UNDERSTANDING THE PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS: A STUDY OF WOMEN IN TOP POSITIONS IN QUASI-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine characteristics that influence women performance in management/leadership position in "quasi-government" organizations in Zimbabwe. The study was motivated by female under-representation in management/leadership in "quasi-government" organizations such as parastatals, local authorities, education and health departments, where women are few than men in terms of employment. In order to achieve the main purpose of the study, a mixed method research was used together with concurrent triangulation design to collect primary data. The sample size used was 302 participants. The sample was chosen using stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. The data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis were employed in order to reflect on the findings of the study. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study show that women in "quasi-government" organisations possess diverse leadership characteristics like their male counterparts. The same findings points to unique characteristics that are a resultant of women making and socialisation. Such characteristics gave them comparative advantage over men. These include being visionary, caring, tolerant, collaborative, empathetic, persistent and humble. The findings also showed that women in leadership positions perform equally good or even better than men. Furthermore, the analysis of data evidenced that the performance of women in "quasi-government" organisation in leadership roles in Zimbabwe is partly due to some culturally constructed barriers which prevent women to climb up the organizational ladder. Overall, the study concludes that there is a leadership gap between women and men in "quasi-government" organisations in Zimbabwe. The society values discourage women to occupy top management/leadership positions regardless of their astute characteristics, qualifications and leadership qualities.

Keywords: Strategic Performance, Women Empowerment, Organization.

INTRODUCTION

Statistically, women remain low in management and leadership positions, in spite of the call at all levels to improve gender balance at workplaces (European Commission, 2013; Lari, 2016; Hora, 2014; Maseko, 2013). For instance, globally, women occupy only 25% of senior management positions, despite the fact that they are the majority of the workforce of most organizations. This is an indication that gender inequality persists in management and leadership

positions worldwide (Broughton & Miller, 2009; Mcelhaney & Smith, 2017). Thus, it is generally accepted that women occupy less management and leadership positions nearly in all spheres of employment and *"quasi-government"* organisations are no exception to this widely held perspective (Kosar & Jamie, 2013; Mead & Warren, 2016; Park & Cho, 2011).

Female under-representation in management/leadership is observed in *"quasi-government"* organizations such as parastatals, local authorities, education and health departments, where women outnumber men (Mead & Warren, 2016). Cases of the difficulties in accessing top management/leadership positions exist for women in these institutions. There are few women in the top management/leadership of quasi-government organizations with an average of 30% and 20% at middle level and senior management respectively (Park & Cho, 2011). For instance, women constitute only 25% (14/54) of African ministers of health and 24% (12/50) of directors of global health centers (Maseko, 2013). In addition, women accounted for 16.6% of board members of large publicly listed companies. In countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda only 14% are executive managers and only 7.1% are directors and general managers of institutions (Lunyolo et al., 2014). Hence, further inquiry is required to improve this phenomenon in the Zimbabwean scenario.

Women are often deemed to lack the characteristics required to be successful leaders. It was thus of paramount importance that the characteristics of successful women in leadership were explored as it was anticipated by the researcher that conducting this study would assist women to identify these characteristics within themselves and make a significant contribution towards an increase in the number of women assuming leadership roles.

As a result of the above perception that women lack the characteristics required to be successful leaders in their fields of expertise, a vast number of efficient, competent and highly-skilled women are not granted the opportunity to occupy key leadership positions in the corporate world. This is to say that women should have equal opportunities with men for top management/leadership positions. Failure to provide equal opportunities is practically the same as to injustice against women.

General perception is that women lack the ability to lead. It is society's thinking that women are inferior beings in territories of leadership. According to Moir (2009), leadership is one of the topics that have been highly dissected and discussed. Mostly, the role of women in leadership positions has been the focus of much debate in the last two decades (Pflanz et al., 2011). This is because women continue to lag behind men in management/leadership positions. Hence, there is still a persistence of inherent gender inequalities in some domains such as management/leadership representation. The rate of women professionals who move into senior management positions decreases as one goes up the ladder. There is belief that the motherly characteristics of women outshine their ability to lead. They are perceived to be incapable and ineffective leaders. Women are undermined and deemed to lack skills and characteristics that equip one to be a successful leader. The management/leadership gap is prevalent at middle and senior-level positions. However, given the almost equal percentage of men and women in low to middle management/leadership positions, one would expect to have seen a stable rise of women in senior management positions in the past decades (Ford & Rohini, 2011). Nevertheless, entry of women to top positions has been slow and the proportion of women promoted to executive management positions has remained low (Broughton & Miller, 2009). Even when they are highly qualified and in spite of the mainstreaming of more women into public life in the last 20 years (1995-2015), women remain less visible in top management/leadership positions. This is even though more women are getting educated and hold more jobs worldwide than ever before. Thus,

