTINO, 2017; VINKENBURG et al., 2011). Other



research suggests that women leaders tend to use individualized consideration, emotional intelligence (GARTZIA; VAN ENGEN, 2012), paying attention to gender-related programs in general and gender mainstreaming in particular (JONES; SWISS, 2014).

Concerned with internal stakeholders, legal, environmental, and social issues, favoring corporate governance and the organization's sustainability. Women leaders are more adaptable, which favors management in times of crisis (ALONSO-ALMEIDA; PERRAMON; BAGUR-FEMENIAS, 2017). They lead according to their social skills, privileging dialogue as a means of reaching a solution (RODRIGUEZ et al., 2017) integrating collaborative elements, relationship building and empathy (SABHARWAL; LEVINE; D'AGOSTINO, 2017), worrying themselves with the well-being of all women are more compassionate and also more cooperative (IBANEZ-CUBILLAS; MIRANDA PINTO, 2019; RUIZ ACOSTA; CAMARGO MAYORGA, 2018).

Prowse et al (2020) calls the leadership exercised by women post-heroic or community, highlighting that this approach is associated with female characteristics such as being helpful, sensitive and kind. For Brandt (2020) women leaders have greater ability to empower others and are more rewarding, acting with greater optimism and hope and also believe that self-efficacy is an important characteristic for leadership.

Most studies portray women as docile, cooperative, democratic, among other characteristics, a survey of 200 participants in the United States, however, revealed that women are not necessarily collaborative leaders, in some cases the respondents revealed that they used a style more autocratic though they generally exhibit collaborative leadership. The findings also show that some women when young were more autocratic over the years, became participatory leaders (SAIKI et al., 2016).

Despite arguing that individuals should not be categorized by relating leadership style to gender, Denizci Guillet et al (2019) agrees with the studies by Ruiloba-Núñez (2013); Cuadrado et al (2015); Place; Vardeman-Winter (2018) and Prowser et al (2020) point out that leadership is portrayed with masculine attributes, and women who stand out as leaders often hide their authenticity by choosing to emulate masculine traits, modifying their style, interests and behavior to survive in the corporate world.

Leadership is traditionally defined as having male characteristics (CUADRADO; GARCIA-AEL; MOLERO, 2015; DENIZCI GUILLET et al., 2019), this male leadership style is often considered the most successful style (CUADRADO; GARCIA-AEL; MOLERO, 2015; RUILOBA NÚÑEZ, 2013). Men are more likely to hire and promote other men as they consider the male leadership style more appropriate (KISER, 2015).

Some authors claim that the leadership style adopted by men is transactional (PROWSE; PROWSE; PERRETT, 2020; SABHARWAL; LEVINE; D'AGOSTINO, 2017; VINKENBURG et al., 2011) making management by exception, laissez-faire (VINKENBURG et al., 2011) and contingent reward, with the concern to complete tasks efficiently and correctly (SABHARWAL; LEVINE; D'AGOSTINO, 2017).

For Prowse; Prowse and Perret (2020) the leadership exercised by men tends to be more traditional and use a heroic style (agent) of leadership, characterized by confidence, self-sufficiency and determination. Male leaders are more resilient, challenging with a higher profile of psychological capital and greater self-efficacy (BRANDT, 2020).

The male leader tends to exercise leadership in a vertical way, based on hierarchy (IBANEZ-CUBILLAS; MIRANDA PINTO, 2019), with characteristics of domination, tending to prioritize external

stakeholders and legal dimensions, environmental and social issues, and then, internal stakeholders (ALONSO-ALMEIDA; PERRAMON; BAGUR-FEMENIAS, 2017). Having the preference to reflect more on the subject discussed and, if necessary, postponing the decision; men are also more authoritarian (RODRIGUEZ et al., 2017).

Men with female identity traits, on the other hand, follow the trend of female leadership with more satisfied subordinates and promoting more cooperation, while “masculine” men (our italics) do not. By avoiding the incorporation of female characteristics, leaders build an obstacle to transformational leadership, contingent reward behaviors and emotional intelligence (GARTZIA; VAN ENGEN, 2012).

When analyzing the articles, it was found that there is divergence regarding the difference in leadership between men and women, some authors even question whether this difference exists, and, according to these authors, if there is a difference, it is not significant (ANDERSEN; HANSSON, 2011; DENIZCI GUILLET et al., 2019; GIPSON et al., 2017; MARTINEZ-LEON et al., 2020; PLACE; VARDEMAN-WINTER, 2018; RUILOBA NÚÑEZ, 2013; SIMS; CARTER; MOORE DE PERALTA, 2020). Although the literature shows that women exercise more the transformational leadership style, and men more the transactional one, the result of the research by Garcia-Solarte et al (2017) showed that the transformational style predominates in both men and women. Some leaders orient their leadership style strategically. Both men and women tend to adopt participatory institutions in areas that attract opposite-sex constituents and disassociate from traditional gender stereotypes (FUNK, 2015).

