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Explorations into Sex, Gender and Leadership in the UK Civil Service Part 3. Implications and Research Findings on Leadership
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Introduction

This is the third part of a three part article on the intersection between sex, gender and leadership in the UK Civil Service. It discusses the implications of research presented in the second part of this article before examining leadership in the UK Civil Service.

The first part of this article provided an introduction to our research and a brief literature review, before putting forward some conjectures derived from it. The second part formulated specific null hypotheses derived from the literature review, outlined our research methodology and presented our research findings. These led us to reject all the null hypotheses.

This part of the article begins by exploring the practical implications of our research findings, with particular reference to training and development. It then presents an evidence-based framework for understanding the nature of the transition into leadership, along with some prescriptions for its use. This is relevant to would-be leaders, line managers and human resource professionals, including training and development specialists. It ends with a concluding discussion on the overall research findings.

Practical implications of research on sex and gender in the UK Civil Service

In the first part of this article, we reviewed theory and research into the intersection of sex, gender and leadership, drawing particularly on Powell (2012). We concluded that the playing field that constitutes managerial ranks continues to be tilted in favour of men and behaviours associated with the male stereotype. This is the case despite what leadership theories and field evidence suggest and the softening of attitudes in recent decades.

The evidence from our own research, presented in the second part of this article, confirmed the existence of contrasting gender stereotypes, as well as sex differences in the behaviour of managers in the UK Civil Service. However, such differences were small and there were far greater differences amongst men and women managers than between the average man and women manager. Moreover, differences in behaviour and assessments of behaviour were more strongly linked to context than either sex or gender.

In this the third part of this article, we begin by exploring a little further the findings relating to the importance of context or situation with respect to managerial behaviour. This involves looking specifically at leadership roles and situations and leadership effectiveness. To do this, we put forward a further two null hypotheses on leadership and present additional research findings that lead us to reject these hypotheses.

This further discussion enables us to provide an evidence-based framework for understanding the nature of the transition into leadership, along with some basic prescriptions on its use. We then use this and our other research findings to look specifically at gender roles and work roles, and at sex differences in managerial behaviour in the Civil Service. Finally, we discuss our research findings as a whole.

Further research findings on situational differences

In the second part of this article, we described research showing that the behaviour of individuals varied in different situations, and that different behaviours were valued differently in different situations. Differences in behaviour and assessments of behaviour were also found to be more strongly linked to context than either sex or gender. These findings highlighted the importance of matching behaviour patterns to the demands of particular work situations.

Here, we look specifically at leadership roles and situations i.e. those roles and situations where individuals were in positions of seniority, with high status and high power, significant control over resources and a strategic role. These were contrasted with positions of followership, where the opposite is the case.

From our earlier literature review, we expected to find differences in the frequency with which behaviours are used in leadership and followership roles and situations, and differences in behaviours considered effective in such situations, with the key to effectiveness residing in neither 'male/masculine' nor 'female/feminine' behaviours.

We formulated these ideas in terms of the two additional null hypotheses. These asserted that there was no evidence indicating:

1. Differences in behaviour linked to leadership situations.
2. Leader effectiveness linked solely to either 'male/masculine' or 'female/feminine' behaviours.

Null hypothesis 1: There is no evidence linking leadership behaviour to leadership situations

We assessed leadership situations on a single scale combining measures of seniority, power and status, control over resources and strategic role. We looked at the degree of correlation, and its statistical significance, between the frequency of use of particular behaviours and the leadership situation score.

Results are shown in the Appendix. 23 of the 40 relationships are statistically significant at or above the 0.1 level, and 14 of these are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. It is clear that there is a very strong relationship between the extent to which individuals have a leadership role and the frequency with which they use a range of behaviours. The null hypothesis that there is no evidence linking leadership behaviour to leadership situations is, therefore, rejected.

See Manning (2013) for a wider discussion of leadership in different contexts.

Null hypothesis 2: There is no evidence linking leadership effectiveness solely to either male/masculine or female/feminine patterns of behaviour.

In the first part of this article, we stated that field evidence refutes the stereotypes that men are better leaders and better leaders are masculine. We concluded that effective leadership today requires a combination of stereotypically 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviours.

To test this null hypothesis, we needed to assess leadership effectiveness and measure sex and gender differences in behaviour. We could then examine the degree of correlation between profiles for leadership effectiveness and for sex and gender differences.

