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Article

Reflecting on Leadership Experiences: The Positive and Negative Journeys of Women in Leadership

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Abstract Women have been leading organizations and communities for centuries, but their journeys in leadership have sometimes been challenging. This paper aims to reflect on women's positive and negative experiences in leadership roles and understand the factors contributing to their successes and challenges. To explore these issues, we will draw on various academic literature, including studies on gender and leadership and case studies of women in leadership positions. We will also examine the cultural and social factors that affect women's experiences in leadership, including bias and discrimination, societal expectations, and work-life balance challenges. One key theme from this analysis is the importance of role models and support networks in helping women succeed in leadership roles. Women with access to mentorship, sponsorship, and peer networks are more likely to thrive in their roles and overcome the challenges they may face. However, lacking female role models and mentors can make it difficult for women to advance in their careers and contribute to feelings of isolation and imposter syndrome. Another important theme is the need for organizations and society to address systemic biases and discrimination that prevent women from reaching their full potential. This can include initiatives such as unconscious bias training, flexible work arrangements, and policies that support gender diversity and inclusion. In conclusion, this paper highlights women's positive and negative experiences in leadership roles and emphasizes the need for ongoing efforts to support and empower women in leadership. By addressing the challenges women face and building a culture of inclusion and support, organizations and society can help unlock the full potential of women leaders and create a more equitable and just world.

Keywords: leadership experiences; women in leadership; adolescent experiences; uae; women; leadership development; qualitative research; semi-structured interviews; document analysis; diary writing; family upbringing; cultural values; education; societal expectations

Introduction

Leadership is crucial to any organization, whether a small startup or a multinational corporation. The ability to lead a team, make difficult decisions, and inspire others to follow is a skill that can be developed over time. However, for women in leadership positions, their journey toward success is often fraught with numerous challenges. Women have been underrepresented in leadership positions in many organizations and industries. Despite the progress made in recent years, women still face gender-based discrimination and inequality in the workplace.

According to a study by McKinsey & Company, women make up just 38 percent of entry-level positions and only 22 percent of C-suite jobs in the United States (McKinsey & Company, 2020). This underrepresentation of women in leadership roles has been attributed to various factors, including stereotypes and biases, lack of access to resources, and the failure of organizations to create inclusive environments.

In recent years, a growing body of research has been on women's positive and negative experiences in leadership positions. Many studies have explored the impact of gender on leadership styles; the challenges faced when leading teams, and the strategies that successful female leaders have used to overcome these challenges. For example, a study by Eagly and Carli (2007) found that women leaders tend to have more democratic leadership styles, emphasizing collaboration and teamwork.

Overall, the experiences of women in leadership positions are complex and multifaceted. While there are certainly challenges that women face, there are also opportunities for growth and

development. By reflecting on their leadership journeys' positive and negative aspects, women can develop a deeper understanding and use this knowledge to become more effective leaders.

This paper will explore women's positive and negative experiences in leadership positions, drawing on research insights and successful female leaders' experiences. We will examine women's challenges in leadership roles, including gender-based biases, lack of access to resources, and difficulty balancing work and personal life. We will also explore the strategies that women can use to overcome these challenges and become successful leaders. Through this exploration, we hope to provide insights and recommendations to help individuals create more inclusive and effective leadership environments.

Purpose of the paper

The paper explores the positive and negative journeys of women in leadership positions. By analyzing the challenges experienced by women leaders, the paper also aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences of women in leadership roles.

Research Questions:

To achieve this purpose, this paper will answer the following research questions:

- What are the challenges faced by women in leadership positions?
- What strategies have women used to overcome these challenges?
- What are the positive experiences of women in leadership positions?
- How can organizations create more inclusive workplaces for women in leadership positions?

By exploring these research questions, this paper will provide insights into women's experiences in leadership positions and offer recommendations for creating more equitable workplaces.

Literature Review

Leadership is a topic that has garnered significant attention in the literature. In particular, women's experiences in leadership positions have become increasingly important to explore. Research has shown that women leaders face unique challenges that often differ from their male counterparts. Scholars have delved into women's positive and negative leadership journeys to better understand these challenging sip journeys. This literature review explores the current state of research on this topic by examining the existing body of knowledge.

On the other hand, Vecchiotti, (2018) points out that Leadership has undergone significant changes recently, these changes can be attributed to the contributions of women leaders. According to McKinsey researchers, there are four practicalmodern leader qualities: being supportive, operating with a strong result orientation, seeking different perspectives, and solving problems effectively by working together. Millennial managers add two contemporary skills to the mix: much verbal dialog and consensus organizations. Servant leadership is also becoming increasingly popular as it encourages each employee to be resourceful, enables companies to develop self-managing teams, and widespread participation, and fosters an identity as a community of resources. Future research should determine what effective leadership really becomes.