women have less access to top management/leadership positions, irrespective of their characteristics and qualifications for those positions. Women continue to lag behind men in top positions. They are particularly outnumbered by men in management and leadership positions (European Commission, 2013). The management and leadership norm in *"quasi-government"* organizations of Zimbabwe continue to be male-dominated, which has led to gender stereotypes on the performance of female managers/leaders. Furthermore, traditional perceptions of women as inferior to men also continue to prevail *in "quasi-government"* organizations as many people invoke the preservation of social injustice and African culture to justify the subordination of women. Leader characteristics and socio-cultural factors appear to determine who should be in management and leadership position, literally and symbolically; hence, blocking women from attaining high-level positions.

The objective of this study is to examine characteristics that influence performance of women in managerial/leadership positions in quasi-government organisations in Zimbabwe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Study Characteristics of Women Leadership

The discussion focuses on the characteristics of women in leadership and assesses how they determine leadership. The literature indicates a number of women-oriented characteristics of leadership that are deemed to make women better leaders than their male counterparts (McCleskey 2004). In view of the transformational leadership theory women leaders seem to possess the required characteristics of being socialised, communicative, interactive, consultative, constructive, inclusive, sensitive, and nurturing. This is a leadership theory that focuses on attempting to explain how leaders can accomplish extra-ordinary things against the odds such as turning around the failing company, founding a successful company, discrimination, glass ceiling, etc. Thus, transformational leadership embodies much of the relational characteristics that are associated with women in leadership roles (Zacko-Smith, 2007).

Multiple other terms have also tried to capture the essence of what is particular to women's ways of leading. As they entered the workforce, some suggest that women learned to 'play the game' by adopting traditional masculine characteristics, dressing like men, and aligning themselves with men (Anyango, 2015; Smith & Squires, 2016). However, as women align themselves with men, adopting and replicating core patriarchal values and leadership methodologies, they both gain power and are subordinated to the men with whom their power resides. These new characteristics may both help and hinder the advancement of women. Such characteristics that help to advance women' vision (Maseko, 2013). Vision guides the organisation to the goals it aims to achieve. It functions as a pointer to indicate the direction where the organisation is heading for the understanding of every corresponding individual, stakeholder, and authority. Vision provides a picture which articulates goals and direction as well as ways of accomplishment. It is described by Smith & Squires (2016), as a goal-oriented mental view that directs people's behaviour.

In addition, many studies have concluded that women are relationship-oriented and democratic (Gobena, 2014; Kadyrkulova, 2008; Le 2011; Mbepera, 2015). Relation-oriented is also consistent with the general characteristics of leadership. These characteristics of women leaders are activated in other leadership arenas women attend. Others like Billsberry (2009) and Sandell (2012) claim that another characteristic of women leadership is being more socialised

when interacting with people. Socialisation constitutes the people-oriented nature of women according to social theorists.

With reference to decision-making, Jepson (2010), argues that women most of the time support consensual agreement. They tend to confront obstacles, consult people, and seek consensus before finalising decisions. Such decisions are based on the construction of plans and strategies for the organisation, something the women leaders are more capable of doing, according to European Commission (2013). In addition, women have been commended for making fair decisions. However, some have found that, these characteristics make very little difference in the results men and women achieve as leaders (Elliott & Clifford 2014; Ely et al., 2011; Fairhurst & Grant 2010). Furthermore, Zacko-Smith (2007) reveals that female leaders are more inclusive, interpersonally sensitive, and nurturing; Torrance (2012) argues that although these particular specialities of women designate their effective leadership styles, they have very little impact on the outcomes.