Leadership effectiveness was assessed using an index combining three sets of data, namely, behaviours most frequently used in leadership positions, behaviours valued in such positions and behaviours more highly valued in leadership than followership positions. See Appendix for details.

Findings on sex and gender differences in behaviour are described in Appendices 1 and 3 in Part 2 of this article

The correlation between profiles for leadership effectiveness and sex differences in behaviour was -0.06, while that for gender stereotypes was -0.12. This shows a very slightly stronger association between leadership effectiveness and the more 'female' behaviours and stereotype than for more 'male' behaviours and stereotype.

However, the differences described are so small as to be of little theoretical or practical significance, beyond providing grounds for rejecting the above null hypothesis. Our findings suggest that effective leadership requires a combination of more stereotypically 'male/masculine' behaviours and more 'female/feminine' behaviours, as detailed in the following table on effective leadership.

The left-hand column lists leadership competences, the second column (Score) the degree of correlation between behaviour use and leadership effectiveness, the third column (Stereotype) shows links to gender stereotypes (FS = feminine stereotype, MS = masculine stereotype), and the fourth column (Behaviour) shows links to sex differences in behaviour (FB = female behaviour, MB = male behaviour).

Leadership effectiveness, sex and gender

Leadership competences, in rank order	Score	Stereotype	Behaviour
Essential competences			
1. Showing commitment	0.44***	FS	-
2. Envisioning change	0.38***	-	-
3. Promoting team working	0.35**	FS	FB
4. Building a support network	0.32**	FS	-
5. Clarifying roles	0.30**	MS	FB
6. Controlling work	0.29*	MS	-
7. Praising and recognising	0.28*	FS	FB
8. Building coalitions	0.27*	MS	FB
9. Planning activities	0.26*	MS	FB
10. Co-ordinating activities	0.26*	FS	FB
Desirable competences			
11. Monitoring operations	0.22	MS	-
12. Encouraging innovation	0.22	-	MB
13. Generating security	0.21	FS	-
14. Providing support	0.20	FS	FB
15. Developing members	0.20	FS	-
16. Scanning the environment	0.17	MS	FB
Supplementary competences			
17. Consulting members	0.13	-	-
18. Taking risks	0.13	-	-
19. Supplying information	0.09	-	-
20. Working flexibly	0.08	FS	MB
21. Empowering	0.07	MS	MB
22. Using sanctions	0.06	MS	MB

The framework as a whole, along with the specific behaviours, can be used to guide to leadership development, providing a standard against which actual behaviour and development can be judged. It is an evidence-based framework that can be used for recruitment and selection, performance management, and training and development, including leadership development.

The behaviours most strongly associated with leadership effectiveness are:-

1. Presenting a desirable and achievable vision to the team.
2. Showing commitment and enthusiasm for the vision and expecting it from others.
3. Building a network of support for the vision, across the wider organisation.
4. Building a team and promoting team working.
5. Assigning and clarifying roles, responsibilities, activities, objectives and standards.
6. Planning and scheduling work to ensure team activities are carried out effectively.
7. Co-ordinating, unifying and harmonising team activities.

8. Controlling work to ensure standards are met and individuals work to capacity.
9. Providing praise, recognition, appreciation and reward for effective performance.

Before going on to make some general concluding comments, we briefly consider two other specific aspects of our research findings, namely, gender roles and work, and sex differences in behaviour

Gender roles and work roles

The evidence presented in the second and third parts of this article, shows that people at work are judged by at least two sets of standards. These are the extent to which their behaviour is consistent with what is expected of them in their work role, and the extent to which it is consistent with what is expected of them in their gender role.

Our research shows that judgements based on managerial situation play a more important role than those based on gender stereotypes. However, as shown in Part 1, the 'glass ceiling' remains. In this respect, it is worth noting that, in our research samples, males predominated in higher level management posts, and females in lower level roles.

It seems to us to be both appropriate and fair to judge people at work according to the extent that their behaviour fits the demands of their work role and situation. However, we see it as neither appropriate nor fair to judge people against a gender stereotype. This raises the question of what to do about gender stereotypes.

One possibility would be to provide training that challenges gender stereotypes, although there are problems with this approach. Jonsen et al (2010) argued that to do so may ignore real differences in the behaviour of women and men leaders, and may favour those who are atypical and do not fit the stereotype. Kossek and Zonia (1993) found that focusing on stereotypes may actually enhance such stereotypes, while Kaley et al (2006) found that training focused on stereotypes is not followed by increased diversity.