Shah and Shah's (2012) study also examines the cultural and belief systems that influence women's participation in public life and their access to senior leadership positions. Specifically, the study focuses on women-only colleges in Pakistan and the discursive dynamics at play in that societal context. The authors find that religious status as a moallam and positional or expert power as a college head are only effective if endorsed by cultural and religious discourses. Furthermore, the authors highlight the use of complex "technologies of power" that divest Women College heads of their de jure authority, and demonstrate how these technologies operate in conjunction with the formation of practices.

The study reveals that women college heads must position themselves subjectively within the cultural and religious discourses in order to exercise their professional roles effectively. Through

resistance and reshaping of these discourses, the "depowered" women college heads are able to achieve relative empowerment and exercise their professional roles.

Furthermore, Keohane (2020) states that while women are now more visible in leadership roles than ever before, they continue to face significant obstacles, such as being primarily responsible for childcare and homemaking, lack of family-friendly policies, gender stereotypes, and laws and practices that limit their access to education and opportunities outside of the home. Simone de Beauvoir's classic work, *The Second Sex*, argues that it is challenging to predict things we have yet to see, and in attempting to do so, we often impoverish the future. Despite the efforts of multiple generations of women and men to ease the path for women, their potential remains unfulfilled and lost to humanity, as we continue to rely on models of leadership designed primarily by and for men.

Kalaitzi et al. (2017) conducted a study to identify the barriers to women's leadership across healthcare, academia, and business sectors. The study identified 26 barriers that were prevalent across the sectors, with some notable differences in their prevalence. Although the results of this study require further validation through statistical methodology, they highlight the critical issue of women's underrepresentation in top leadership positions and its impact on organizational and societal progress. The study's comparative nature allows readers to understand the differences in gender inequalities across sectors and comprehend inclusion challenges in healthcare. The research highlights the need for context-specific policies to address gender equality and inclusion challenges in work environments. The study's originality lies in its comparative analysis of barriers to gender leadership across different sectors.

Kattan et al. (2016) conducted a study with the aim of identifying factors promoting success in leading organizations, particularly for women. The study tested five hypotheses, but found no significant impact on the final variable of leadership success for Saudi women. Despite the substantial investment in women's education in Saudi Arabia, the study faced limitations such as a lack of literature on women's leadership and the unique cultural and traditional values in Saudi society. The majority of the study's participants were from the education sector, indicating a lack of diverse perspectives from other fields of leadership. Nonetheless, the study sheds light on the need for further research on factors that contribute to women's success in leadership positions, especially in the unique cultural context of Saudi Arabia.

In Robson's (2013) study, the author investigates the "narrative practices" of women in leadership roles within Early Years services in the North East of England. The study reveals that the women who were involved in the research developed narrative practices that were sophisticated, adaptive, ethically sensitive and sustainable, despite the prevalent masculine leadership culture. The research is distinctive in its approach, utilizing a highly participative and reflective methodology to explore the use of narrative in leadership interactions in the UK Early Years sector. The study also highlights that transactional, cognitively biased, formal and unresponsive organizational leadership cultures hinder the recognition and utilization of such practices. The paper argues that the acceptance and support of these practices are linked to a broader debate concerning the rejection of gendered leadership practices that are currently resisting them.

McIlongo&Strydom (2021) conducted a study on the role of mentorship in women's career advancement in the South African public sector. They employed a quantitative approach and gathered data from 200 women in various South African provinces. The results revealed that junior female employees perceive mentorship as crucial for their career growth. However, the gender of the mentor did not necessarily lead to career advancement. The study highlights the absence of established mechanisms to support mentoring, which calls for managers to implement mentorship policies. The authors suggest that women should actively build networks and encourage management to prioritize mentorship for women in their organizations. The study emphasizes the need for action to support women's career advancement in the South African public sector.

In Rochon et al.'s (2016) paper, the authors draw from their own experiences in academic medicine to provide lessons that apply to women's careers in this field. Specifically, they cover leadership, recruitment, editorship, promotion, and work-life balance topics. They also review current literature on the personal and social factors that impact women's participation in academic

leadership roles, and argue that a deeper understanding of these factors can help create a more supportive environment that encourages women to take on leadership positions in academia.

Discussion

Positive and Negative Experiences Of Women In Leadership

Women in leadership face positive and negative experiences, often shaped by societal expectations and gender norms. While progress has been made towards gender equality, women in leadership still face obstacles and biases that their male counterparts do not. In this journal paper, we will explore some of the women's positive and negative experiences in leadership, using real-life examples to illustrate the points.