In addition, women leadership characteristics may be denoted from the feminist leadership. Feminist leadership is a broad overview that focuses on Social justice and inclusion. Others refer it to certain feminine characteristics which are valuable in today's organizations. As a consequence, women leadership is most commonly defined by the differences between femininity and masculinity (Gobena, 2014; Le, 2011).

The leadership characteristics are infused into societal expectations of how women are supposed to behave and affect the manner in which people interact (Lucas, 2015) and the value that is placed on those interactions. In most cases women are linked to famine leadership characteristics. Feminine characteristics include social skills and social interaction, conversational style of communication, acceptance of differences, being multi-skilled and working well in groups (O'Neil & Domingo, 2015). These characteristics do not imply the gender of the leader; they merely represent different kind of leadership behaviour which can be applied by both women and men. The characteristics are considered to influence decision making, problem solving and achievements. However, some women adapt to masculinity characteristics in order to conform to cultural and historical perspectives of leadership.

Council (2017) posits that the following characteristics are synonymous with being a woman in a leadership role: the ability to persuade, the ability to collaborate, the ability to multi skill, the ability to care, the ability to tolerate, the ability to empathize, the ability to build and develop teams, possessing self-confidence and the ability to challenge conventional thinking. In an attempt to elaborate on the aforesaid, Council (2017) indicated that women are deemed to be significantly more persuasive as a result of their ability to empathize and engage with others from an emotional perspective. Women leaders are said to be tolerant as they handle the cheating husband and mischievous child. Women leaders are said to be extremely visionary as they set concrete goals. Women leaders are often deemed to possess the innate ability to motivate others and build unity within teams. Women in leadership possess a high self-esteem and never cease to believe in their ability to succeed even when obstacles obscure their path. Taking into consideration that women are often faced with challenges and obstacles with regards to leadership, they are courageous and persistence (Council, 2017).

Even though leaders do not consciously make decisions based on their gender, the different way of perceiving things is still present. The feminine way of perceiving entities is broader, and more aspects that might have an influence are taken into consideration (Katuna, 2014). It is typical for women to see the relations between different things and hence have a clearer vision of the bigger picture. Achieving goals is important in femininity as well, but the

way of achieving them is equally important. Intuition is important in the process of achieving goals. It plays a part in this progress and the entity is discovered quicker (Hora, 2014). However, the feminine way of perceiving has its downside too. Because of the amount of information and different aspects that are identified, it can be easy to get stuck or slowed down.

Feminine way of communicating is horizontal, which means that it strengthens the relationships between people, creates team spirit and equality (Rummery & Fine, 2012). In addition, Women leaders are often depicted as relational leaders (Pflanz et al., 2011). The characteristics associated with this type of leadership include: caring about people, seeking to create and maintain relationships, empowering others, and transforming individuals and society (Patel & Buiting, 2013; Stoker et al., 2012). Hence, women leaders are described as developing a caring, nurturing environment that fosters relationships.

Performance of Women in Management/Leadership Positions

Most women continue to suffer from occupational segregation in the workplace and rarely break through the so-called glass ceiling in public life which separates them from top-level management and professional positions (Smith & Squires, 2016). Again, even the few that push through to occupy top leadership/management positions face serious challenges that can and do limit their performance in these positions (Snyder, 2013). This is a serious concern as it reinforces existing stereotypes of women's ability to perform at the top level of public life and thus perpetuates a fierce cycle of marginalization and disempowerment of women.

According to Schreiber (2013), despite women forming 50% of the world's population, only a paltry 2-3% have managed to break the glass ceiling in top leadership. This disparity has continued despite the fact that women are equally if not more qualified than men, they possess the required technical know-how and are more than willing to serve in the top corporate leadership. This gender imbalance has continued to exist despite passing of several legislations by governments to provide for gender balancing (Qian, 2016). Several international declarations have also been made to address this disparity over the years but very little change if any has been achieved to this end (Crosby-Hillier, 2012).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used the mixed methods approach, which involves conducting research by combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study. The quantitative approach was used to collect numerical data in order to test the measure of dispersion. The qualitative approach was used because of its strength in collecting in-depth information based on the experiences, beliefs, feelings and behaviour of females in leadership *"quasi-government"* organisations. The study used the concurrent triangulation design to collect data. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time. The target population of the study include government institutions, local authorities and parastatals in Harare, Midlands and Mashonaland provinces. The study's target population was around 1400, and a sample of 302 respondents with a 95% level of confidence and 5% margin of error; comprising of fifty-five (55) board of directors, twenty-five (25) Chief executive officers and one hundred and ninety-seven (197) senior managers. The study used stratified random sampling to put the population under well-defined groups. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their expertise and sex. Data was collected using structured-questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data

was analysed using SPSS version 25.0 while qualitative data was analysed through thematic analysis.

