



THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY TRAIT ON BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP IN THE GHANAIAAN CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

The personality trait of an individual, either inherent or of a learned nature is perceived to influence one's choice of a particular career path and the levels of leadership appointment. The persistent gender gap in corporate leadership is believed to stem from women's inability to display personality trait deemed as congruent with leadership roles. However, leadership roles in the corporate world are considered as a typical pyramid, giving few individuals the opportunity to go through the corporate ladder to the top hierarchy of decision making. In recent times, it has been observed that focusing on education alone is insufficient requirement in getting women into the higher echelons of leadership and ultimately bridging the gender gap in leadership. Thus, this study seeks to use hermeneutic phenomenological approach under qualitative methodology to investigate how individual's personality trait could influence the emergence of leadership, and its impact on closing gender gap in leadership within the Ghanaian corporate world.

Key words: career path, congruent, emergence, gender, leadership, personality trait

Introduction/Background to the Study

Debates on gender parity in corporate leadership have gained prominence on the global agenda, with issues concerning women being discussed in meetings and conferences around the globe (Ganguli, et al., 2014; Jackson, 2009; Livingston, 2013; World Development Report, 2013). Women are viewed as grossly underrepresented in the higher echelons of professional and in leadership roles within the corporate world (Sheerin, 2012). Efforts by governments, organizational bodies, and various concern groups to bring women into the corridors of power, have achieved infinitesimal progress, making the agenda an unfulfilled promise (Dewi & Rachmawati, 2014; Eagly, 2013; Ganguli, Hausmann & Viarengo, 2014; Jackson, 2009; Kerr & Multon, 2015; Sheerin, 2012; Wood, 2011).

The Economic Forum (2010) revealed that, although women account for more than half of the workforce in financial institutions, they lag behind their male counterparts in leadership roles. Globally, research has revealed that, for every nine men in senior management positions there is one woman; thus, the ratio of women who hold a senior management position is relatively lower. Comparatively, one out of every twenty-six women in sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean makes it to a senior management position in the corporate world, whereas one out of every six to nine men in the workforce makes it to a senior management position (Jackson, 2009). The 2010 Ghana population census estimated that, women accounted for 51% of the labour market; however, only 2.5 percent and 4.1 percent of women were respectively found in managerial and professional roles within the formal employment sector (Ghana Statistical Services, 2012; International Labour Organization, 2015).

In recent times, few women have been found to be making inroads into the higher levels of leadership, and making impressive contributions in corporate leadership performance. Several

others are found at the strategic management positions that lead to the top corporate leadership; while the majority of working class women are concentrated at the middle and lower levels of management as compared to their male counterparts (European Commission, 2010; International Labor Organization, 2015). The pronounced gender gap in senior leadership positions leaves one to wonder how the ongoing initiatives by governments, and various concern groups, on gender diversity and inclusion could possibly close the gender gap in corporate leadership (Jackson, 2009). This study used qualitative methodology to elicit individual personal experience, feelings, and perceptions to investigate the effect of personality traits on the subject of gender inequality in corporate leadership in Ghana.

Methodology

The study used qualitative methodology, specifically, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to investigate the influence of one's personality trait on the gender gap in corporate leadership. Primary and secondary data was used for the analysis of the factors accounting for the dearth in gender leadership. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, primary data was obtained from ten female experienced bankers occupying leadership positions in the banking sector of Ghana. Data collection was done through a face-to-face interview sessions. The data collected were captured and transcribed verbatim onto Microsoft word; and subsequently loaded onto computer-generated qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 10 to search for, and established commonalities, themes, and related threads for detailed analysis. To achieve the purpose of the study, qualitative methodology was employed to explore multiple perspectives of individual women who have had experiences in the rise into senior leadership roles, and to better understand the phenomenon under study (Ballad & Balawan, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Literature Review

Gender equality at top management level is considered as a factor of better performance for top leadership teams; however, observations have revealed that the human talents available in the labour market are not fully being utilized for economic and social development (Dewi & Rachmawati, 2014; Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011; Sheerin, 2012). Sheerin (2012) observed that, important differences exist in the various occupations men and women occupy in the global labor market. This study draws from previous studies on personality, to reviews the influences of personality trait on the gender leadership (Colbert, Barrick & Bradley, 2014; Sheerin, 2012).

Personality Traits Theory

Personality trait is the individual characteristics that influence career choices and career progression (Sheerin, 2012). McCrae and Costa (2003) described personality trait as "... dimensions of individual differences in tendencies to show consistent patterns of thoughts, feeling, and actions" (Sheerin, 2012, p. 34). Personality trait is considered to have significant influence on one's career aspiration, career direction, and the attainment of leadership position at the workplace (Colbert, Barrick & Bradley, 2014; Sheerin, 2012).