Positive Experiences

Breaking Barriers: One of the positive experiences of women in leadership is breaking the traditional gender roles and stereotypes that have been long associated with women. Women in leadership positions serve as role models to other women and girls, inspiring them to believe in themselves and pursue their aspirations. For instance, Kamala Harris' election as the Vice President of the United States in 2020 marked a historic moment for women, especially women of color, who had long been underrepresented in American politics.

Unique Leadership Styles: Women have a unique leadership style that has been shown to be effective in today's dynamic and diverse workplaces. Women leaders often demonstrate empathy, collaboration, and inclusiveness, which helps to build a more positive and cohesive work environment. For example, Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, has been recognized for her leadership style emphasizing collaboration and inclusivity, which has helped her company succeed.

Diversity and Inclusion: Women in leadership positions bring diversity and inclusion to the workplace, which are vital for any organization that wants to be successful in today's global market. Women leaders often advocate for the advancement of other women and other underrepresented groups, which helps to create a more equitable and just society. For example, Ursula Burns, former CEO of Xerox, was the first African-American woman to lead a Fortune 500 company. During her tenure, she was committed to increasing diversity and inclusion at Xerox and was recognized for her efforts.

Negative Experiences

Gender Bias and Discrimination: One of the main negative experiences of women in leadership is the gender bias and discrimination they face. This can manifest in many ways, such as being overlooked for promotions or pay raises, being maltreated, or not being taken seriously. For instance, in 2019, the US Women's National Soccer Team filed a gender discrimination lawsuit against the US Soccer Federation, citing unequal pay and working conditions.

Stereotypes and Prejudices: Women in leadership roles are often subjected to stereotypes and prejudices that can undermine their authority and credibility. Women leaders are often expected to be nurturing, emotional, and collaborative, while men are expected to be decisive, assertive, and competitive. When women exhibit assertiveness, they are often labeled as "bossy" or "aggressive." For example, Hillary Clinton, the first female nominee of a major party for President of the United States, faced criticism and backlash for her assertiveness and confidence, with some calling her "unlikeable."

Work-Life Balance: Women in leadership often struggle to balance work and family responsibilities, leading to burnout and stress. Women are still expected to shoulder the bulk of domestic duties and childcare responsibilities, which can interfere with their ability to focus on their careers. For example, Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo, has spoken publicly about the challenges of balancing work and family, stating that she would often skip school events for her children to attend business meetings.

In conclusion, women in leadership face positive and negative experiences, often shaped by societal expectations and gender norms. While progress has been made towards gender equality,

women in leadership roles still face obstacles and biases that their male counterparts do not. Organizations and society need to recognize women leaders' unique contributions, address gender biases and discrimination, and support women in achieving their full potential.

Factors that contribute of the success of women in leadership

The past few decades have seen a significant shift towards greater gender diversity in leadership roles, with more women assuming power and influence in various industries and sectors. However, despite this progress, women still face significant challenges in breaking through the "glass ceiling" and achieving success in leadership roles.

Several factors contribute to the success of women in leadership, and these factors can vary depending on the industry, the culture of the organization, and other contextual factors. Here are some of the most critical factors that can contribute to the success of women in leadership:

Vision and Strategy: Women who have a clear idea of what they want to achieve and a strategic plan for achieving it are more likely to be successful in leadership roles. This requires a combination of strategic thinking, creativity, and the ability to communicate their vision effectively to others.

For example, Indra Nooyi, the former CEO of PepsiCo, is widely admired for her strategic vision and ability to transform the company. During her tenure, she led a significant restructuring of the company, shifting its focus towards healthier products and expanding its global reach. Her vision and strategic leadership helped PepsiCo grow its revenue and profitability, while also positively impacting the health and well-being of consumers worldwide.

Resilience and Perseverance: Women in leadership roles often face significant obstacles and setbacks, and those who are able to persevere in the face of adversity are more likely to succeed. This requires resilience, the ability to bounce back from setbacks, and a willingness to learn from failures and mistakes.

One example of a resilient and persevering leader is Mary Barra, the CEO of General Motors. Barra took over as CEO amid a significant crisis for the company following a massive recall of faulty vehicles. Despite the challenges she faced, Barra was able to steer the company through the problem and transform its culture, earning praise for her leadership and resilience.

Emotional Intelligence: Women who can understand and manage their own emotions and those of others are more likely to be successful in leadership roles. Emotional intelligence includes empathy, self-awareness, building relationships, and influencing others.