Reliability Statistics

Table 1 CASE PROCESSING SUMMARY		N	%
Cases	Valid	283	100
	Excluded	0	0
	Total	283	100

Table 1 shows the case summary. A List wise deletion was based on all variables in the procedure. The Cronbach's Alpha is 0.508 for all the characteristics.

Table 2 CRONBACH'S ALPHA SCORE FOR THE ITEMS THAT CONSTITUTED THE QUESTIONNAIRE		
Characteristic	**No of Items**	**Cronbach's Alpha**
Resilient	1	0.734
Charismatic	1	0.655
Committed	1	0.818
Good Communicator	1	0.508
Courageous	1	0.655
Initiative	1	0.734
Listening	1	0.818
Problem Solving	1	0.734
Servant Hood	1	0.655
Industrious	1	0.818

The Table 2 above reflects the cronbach's alpha score for the items that constituted the questionnaire. A reliability coefficient of 0.60 or higher is considered as *"acceptable"*. All except *"good communicator"* are above the measure. Good communicator could have failed due to interpretation of characteristic by respondents.

Table 3 ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX[a]		
Characteristics	**Component**	
	1	**2**
Resilient	-0.07	0.867
Charismatic	0.356	0.732
Committed	0.07	0.867
Good Communicator	0.542	0.586
Courageous	0.806	0.169
Initiative	0.888	0.061
Listening	0.356	0.732
Problem Solving	0.07	0.867
Servant hood	0.542	0.586
Industrious	0.888	0.061

	Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
Table 4 KAISER-MEYER-OLKIN				
		Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Resilient	0.711	345.872	10	0
Charismatic	0.57	205.585	10	0
Committed	0.676	345.997	3	0
Good Communicator	0.603	88.146	6	0
Courageous	0.56	205.585	10	0
Initiative	0.711	345.872	10	0
Listening	0.676	345.872	3	0
Problem Solving	0.57	205.585	3	0
Servant hood	0.603	88.146	6	0
Industrious	0.711	245.872	10	0

The matrix tables are preceded by a summarised Tables 3 & 4 that reflects the results of KMO and Bartlett's Test. The requirement is that Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy should be greater than 0.50 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity less than 0.05. In all instances, the conditions are satisfied which allows for the factor analysis procedure which also was satisfied, hence justification of presented results.

Findings and Quantitative Analysis of Characteristics of Women in Management/Leadership positions

Characteristics of women in management/leadership are so varied and the common characteristics of women managers or leaders are resiliency, initiative, problem solving, industrious and empathetic. In order to answer the characteristic question, the respondents were asked to indicate the characteristics they have in   management/leadership positions in *"quasi-government"* organisations. This was   important in order to determine if these characteristics affected their performance at workplace. The results of a survey are presented in Table 5 and Graph in Figure 1 and were quantitatively analyzed below.

A survey was conducted and it showed that; 189 (67%) participants were resilient to all forces militating against women performance, while 94 (33%) participants performed due to impact of other characteristics and other factors; 182 (64%) participants used charisma to influence their performance, while 101 (36%) participants were driven by other factors to perform; 185 (66%) participants were committed to their work and they performed very well, while 97 (35%) participants performed due to influence of other factors and characteristics; 186 (66%) participants were just good and that was enough to cause them to perform; 97 (34%) participants were influenced by other factors and characteristics to perform; 190 (67%) participants were good communicators hence it promoted performance among them, while 93 (33%) were influenced by other factors and characteristics to perform; 183 (65%) participants were driven by courage to perform, while 100 (35%) were influenced by other factors and characteristics to perform.