Personality Traits, Occupational Choice and Leadership

An individual's choice of a particular career path and the levels of leadership appointment is intrinsically linked to one's personality type, either inherent or of a learned nature (Sheerin, 2012). Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua (2006) claimed that an individual's personality has a greater effect on occupational choice than cognitive ability; and this finding is more pronounced among women. Thus occupational choice is considered to be dependent on one's personality type. The display of specific personality traits, considered as congruent with leaders' role is crucial to one's assumption into certain leadership roles (Colbert, Barrick & Bradley,

2014; Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011; Sheerin, 2012). Personality traits are classified under five broad factors and further analyzed for leadership emergence (McCrae & Costa, 2003).

Personality Traits and the Five-Factor Model

Sheerin (2012) posited that, the five-factor model is one of the most common means of classifying a wide range of personal attributes and characteristics into a finite number of groups or types. These factors serve as contributing factors, and not the sole indicator in one's choice of educational path, occupation and career choices including leadership roles (Ozer, & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Sheerin, 2012). The table below depicts the various personality traits, and score ranges as demonstrated by Sheerin (2012).

Table 1

Five-Factor Model of Personality Traits

Personality Trait	Low Score	High Score
Openness	Favours conservative values Judges in conventional terms Is uncomfortable with complexities Moralistic	Values intellectual matters Rebellious, non-conforming Has an unusual thought process Introspective
Conscientiousness	Unable to deny gratification Self-indulgent Engages in daydreams	Behaves ethically Dependable, responsible Productive Has high aspiration level
Extraversion	Emotionally bland Avoids close relationships Over-control of impulses Submissive	Talkative Gregarious Socially poised Behaves assertively

Agreeableness	Critical, sceptical	Sympathetic, considerate
	Behaviour is condescending	Warm, compassionate
	Tries to push limits	Likeable
	Expresses hostility directly	Behaves in a giving way
Neuroticism	Calm, relaxed	Thin-skinned
	Satisfied with self	Anxious
	Clear-cut personality	Irritable
	Prides self on objectivity	Guilt-prone

Source: McCrae and Costa (2003: 53).

Personality Traits, Gender, and Leadership

Colbert et al. (2014) described the five broad personality traits, named in the five-factor model as either task-oriented (conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience) or interpersonally-oriented (extraversion and agreeableness) when accessed under the personality traits of leaders (DeRue, Wellman, Nahrgang & Humphrey, 2011). Task-oriented traits are suggested to empower senior executives in leadership roles that have critical task of directing and channelling employees toward goal attainment (Colbert, Barrick & Bradley, 2014). Thus, top management teams with the three task-oriented traits are more likely to be effective in leadership roles irrespective of one's gender (Colbert, et al., 2014). Recent studies on relationship between gender and personality traits within the five-factor model revealed that women score higher on all five factors when the five-factor model was utilized to examine personality traits (Donnellan & Lucas, 2008; Schmitt, et al., 2008). Women were seen to be scoring slightly higher than men in conscientiousness, a trait found to be an indicator for the emergence of successful and effective leadership (Colbert, et al., 2014; Donnellan & Lucas, 2008; Schmitt, et al., 2008).

Neuroticism, a task-oriented personality trait is associated with an individual's ability to deal with negativity and the level of emotional stability (Colbert, et al., 2014). As a negative personality trait, higher scores on neuroticism lead to less productivity, especially for people whose jobs are demanding (Ham, et al., 2009). Women were found to consistently score higher in neuroticism than men (Colbert, et al., 2014). Openness to experience, a task-oriented personality trait involves originality; daring, imaginative and broad-minded spirits that make things happen (Colbert, Barrick & Bradley, 2014). According to Colbert et al (2014), individuals, irrespective of gender, higher on 'openness to experience' are better suited to adapt to the more dynamic environments typically found in team settings and leadership roles. Openness to experience is important to leader effectiveness, due to the critical role it plays in the increased uncertainty inherent in the leaders' work schedules (Bell, 2007; Colbert, Barrick & Bradley, 2014). Women were observed to have high scores on certain sub-headings such as 'openness to feeling' and fewer score on 'openness to ideas' as compared to men, revealing some inconsistencies (Colbert, et al., 2014).

In addition to the task-oriented personality trait, are the interpersonally-oriented traits (Extraversion and Agreeableness). The extraversion trait is valued more highly in social jobs, and development and training roles; and Colbert, et al. (2014) observed some inconsistencies on the scores for women. Agreeableness as a personality trait is classified as one of the models that are positively valued within social occupations only (Ham et al. (2009). Observations revealed that women consistently score higher in agreeableness than men, however other studies suggest that there is no relationship between agreeableness and career choice; and being overly agreeable does not contribute to success as a leader (Colbert, et al, 2014; Sheerin, 2012).