One example of a leader with high emotional intelligence is Ursula Burns, the former CEO of Xerox. Burns was known for her ability to connect with employees and customers personally and for her empathetic leadership style. Her emotional intelligence helped her to build strong relationships with stakeholders and to lead Xerox through a period of significant transformation.

Diversity and Inclusion: Women committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace are more likely to succeed in leadership roles. This includes creating a culture that values and respects diversity and promoting policies and practices that support the advancement of women and other underrepresented groups.

One example of a leader committed to diversity and inclusion is Rosalind Brewer, the CEO of Walgreens Boots Alliance. Brewer has been a vocal advocate for diversity and inclusion and has implemented various policies and initiatives to promote gender and racial diversity in the workplace. Her leadership on this issue has earned her widespread recognition and praise.

In conclusion, the success of women in leadership roles depends on a range of factors, including vision and strategy, resilience and perseverance, emotional intelligence, and a commitment to diversity and inclusion. By cultivating these qualities and demonstrating effective leadership, women can break through barriers and succeed in various industries and sectors.

Barriers that women face in leadership roles

Despite significant progress towards gender equality in the workplace, women face a wide range of barriers to achieving leadership roles. These barriers can be overt and subtle, varying depending

on the industry, the organizational culture, and other contextual factors. Here are some of the most common obstacles that women face in leadership roles:

Gender Bias and Stereotyping: One of the most significant barriers women face in leadership roles is gender bias and stereotyping. Women are often perceived as less competent, less ambitious, and less assertive than their male counterparts, which can lead to them being overlooked for leadership positions or being passed over for promotions.

For example, a study by the Harvard Business Review found that when men and women used identical language in their performance reviews, women were more likely to be criticized for being "too aggressive" or "too emotional," while men were praised for exhibiting the same behaviors.

Lack of Mentorship and Sponsorship: Women often face a shortage of mentorship and sponsorship in their careers, making it more difficult for them to advance to leadership roles. Without support and guidance from more experienced leaders, women may struggle to build the networks and skills they need to succeed in leadership roles.

For example, a study by McKinsey & Company found that women are less likely than men to receive advice and sponsorship from senior leaders, which can hinder their career advancement.

Work-Life Balance Challenges: Women are often expected to balance multiple roles and responsibilities, including work, caregiving, and household duties. This can make it more difficult for them to take on leadership roles that require long hours and significant travel.

For example, a study by the Pew Research Center found that women are more likely than men to say that they have had to make sacrifices in their careers in order to care for family members.

Structural and Organizational Barriers: Women may also face structural and organizational barriers that make it more difficult for them to advance to leadership roles. For example, many organizations have policies and practices that are not supportive of work-life balance or that do not provide equal opportunities for women to advance.

For example, a study by the World Economic Forum found that only 22% of senior leadership roles are held by women globally. That progress toward gender parity has been slow in many industries.

In conclusion, women face a wide range of barriers to achieving leadership roles, including gender bias and stereotyping, lack of mentorship and sponsorship, work-life balance challenges, and structural and organizational barriers. Addressing these barriers will require a concerted effort by organizations, leaders, and policymakers to create more inclusive and supportive workplaces that enable women to achieve their full potential. By breaking down these barriers, we can unlock the full potential of women leaders and create a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

Women's leadership traits skills

Women have unique leadership traits and skills that are often overlooked or undervalued in traditional leadership models. These traits and skills are essential for building inclusive, collaborative, and high-performing teams and can help women to thrive in leadership roles. Here are some of the key leadership traits and skills that women bring to the table:

Empathy and Emotional Intelligence: Women are often more attuned to the emotions and needs of others, which makes them highly effective at building relationships and fostering collaboration. Women leaders are often skilled at creating a sense of psychological safety in their teams, which can lead to higher levels of trust, engagement, and innovation.

For example, Melinda Gates, co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has been praised for her empathetic leadership style and her commitment to promoting gender equality in her organization's work.

Communication and Relationship Building: Women are often skilled communicators and relationship builders, which can help them to inspire and motivate their teams. Women leaders are often adept at navigating complex organizational structures and stakeholder relationships and can build strong partnerships with customers, suppliers, and other key stakeholders.

For example, Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors, has been praised for her focus on building relationships with employees and customers and for her transparent and communicative leadership style.

Resilience and Adaptability: Women leaders are often highly resilient and adaptable and can navigate challenging situations with grace and determination. Women leaders are often skilled at managing multiple priorities and balancing competing demands, which can help them to succeed in fast-paced and dynamic environments.