|	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
**Table 5**		
**CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT/LEADERSHIP POSITIONS**		
1	Resilient	189	67%
	Others	94	33%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
2	Charismatic	182	64%
	Others	101	36%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
3	Committed	186	66%
	Others	97	34%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
4	Good Communicator	190	67%
	Others	93	33%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
5	Courageous	183	65%
	Others	100	35%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
6	Initiative	188	66%
	Others	95	34%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
7	Listening	183	64%
	Others	101	36%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
8	Problem solving	193	68%
	Others	90	32%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
9	Servant hood	190	67%
	Others	93	33%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
10	Industrious	209	74%
	Others	74	26%
	Total	**283**	**100%**
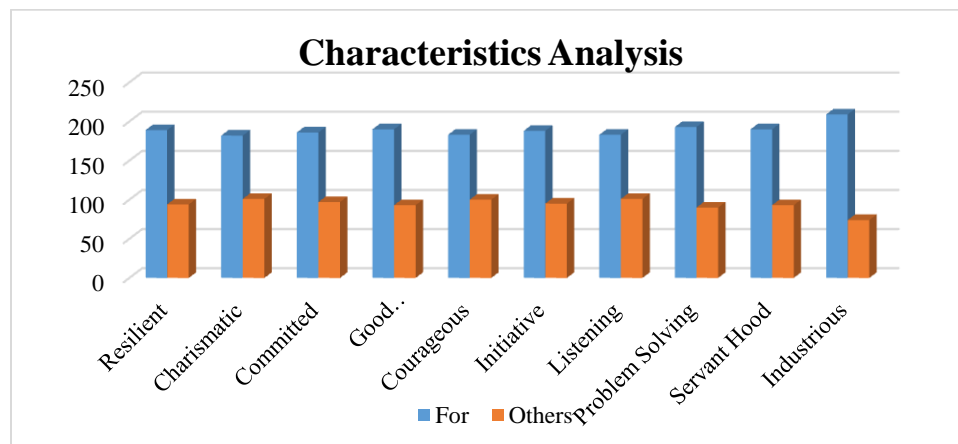
FIGURE 1
ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT/LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

The same survey conducted indicated that; 188 (66%) participants were initiative this pushed them to perform, while the remainder 95 (34%) participants were influenced by others factors to be the cause to women leaders' performance; 183 (64%) participants indicated that listening characteristic was a driver to their performance, while 101 (36%) participants were influenced by other factors to drive women performance; 193 (68%) participants were influenced by problem solving as a characteristic that caused them to performance, 90 (32%) were sure that other factors are the cause for women performance; 190 (67%) participants were servant hood and were driven to perform, while 93 (33%) participants were influenced by other factor perform; and 209 (74%) participants indicated that industrious characteristic was the force that kept them performing, while 74 (26%) were influenced by to other factors that justified performance of women leaders. The frequency table summarized that women had a diverse management/leadership characteristics which drove them to perform any given task, hence they qualifying them as good leaders.

Findings from the survey points to a very clear picture that there are generic characteristics which every leader must have to be a good performer. The frequencies from the table pointed to the universality of the characteristics that have been forwarded, they all revolve around 66%, and the outliers were 64% and 74%.

Findings and Qualitative Analysis of Characteristics of Women in Management/Leadership Positions

Qualitatively this objective was analysed and was aimed at examining the characteristics of women in management/leadership positions in *"Quasi-government"* organisations in Zimbabwe. This was important to determine if their qualities were in conformity with the expected characteristics of a manager/leader. In order to answer the research objective, participants were asked to describe their characteristics. The following themes emerged from the data namely being visionary, caring, tolerant, collaborative, multi skilled, empathetic, persistent, and humble and team playing.

Visionary Leadership

A good leader needs to not only be an expert in their work, but to see the bigger picture, and understand their role in the wider work sphere. Women who participated in this study indicated that vision is one of the common characteristics held by women in managerial/leadership positions regardless of the organisation. Many of the women interviewed expressed similar ideas about their own leadership as well as that of leaders they would want to follow. According to the participants, vision is one of the attribute that defined the qualities of a good and eligible manager/leader. They argued that any leader either men or women would like to drive the organisation from the present to the future state. During the interviews, the participants had the following to say:

"As women, we are people who can see the path ahead and who can inspire others. We have unconditional belief that we can drive the organisations beyond their present state".
"As well, leadership is not a person or a position. It is a compound relationship between people and a leader aimed at driving them to the future cause of the organisation".