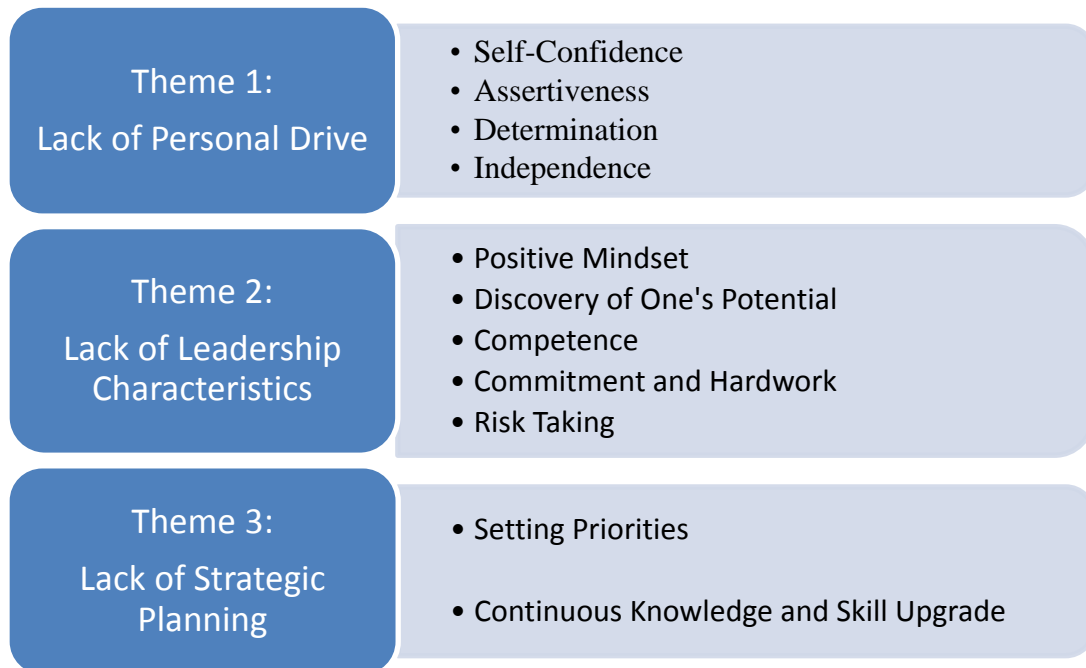
Personality as an explanatory variable for critical occupational and career choices has been critiqued as unstable, thus showing a potential problem (Colbert, et al., 2014). The validity of personality as an explanatory variable has been questioned by various authorities. According to Heckman, et al (2006), and Mueller and Plug (2006), personality trait is considered as endogenous and unstable; it may be influenced by labour market factors and even organizational and workplace structure, practices and patterns of interactions. With that said, personality trait is suggested to be only a predictor for leadership emergence and leadership effectiveness; thus efforts must be made to engender the right traits in individual aspiring for leadership roles.

Results and Discussion

Three distinct themes and eleven sub-themes were identified from the responses gathered from the participants of the study. The study participants shared experiences as to the successes and challenges women face as they progress through their career lives into senior leadership positions within the corporate world. Suggestions on personal success factors were shared by participants based on individual experiences. These factors are discussed and analysed in turns.

Figure 1

Themes and Subthemes



Source: Field data, 2016

Lack of personal drive

Most of the study participants expressed that, women who are assertive and confident, and are not frightened to say what they believe in, have moved up the career ladder into senior leadership. Participants expressed that sadly, some women lack the drive to pursue higher career heights. One participant admitted that, some women ‘really don’t come up to speed’ when it comes to exhibiting leadership traits. Some women lack the aspiration, confidence, and commitment to achieve higher heights. One participant stated emphatically that “most women don’t believe in themselves, they do not have confidence and do not have the vision of being at the top”. To support this, another participant blatantly confessed that, “if I should aim at becoming the CEO of a bank, am I not being too ambitious”? Participant perceived that women with high career dreams are tagged by others within the society as being too assertive and aggressive in the negative way. For the fear of being stereotyped as unfeminine, some women

within the Ghanaian society will not want to step out to display leadership traits that lead to leader emergence.

Women lack the confidence and the boldness to determine and aspire for greater height as far as society is concern. Colbert et al, (2014) described individuals who are emotionally unstable, lacking great sense of security, and being overly anxious or distracted from their work as those high on neuroticism personality trait, and not qualify for leadership roles. Women have been observed to be scoring higher scores on personality traits that inadvertently undermine their leadership emergence and appointment. Additionally, from participants' experience some women exhibit low conscientious and extraversion traits at the workplace making women unfit for leadership roles. Sheerin (2012) however established that an individual's personality traits, either inherent or of a learned nature has greater positive effect on occupational choice than cognitive ability. Thus women who do not display personality trait that are congruent with leadership traits do not stand a chance for higher leadership roles and higher career prospects (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011; Livingston, 2013).