The results of other surveys show that not only are there no significant differences in the leadership style of male or female leaders, but there are also many similarities in both behavior and performance (ANDERSEN; HANSSON, 2011; GIPSON et al., 2017; MARTINEZ-LEON et al., 2020; SIMS; CARTER; MOORE DE PERALTA, 2020).

In the articles analyzed for this integrative systematic review, different styles and characteristics that influence the leadership of men and women were found, and some studies were also found that showed no difference in leadership regarding gender, but in individual characteristics and chosen strategies to lead. To answer the research questions and based on the studies analyzed in the review, Table 3 was created, where leadership styles and the characteristics of women and men leaders are listed.

**Table 3: Leadership style and characteristics by gender.**

<b>Leadership Style and Characteristics of Women Leaders</b>	<b>Leadership Style and Characteristics of Men Leaders</b>
<b>Transformational</b>	Transactional
<b>Horizontal leadership</b>	Vertical leadership
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>	Confidence
<b>Internal Stakeholders</b>	External Stakeholders
<b>Greater efficiency in the crisis</b>	Determination
<b>Empathy</b>	Resilience
<b>Compassion</b>	Challenge
<b>Cooperation</b>	Self-efficacy
<b>Community</b>	Psychological capital profile



<b>Vocation to training others</b>	Hierarchy
<b>Dialogue</b>	Self-sufficiency
<b>Relationship</b>	Reflection before decision making
<b>Social skills</b>	Tendency to hire and promote other men
<b>Looking towards the individual</b>	Authoritarianism
<b>Focus on the organization's sustainability</b>	Style seen as the most successful

Source: Elaborated by the Authors.

The style and characteristics of leaders can be influenced by gender stereotypes, but not by gender itself, as people with female identity traits use a more transformational, cooperative style, using emotional intelligence, among others. People with masculine traits, on the other hand, adopt the transactional, hierarchical style, being more authoritarian, etc. There are also those who adopt the style according to their strategy, not differentiating whether they are men or women.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this research was to develop an integrative systematic review to understand whether gender influences leadership style, identifying the characteristics and style of leaders. Based on the model of Botelho, Cunha and Macedo (2011), 6 phases of the checklist proposed by the authors were established and followed. Thus, it was possible to identify and analyze 22 articles that met the criteria established for this review.

Thus, the research was developed in the light of theory, raising important reflections to answer the following questions: What are the styles and characteristics that each gender assumes when leading? Does the leader's gender influence leadership style?

The review made it possible to perceive and analyze, in most publications, different styles and characteristics of women and men leaders. On the other hand, studies were also found defending that the differences between the leadership of men and women are insignificant and both can have characteristics and styles according to their nature or leadership strategy and not according to gender.

Women tend to have a transformational leadership style, using emotional intelligence and dialogue, they are more compassionate, cooperative, empathetic. They think about well-being, relationships, focusing on the individual, using their social skills well and worrying about the training of the other. They tend to exercise horizontal leadership, are more effective in times of crisis, favoring internal stakeholders, favoring corporate governance and the organization's sustainability.

Leading men tend to assume the transactional leadership style, valuing hierarchy and external stakeholders. They are more confident, self-reliant, determined, resilient and challenging. They adopt vertical leadership, and have the profile of psychological capital, are more authoritarian and tend to hire and promote men, are self-effective and reflective when making decisions. The male style of leadership is considered the most successful.

Another point highlighted in some of the articles analyzed was the argument that this difference does not exist, and, if it does, it is insignificant. It was found in these studies, that the style of both genders

is adopted depending on the nature of the individual, as a man has more feminine traits, he will possibly adopt a leadership with feminine characteristics and so on. The style can also be assumed strategically, according to the need of the moment. To this line of thought, men and women leaders are more similar than different in both behavior and performance.

To answer the first research question and help in understanding the second question, a table was created where the characteristics and styles of men and women leaders found in the literature are related.

The answer to the second research question is that gender does not influence a leader's style and characteristics. What influences is the male or female stereotype a person adopts. Men who adopt the more masculine stereotype are likely to assume a leadership style with masculine characteristics, and women who adopt those stereotypes as well. On the other hand, if a woman adopts a very feminine behavior and style, she will tend to adopt a leadership style and characteristics of a feminine leader just like the man.

Through this review, it was possible to notice that this theme is not very explored in the literature and there is still a lot to be researched. For there is little comprehensive research concluding that there are no differences in leadership style between genders or that they do exist, and if these differences occur in all cases, or in which cases, there is a possible research gap.

In order to contribute to the structuring of a grounded and broad theory on the subject, broader empirical studies could be made in the future both in the number of participants and in other countries such as Brazil, for example, identifying these differences or similarities, if any. As a suggestion for future work, qualitative studies could also be carried out, collecting the experience of men and women leaders in the context of organizations.

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