Women leaders are deemed to set specific goals and are said to be religious that they commit to such goals and never stray from the path they chose to follow (Council, 2017). These

responses show that being visionary can be found in women, hence, this makes them good leaders in an organisational set up.

Caring Leadership

From the participants it must be noted that women are gentler in approach and conduct of themselves. The participants stated that women's approach to leadership as less hardened and aligning. Gengan's (2018) indicated that women leaders are nurturing and adopt a humanistic and soft approach in the execution of their functions. Women who participated in this study indicated that women by their very nature are caring managers/leaders. They argued that the nurturing ability of women enable them to exercise caring leadership in the work context. In view of the participants, this leadership quality enables women to exercise fairness. Women also argued that the caring leadership quality possessed by women is embraced through their upbringing. During the interview, women had the following to say;

"... You see what my brother, our nurturing abilities as women makes us to be caring people. The fact that as mothers we are expected to love our children and share home resources with them equally engraves us with the habit to care for everyone. As a result, we are able to exercise it at work. This makes us to be good leaders."
"What I have noticed is that when women become leaders they are competent because of the mother qualities we have. We are able to care for the employees in the manner that we care for our children"

Thus, the varied responses given by women in *"Quasi-government"* organisations show that women have caring management/leadership qualities which is developed through their up bring from childhood. This shows that socialization play an important role in imparting leadership qualities.

Tolerance Leadership

The analysis of the data showed that the participants perceived women managers/leaders as people who are tolerant. According to the participants, they are groomed to tolerate different situations and behaviours. It was argued that through socialization, women are made to tolerate stubborn children in their home. Further, they are also socialized to tolerate cheating husbands within their marriages. Women who participated in this study had the following to say;

"As women we are able to tolerate our stubborn children at home, so when we come to the work as leaders or managers, we tolerate the employees who we manage as our own children. We tolerate their deviating views and shortcomings and gradually try to correct them".
"... I am a mother so I try my best to tolerate and correct my subordinates the same way I do to my children at home. I really appreciate any divergent views and sometimes they help me to become a good leader".
"I just treat my subordinates as individuals with distinctive circumstances. Since they come from differing background, they need to be dealt with individually".

Thus, women who participated in this study agreed that they are very tolerant when it comes to handling the behaviours of their employees in their organisation. Again, it can be seen that social structures are contributing immensely to the formation of leadership qualities.

Collaborative Leadership

The concept of collaboration was repeatedly mentioned during the interviews. It was found out that women are good collaborators. It is a leadership style which is highly favored by women. According to the women who participated in this study, naturally, women enjoy an

environment of connectedness, where they share ideas and responsibilities. They strive to share their responsibilities with people around them. Women who participated in this study had the following to say:

> *"Talking to others and sharing ideas with them has been highly beneficial to me as a leader".*

> *"This connection as a leader is what worked for many women? According to their shared experiences".*

> *"Collaboration skills help women to be better teammates and also* stronger *leaders, because we see others as actual people, not just work producers".*

These response shows that women enjoy working in an environment that promotes collaboration and connectivity. Hence, collaborative leadership is a quality that women seem to cherish so much in their leadership style.

Multi Skilling

A leader is at times required to do more than one task at a time. Work environment at times subject leaders to do more than one task in view to balance the act and beat timelines. Women by virtue of their socialization in the home are experts, such that in the morning or evening after work, every family member relies on them to go to work or go to bed on a full tummy. According to participants women are endowed with multi skilling character which no men can match. Women perceive themselves better drivers of organizations who can multi skill and push organisation to their desired destination. Where there is one woman an organisation would employ more than one man to function to women set standards. During interviews, participants had the following to say:

> *"My brother women are God sent, in the home, family of five all get served and never in their life time do they report for work, school or college late."*

> *"Women have a special magic where they can feed the baby, cook supper and iron following day's clothes..."*

> *"You know what? My importance as a woman is only realised when I am sick or retired from service. Where I managed alone and unappreciated would be replaced by two or more full grown overpaid and ever complaining men."*

Thus, women in this study agreed that they are multi skilled and talented and have naturalness in having more than one task under their control radar at any given time, which tantamount to great savings and labour for quasi-government organisations.