Given that stereotypical assumptions about gender may impact on a wide variety of human resource activities, an alternative approach would be to ensure that all related policies and practices are both appropriate and fair. Our assumption here is that prevention is better than cure. We would, therefore, emphasise the need to:-

1. Develop specific, gender neutral job descriptions and person specifications.
2. Ensure all selection and promotion decisions are job relevant and evidence-based.
3. Ensure performance agreements are job relevant, specific and transparent.
4. Ensure all performance assessments are fair and objective.
5. Monitor the performance of managers and provide constructive feedback.
6. Provide training to underpin all the above.

Training is necessary to enable individuals to develop the procedures and documents described above, and to ensure that users have the knowledge and skills to make fair and effective decisions in the various activities. Training programmes in all these areas do, of course exist, especially in the public sector.

Sex differences in behaviour

In our research, we found sex differences in the behaviour of managers in the UK Civil Service. However, we also found that such differences are small, with far greater differences amongst men and women managers than between the average man and women manager. The implications of this finding are considered below.

If one accepts that there are differences in the ways in which male and female managers behave, independent of their work roles and situations, then this could be used to guide action. Thus, Kniveton (2008) suggests considering when particular strengths and skills may be appropriate, and how the development needs of male and female managers may vary, while Jonsen et al (2010) argue that the particular contribution of women is often understated and should be more actively embraced.

However, Jonsen et al (2010) also warn that an approach built around assumed sex differences in behaviour can reinforce stereotypes and disempower those who do not conform to the stereotype. We have considerable sympathy for this view. We think the focus should be on actual individual differences, rather than average differences between the sexes, as the latter approach caricatures individuals and over-generalises differences.

We would favour a more general approach to individual differences built around openness and transparency in all human resource systems, a commitment to equal opportunities and diversity, continuing training and development for all, with a strong focus on activity-based training and coaching, and the provision of support during major transitions, including moving into leadership roles.

Concluding discussion

Our research has confirmed the existence of contrasting gender stereotypes and differences in the behaviour of male and female managers in the UK Civil Service. However, it showed that such differences are small, with greater differences amongst men and women managers than between the average man and woman.

We also found differences more strongly linked to context than gender or sex. Our research findings showed that, once people reach a managerial position, it is this that most influences their behaviour and performance, and how it is judged. This could mean that gender bias against women is less strong once they have reached management positions.

Our research appeared to offer little in the way of an explanation of the 'glass ceiling'. Sex differences in behaviour and gender stereotypes were not found to be linked statistically to our measure of leadership effectiveness. This suggests that our findings do not, in themselves, explain the under-representation of women in leadership roles. However, the situation is more complex than this, as the following comments indicate.

First, while our results suggest that other factors may be important, they also reinforce the need to address the impact of gender stereotypes. We concluded that they were best tackled by ensuring that all jobs are properly described and all assessments involved the use of relevant information against agreed job criteria, with appropriate training and development essential to maintaining best practice. Moreover, training and development activities should concentrate on actual individual differences rather than stereotypical generalisations about such differences. Finally, we put forward an evidence-based, gender-neutral framework to help individuals make the transition into leadership positions.

Second, we did not set out to investigate and explain the 'glass ceiling'. Our research was a by-product of our training and development work. We hoped it would illuminate the intersection between sex, gender and leadership in a particular context. While we are happy that we met our aims, a more purpose-built, wide-ranging research programme would doubtless have provided more insights into the 'glass ceiling'.

Third, despite our findings, we think that existing gender stereotypes do help explain the 'glass ceiling'. Previous research has shown that men tend to attach relatively more importance to their working life and less to their family life than women (Fogarty et al, 1998), and they are more likely to aspire to top management (Powell and Butterfield, 2003). Thus, gender stereotypes may directly impact upon behaviour at work, making it more difficult for women to enter managerial positions, rather than serving as a lens through which people at work are judged.

Fourth, the context of our research was the UK Civil Service in the early 21st century. We were dealing with a meritocracy, with a strong commitment to equal opportunities and diversity, and well-developed human resource policies and practices. Previous research by Eagly et al (1995) also found that women are more effective than men in government, where interpersonal skills may be more important. We conclude that it is very likely that research in other contexts would have produced different results.