For example, Ursula Burns, former CEO of Xerox, has been praised for her resilience and adaptability in leading the company through a significant transformation in the face of intense competition and technological disruption.

Creativity and Innovation: Women leaders are often highly creative and innovative and can bring fresh perspectives and ideas to complex problems. Women leaders are often skilled at fostering a culture of experimentation and risk-taking, which can lead to breakthrough innovations and competitive advantage.

For example, Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, has been praised for her innovative approach to leadership and her commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion in the tech industry.

In conclusion, women bring unique leadership traits and skills to the table, including empathy and emotional intelligence, communication and Relationship building, resilience and adaptability, and creativity and innovation. These traits and skills are essential for building inclusive, collaborative, and high-performing teams and can help women to thrive in leadership roles. By recognizing and valuing these traits and abilities, we can create more diverse and influential leadership teams better equipped to navigate the complex challenges of the 21st century.

The importance of mentorship and support networks for women in leadership

Mentorship and support networks are crucial in empowering women to break through barriers and reach their full potential in leadership positions. Women leaders have faced unique challenges due to systemic biases and gender stereotypes, and it is essential to create a supportive environment that encourages and enables them to succeed.

Mentorship can be a valuable tool for women in leadership. A mentor can provide guidance, support, and advice, helping women navigate the challenges they may face in their careers. They can offer insights into navigating workplace politics, negotiating salaries and benefits, and building relationships with colleagues and clients. Having a mentor who has experience in the same field and has faced similar challenges can be incredibly valuable for women in leadership positions.

For example, Sheryl Sandberg, the COO of Facebook, has talked extensively about the importance of mentorship in her career. She has credited the guidance of her mentor, Larry Summers, with helping her navigate the male-dominated world of finance and tech. Sandberg has since become a mentor to many women, including her protégé, Facebook COO and later CEO, Cheryl Sandberg.

Support networks are another important aspect of empowering women in leadership. These networks can be formal or informal, including colleagues, peers, or other women in similar roles or industries. They offer a safe space for women to share their experiences, receive support and advice, and develop relationships that can help them advance their careers.

One example of a formal support network is the Women in Technology (WIT) network, a global organization that provides resources and support to women in the tech industry. WIT hosts events, webinars, and mentoring programs to help women connect, learn, and grow in their careers.

In addition to mentorship and support networks, it is crucial to address systemic biases and gender stereotypes that can hold women back in leadership positions. This may involve implementing policies that promote diversity and inclusion, addressing unconscious bias in hiring and promotion practices, and training managers and leaders on creating a more inclusive work environment.

A great example of a company that has taken steps to address gender bias is Salesforce. In 2015, the company conducted a comprehensive audit of its pay practices and found that it paid men more

than women in some roles. The company then committed to closing the pay gap and has spent millions of dollars on pay adjustments to ensure equal pay for equal work.

In conclusion, mentorship and support networks are essential for empowering women in leadership positions. By providing guidance, support, and a safe space to share experiences, these resources can help women break through barriers and reach their full potential. Addressing systemic biases and gender stereotypes is crucial to creating a more equitable and inclusive workplace where women can thrive. By taking these steps, we can help create a more diverse, honest, and prosperous future for women in leadership.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the positive and negative experiences of women in leadership positions are crucial aspects that need to be discussed and addressed in today's society. While progress has been made in promoting gender diversity in leadership, women's experiences in leadership positions vary widely. Despite the challenges, women leaders have proven themselves to be effective and capable leaders, significantly impacting their organizations and communities.

The positive experiences of women in leadership include the opportunity to make a difference, inspire others, and lead with empathy and compassion. Female leaders have demonstrated that they can bring a fresh perspective to organizations and promote a more collaborative, team-oriented approach to leadership. They have also shown that they can achieve success and recognition for their accomplishments, paving the way for future generations of women leaders.

However, women in leadership also face significant challenges, such as gender discrimination, stereotyping, and bias. Women in leadership positions often have to work harder to prove themselves, face greater scrutiny, and encounter more obstacles to success. Additionally, women in leadership may struggle with the expectations of balancing their work and personal lives, especially if they have children or other caregiving responsibilities.

To address these challenges, organizations and individuals must work together to promote gender diversity in leadership, support women in leadership positions, and create a more inclusive and equitable environment. This includes promoting leadership training and mentorship programs specifically tailored to women, increasing the representation of women in leadership positions, and implementing policies that encourage work-life balance and support for caregivers.

In summary, women's positive and negative experiences in leadership highlight the need for continued progress toward gender diversity, equity, and inclusion in leadership. By acknowledging and addressing women's challenges and supporting their leadership journeys, we can create a more equitable and effective society for all.

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