Empathy Leadership

Participants revealed that women always exercise empathy when relating to others. They are able to understand the needs of other people and are aware of their feelings. Women who participated in this study had the following to say:

> *"Leadership is no longer about leading different personalities in the same office but it is about understanding other people's needs and feeling".*

"I have learnt to understand that I need to be aware of the feelings and the needs of various people whom I manage…….. this can make or break my ability to perform as a leader".

Thus, the responses from the participants show that modern leadership has transformed because of the leadership qualities brought by women leaders/managers.

Persistence Leadership

During the interviews persistence was always mentioned, often as the, or one of the, most important characteristics in management/leadership. The women who participated in the study had this to say:

"As a leader, you are going to come across challenges, and sometimes things won't go according to plan… therefore, you need to be persistent which I believe I am good at this".

"I think It's important that we are not discouraged by the occasional barricades in what we have to do, but as women the solution is to look for a fresh way around them and then to persevere".

"I have talked about being empathetic, yes. But I think it's not enough to be able to identify and understand what people want. I think persistence is a great quality and one that we should all look to nurture. The ability to hold on or to get back up after we have been knocked down is essential for us to achieve any real success, because there will be failures along the way of leadership".

These responses show that a leader needs to be persistent throughout the journey of leadership; otherwise, one might fail to be successful. Thus, persistence is an important characteristic in leadership.

Humble Leadership

Humility in leadership seems to be gaining a lot of interest, and for very good reasons. According to the information provided by the participants, women are very humble leaders. It was argued that humbleness makes women to be great leaders because they are willing to learn from others and gain knowledge that take them to better levels. During the interviews, the participants had the following to say;

"I think for long, humility has been associated with low self-esteem, self-degradation, shyness and weakness. But true humility is found in women because we are able to assess both our strengths and weaknesses, and understand our true value in the context of leadership".

"I think what makes us to be good leaders is that we are humble. Humble people like us know that we are part of something far bigger than us. We are both grounded and liberated by our knowledge and abilities which we always want to improve".

Thus, the responses provided by the participants show that most women are humble leaders and this characteristic make them good leaders.

Team Playing

The perceptions and discussions provided by the participants regarding whether women leaders prefer taking decisions in isolation or whether they are team-oriented revealed that women believe in team engagement. This complies with the stipulations of the transformational

leadership theory which was the theoretical framework deployed for the objective of this study. This concept will be further explored below. Stempel et al. (2015) indicated that the transformational leadership theory is synonymous with women in leadership as it embodies many of the characteristics and the conduct displayed by women leaders one of which is that women are team and people-oriented. Furthermore, Caniëls et al. (2018) stated that women leaders stress the importance of motivating others and boosting their morale by engaging with them and taking their perceptions into account. Women leaders prosper when they engage with others (Caniëls et al., 2018).

"We are naturally into friends and believe in work being done with your acquaintances than strangers,"

"There is always an urge to belong to a group and efforts are made to define oneself and position in a group that makes things happen,"

"As a leader results are best got through a trusted team, and involvement of team players is always desired,"

Thus, the responses provided by the participants showed that most women are team players and they ascribe to group associations which give women leaders a competitive advantage over men leaders. The above view corresponds with that of Caniëls et al. (2018) who emphasised the importance of facilitating team interaction to ensure the best possible results. The statement, *"I like to as far as possible to get the team involved. Every different personality contributes to successful team dynamics." "If you put all the suggestions together, you get a better group decision than you would have achieved on your own."* This indicates that women leaders and in this instance, Participant One values team input. The perception further enhances the view proposed by Caniëls et al. (2018). This view correlates with that of Stewart (2006) and it indicated that being a woman leader involves uplifting others especially those that belong to her group, motivating them, inspiring them to reach great heights and be aiding them to become the best versions of themselves.

Northouse (2018) insinuated the importance of generating vision and sharing its importance with the entire team. In doing so, Northouse (2018) indicated that it encourages team inclusivity and reiterates the importance of collaboration to ensure the achievement of common goals. The findings show that women have a diverse combination of characteristics that arm them to perform better than man though cultural beliefs militate and undermine women ability and therefore people do not recognize women as capable of leading. Women who participated in this study indicated that the women have some significant characteristics that are emanating from their socialisation which gives them an advantage over their male counterparts.