Finally, things have changed and continue to change. Hennessy (2014) has warned that politicisation of the Civil Service threatens its meritocratic status. Moreover, the CIPD (2014) has reported on cuts in overall training provision in public sector organisations, and a shift to e-learning, which is consistently rated one of the least effective learning and development methods. These changes can only undermine equality of opportunity in the UK Civil Service.

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Appendix. Leadership situations, leadership behaviours and 360 degree assessments of leadership and followership behaviours

Behaviour (Instrument)	Leadership Frequency	Leadership 360	Followership 360
Showing commitment (LSI)	0.76 ***	0.43 ***	0.30 **
Envisioning change (LSI)	0.68 ***	0.27 *	0.07
Promoting team working (LSI)	0.58 ***	0.27 *	0.07
Encouraging innovation (LSI)	0.55 ***	0.09	0.08
Clarifying roles (LSI)	0.52 ***	0.29 *	0.20
Praising and recognising (LSI)	0.52 ***	0.18	0.03
Monitoring operations (LSI)	0.48 ***	0.09	0.00
Vision (DLI)	0.43 ***	0.19	0.17
Controlling work (LSI)	0.43 ***	0.27 *	0.11
Scanning the environment (LSI)	0.42 ***	0.10	0.11
Building a support network (LSI)	0.42 ***	0.29 *	0.03
Partnership (ISSP)	0.41 ***	0.17	-0.06
Consulting members (LSI)	0.40 ***	0.08	0.16
Shaper (TRQ)	0.39 ***	0.09	-0.06
Co-ordinator (TRQ)	0.37 **	0.31 **	0.21
Taking risks (LSI)	0.35 **	-0.09	-0.21
Providing support (LSI)	0.34 **	0.16	0.05
Resource investigator (TRQ)	0.34 **	-0.01	-0.17
Planning activities (LSI)	0.32 **	0.27 *	0.08
Generating security (LSI)	0.31 **	0.21	0.09
Developing members (LSI)	0.31 **	0.13	-0.03
Empowering members (LSI)	0.29 *	0.01	0.08
Assertion (ISSP)	0.29 *	-0.07	0.03
Macro (DLI)	0.21	0.30 **	0.20
Supplying information (LSI)	0.18	0.06	0.03
Working flexibly (LSI)	0.16	0.10	0.11
Traits (DLI)	0.13	0.12	0.17
Source (DLI)	0.10	0.11	-0.02
Task (DLI)	0.08	0.17	0.20
Interpersonal (DLI)	0.08	0.35 **	0.19
Plant (innovator) (TRQ)	0.03	-0.03	-0.04
Reason (ISSP)	0.00	0.00	0.22
Monitor evaluator (TRQ)	-0.01	0.05	0.10
Team worker (supporter) (TRQ)	-0.03	0.09	0.19
Coercion (ISSP)	-0.03	-0.04	-0.27 *
Implementer (TRQ)	-0.04	0.17	0.25 *
Exchange (ISSP)	-0.10	-0.12	0.13
Courting favour (ISSP)	-0.10	-0.07	0.08
Completer finisher (TRQ)	-0.17	0.05	0.22
Specialist (TRQ)	-0.33	-0.08	-0.07

The left hand column lists the behaviours measured, with the instrument from which they are derived given in brackets. Leadership situations are assessed on a single scale combining measures of seniority, power and status, control over resources and strategic role. See explanations below.

Leadership frequency: the degree of correlation, and its statistical significance, between the frequency of use of the particular behaviour and the leadership situation score.

Leadership 360: the degree of correlation, and its statistical significance, between the frequency of use of particular behaviours and an aggregated 360 degree satisfaction score, for individuals scoring in the top 50% (approximately) on leadership situation.

Followership 360: the degree of correlation, and its statistical significance, between the frequency of use of particular behaviours and an aggregated 360 degree satisfaction score, for individuals scoring in the bottom 50% (approximately) on leadership situation.

Statistically significant relationships are shown as follows: * = 0.1; ** = 0.05; *** = 0.01.

In the research outlined in this part of the article, leadership effectiveness is measured by combining scores from the above table, as described below.

Leadership effectiveness: this is the average of scores on 'leadership frequency', 'leadership 360' and 'leadership 360 difference'; the latter is the difference between the 'leadership 360' and 'followership 360' scores on behaviours.

Biographical Details

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