Lack of leadership characteristics

Participants of the study shared that some women do not display characteristics needed for higher leadership roles. Participants expressed that, women perceive themselves as substandard and subservient to men, and therefore feel they 'cannot' stand up to the leadership task; however women with the willpower, high sense of independence, and confidence in their own ability to be successful at tasks are able to take higher challenges of leadership roles. Participants asserted that the acquisition of higher leadership roles in the corporate world is dependent on the individual. One participant stated this: "I think acquisition of leadership role boils down to the individual; it boils down to the mindset". Another participant expressed that "if

as an individual, you see yourself as capable, as competent ... people will react to you accordingly”. According to Colbert et al, (2014), conscientious individuals with the passion for hard work and performance-driven are considered as high performers. Thus individual women who lack conscientious traits of competence, commitment and hard work are not viewed as emerging leaders for higher leadership roles.

The inability to discover one’s potential, is perceived as a distinct factor that inhibits career progression. Study participants shared that some women are afraid to display their potential for fear that they would be tagged as “unfeminine”. In addition, participants shared that most women do not take up challenging roles for fear of failure, women are considered as risk averse than the male counterparts. Participants described the corporate leadership as “male-dominated”; thus, the discovery of one’s potential, and taking up challenging tasks is suggested to be the key to unlocking women’s potential to break through the ‘walls’ and ‘glass ceiling’ into higher senior leadership roles. Consistent with previous literature, Sheerin (2012) described an individual’s self-efficacy as an individual’s perception and belief in their own ability to be successful at a particular task or their belief or perception regarding their career success.

Lack of strategic planning

Women in the corporate world are faced with the challenge of balancing the family life and the demands at the workplace. Combining demands of the family life and the demands at the workplace place a toll on a woman’s career ambition. Participants expressed that “having the right exposure” through training helps women in developing themselves for senior leadership roles. Participants further expressed that ‘education is a given’ and ‘goes beyond the academics’; thus, it is imperative for women to be trained academically and professionally for higher career prospects. Study participants shared that women who strategically plan for career growth,

continuously train themselves for the job, and pursue higher education, are those who easily make it into higher leadership roles. Consistent with literature, Colbert et al, (2014) stated that individuals who are high on openness to experience, and open to new ideas, are better suited to adapt to the more dynamic environments typically found in leadership roles. Thus, individual women who seek to continuously upgrade knowledge and skills are better suited for leadership roles.

In summary, study participants expressed that women are limited by their inability to expressed leadership personality traits such as conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism and openness to new ideas at the workplace. From participants' perspectives, attaining leadership positions must be strategically planned as an objective, and not left to chance. Thus key traits required for leadership emergence and effectiveness to close the persistent gap in gender leadership are to be displayed for recognition and consideration at the workplace. In conclusion, study participants observed that women are found to be protective of their image, and would not wish to sacrifice personal comfort for career heights that might lead to backlash and double bind (Livingston, 2013).

Conclusion and Practical Recommendations

Given the few opportunities available for leadership position in the corporate world, women are expected to develop the leadership traits required for leadership roles, and focus on promoting themselves for recognition. Participants recommend that women in the corporate world must display the passion for leadership roles at the workplace. Women are to go the extra mile and take up higher challenges to beat the competition at the workplace for recognition and promotion. Participants observed that women in the banking sector, on daily basis, go through the unconscious biases at the workplace, and these biases limit their abilities to display the drive

that is congruent with leadership characteristics. The obvious implication is that women who are in leadership positions had to display the requisite leadership traits such as assertiveness, confidence, responsible and productive and with high levels of aspirations to meet expectations for higher leadership roles (Colbert, et al., 2014).

In addition to developing personal characteristics, study participants perceived that women who make it to senior leadership positions are those who are able to set right priorities through careful planning and determination, and continuously train themselves academically and professionally for higher roles. Given the dual roles women in the corporate world play, planning personal career life to set clear career visions, allocating appropriate resources for career growth, and working at achieving set goals could help women to move from the lower levels of career into higher leadership roles. Ganguli, Hausmann, and Viarengo (2014) supported that higher educational attainment allows women to increase their expected lifetime labour force participation. In addition, Jackson (2009) established that continuous and higher education develops confidence, broadens one's perspective, communication, and leadership skills. Thus, women in leadership must trained themselves and aspire for higher roles to help in closing the gap in gender leadership.

The study believes that these practical recommendations will raise and unleash the leadership potentials in women aspiring and pursuing leadership careers, and to close the persistent gap in gender leadership. The study observed that personality traits only serve as contributing factors, and not as the sole predictor to leadership emergence and effectiveness (Ozer, & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Sheerin, 2012). Thus, the study findings provide opportunities for further research into the phenomenon of gender gap in leadership.

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