Quantitative analysis has made it crystal clear that every leader is required to have base characteristics that anchor them to perform. For women leaders it then becomes a must have in-order to outstand and outshine male counterparts' performance (Council, 2017). It then becomes just for the researchers to say every leader should be endowed with more of; resilience, charisma, commitment, communication, courage, initiation, listening ability, problem solving ability, servant hood and industrious. Qualitatively an extensive description was provided by each participant pertaining to what women leaders exhibited to be the most relevant characteristics.

It was established by scrutinising the literature that to do justice to being a woman leader meant setting concrete goals and remaining committed to them to ensure its materialization. Women's ability to care and forgo personal luxuries to feed their starving kids in the home puts women at an advantage to handle the ungrateful employees in times of upheavals in an

organisation. Upon scarcity or diminishing of resources in an organisation, women leaders can distribute such resources equitably than their male counterparts. Again through the very unselfish characteristic women leaders are skewed to better prioritising system that would favour organisation's desired output.

Women by virtue of being able to tolerate the cheating husband or partner and the mischievous boy in the home put the women leader at an advantage to handle unfaithful and cheating employees. Women are known to be nurturing by nature from their taking care of toddlers, makes them suitable to groom staff to desired performers and organisation to desired level. Women are naturally collaborators through their ability to belong to groupings make them able to perform in teams. Women are known to handle many tasks at one go which is an inherent advantage over men leaders as they are bound to perform and produce more than their male counterparts as supported by Gengan (2018). Women are very persistence by nature hence they achieve results better than male colleagues.

Women are known for being too concerned and empathetic for others they are not related to. It is a socialization that positions them at an advantage over men leading organisations. Women are also identified with humbleness and team playing. This observation is supported by the view presented by Gengan (2018) and the responses provided by the participants validate such perceptions. The aim was to identify the core characteristics affiliated with successful women leaders.

The findings extracted by engaging with participants revealed that there are specific characteristics exhibited by successful women leaders. They are said to be fierce in the pursuit of their goals and never deviate from a plan of action (Council, 2017). Furthermore, their nurturing side enables them to motivate and inspire others permitting for harmony to be enjoyed (Council, 2017). O'Neil & Domingo (2015) posits that, whilst the list of predominant characteristics is extensive, the aforementioned elements are just a few of the regularly characteristics by successful women leaders, which is in contrast to the observation stumbled upon by the researchers, that women are incapable of leading due to lack of competencies.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings the researcher concludes that women leaders in quasi-governmental organisations exhibits the following characteristics; resilience, charisma, commitment, communication, courage, initiation, listening ability, problem solving ability, servant hood and industrious. Qualitatively an extensive description was provided by each participant pertaining to what women leaders displayed to be the most relevant characteristics and modeled such were visionary, caring, tolerance, multi skilling, empathy, persistence, humble team playing. These characteristics have placed women at an advantageous place position to manage and lead quasi-government organisations as men or even better. Armed with unique qualified characteristics women do emerge better leaders than men. They are a cut above men when it comes to leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➢ There is need to strengthen and upgrade the mechanisms for monitoring equality in employment.
➢ There is need for a recruitment process that solicits for leadership characteristics that stimulates performance.
➢ There is need for advocacy and awareness on the comparative and competitive advantages women have over men leaders.

> ➢ There is need to create a more favourable work environment which fosters gender equality and the career advancement of women.
> ➢ There should be policy shift towards the promotion of gender balance and improvement of women proportions in management.

Recommendation for Future Research

The study recommends that the findings presented in this study can be strengthened by using a larger sample of the population. The study also recommends that research instrument such as focus group discussion and experimental design can be used to reinforce qualitative data and quantitative data respectively. The quantitative results can be strengthened by imploring regression analysis. Focus group discussions can be conducted with experts in leadership that exudes characteristics that excites performance and management in order to gain in-depth understanding of the factors affecting women in leadership positions. It is also recommended that future research may investigate the individual characteristics that are sector specific that may affect women in management/leadership positions in Zimbabwe

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