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DECLARATION

I, the above named student, confirm that by submitting, or causing the attached assignment to be submitted, to CCT, I have not plagiarised any other person's work in this assignment and except where appropriately acknowledged, this assignment is my own work, has been expressed in my own words, and has not previously been submitted for assessment.

CCT College Dublin

**Gender Differences in Leadership: An Investigation into Female
Leadership Styles and Affective Organisational Commitment.**

Katrine Juliane Schubert

2020250

April 2021

Abstract

As many women enter the ranks of leadership, more research is conducted and needed. Through qualitative analyses based on bibliographic research, this study aims to explore the gender differences in leadership, providing an investigation into female leadership styles and affective organisational commitment. The review and analysis of existing literature demonstrated that the transformational leadership style is more typical of females than male leaders. The study's findings also indicate that there are differences between female and male leaders' styles and traits, reinforcing the existing leadership gender stereotype that female leaders are seen as more emotional, supportive, caring, and people-oriented. In contrast, male leaders are identified as more assertive, directive and task-oriented. Furthermore, it appears that there is a positive association between female leadership and affective commitment. However, during the literature analysis, a scarcity of studies dedicated to understanding this relationship was identified. Therefore, further research is required to confirm and better analyse the relationship between female leadership and affective organisational commitment.

Keywords: Female leadership, transformational leadership, affective commitment.

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1 Introduction

Leadership is a contested subject. Some leadership scholars have argued that a leader is whom followers have. Others have tried to define the right set of characteristics, styles and personality traits that form a great leader. Moreover, although leadership has been tirelessly debated in the academic arena, the possibilities for discussions are still endless. Understanding men and women leaders' roles in the organisational context seems to assume increasingly significant relevance, both from managerial and academic research. Such interest is justified not only by the trend towards the empowerment of leadership and its influence on employee behaviour (Lee et al., 2017a) but especially by the stereotyped conception that the leadership behaviours are attributed more to men than women (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995) and the increase of concern about the barriers women encounter when trying to reach leadership roles.

Recent works, such as Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) and Sloan (2017), show the importance of understanding to what extent and in what contexts women leaders can be beneficial for work teams by creating a favourable environment to encourage cohesive teams, cooperative learning, and participatory communication. However, the big challenge lies in the ability to balance organisational interests with individual interests (Porter and Nohria, 2020) so that individual motivations are not supported only by mechanisms of exchange but by lasting stimulating prospects. In this sense, this research provides an investigation into female leadership traits and affective organisational commitment, including the barriers women encounter to lead and how organisations can benefit from increasing women participation in leadership positions.

Using the existing literature, the first question of this paper aims to verify if women are more transformational than men, and the second question seeks to examine if there are differences between male and female leadership traits. To this end, the transformational and transactional framework developed by Bass (1985) and Bass and Avolio (1990, 1994, 1997) was adopted. Although there are other frameworks debating transformational and transactional leadership styles, such as Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Kouzes and Posner (1993) models, the Bass and Avolio's framework choice is supported because over the last two decades, it has been recognised as the dominant leadership framework (Yukl, 2010), generating most empirical research and evidence about leadership styles.

The transformational leadership style has been in the mainstream managerial context for decades (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014). Therefore, understanding the characteristics of this style is vital to identify the particularities of leadership styles adopted by women and men.

According to Bass and Avolio (1990), idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration are the practices that constitute the transformational leadership style. On the other hand, transactional leaders use contingent reward and active or passive management by exception as practices to lead. O'Reilly and Chatman (2020) highlight that comprehending Bass and Avolio's (1990) framework helps identify the female leadership traits within the organisational perspective, besides shedding light on the relationship between leadership styles and organisational commitment.

The third question of this study aims to verify if there is an association between female leadership styles and affective organisational commitment. In order to recognise the contribution of women leaders at this level of commitment, this research uses the Three-Component Model proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991), which organises the various meanings of commitment into three categories: affective, calculative and normative. Given that scholars indicate that affective commitment has the most positive influence on employees' overall levels of commitment (Meyer et al., 2002; Mercurio, 2015; Mowday et al., 1982), this research focuses on the affective dimension of Meyer and Allen's model. According to Weymer et al. (2018), in this dimension, the individual is emotionally connected to the organisation and wants to remain a part of the business. Hence, investigating the connections between female leadership and employee's affective commitment is essential to examine how organisations can benefit from having female leaders.

This paper has been divided into six sections. The first part refers to the introduction, which presented the context and theoretical justifications for conducting the research. The second section addresses the research questions, goals and objectives. Then the following part presents the research design methodology used to support the study. The studies carried out on leadership with an emphasis on the role of women as a leader and affective organisational commitment are critically analysed in section four. The fifth part presents the research findings. Finally, section six poses the conclusions and scope for future work.

2 Research Questions, Goals and Objectives

Considering that there has been an increase of women holding leadership positions, this research endeavours to provide an investigation into the female leadership traits, focusing on the transformational and transactional leadership styles, to understand whether women and men adopt a distinct approach to leadership within the organisational context. Besides, this study concentrates on exploring the female leadership interactions with affective organisational commitment. The main questions addressed in this research are:

- I. Are women more transformational than men?
- II. Are there differences between male and female leadership traits?
- III. Are there female leadership styles associated with affective organisational commitment?

Through the literature research and analysis, this study has the objective of identifying what previous studies have discovered about the relation between female leadership styles and organisational commitment and comprehending whether women leaders can be beneficial for work teams. Besides, it seeks to underline the proportion of women occupying leadership roles and identify the barriers they encounter when trying to reach leadership positions. Furthermore, the researcher aims to deepen her knowledge about female leadership styles in order to use this investigation in the future as a starting point for further research on the subject.

3 Research Design Methodology

Understanding the research process and the different approaches to collecting and analysing data is vital to support readers and researchers in avoiding the many pitfalls inherent to research projects and ensuring that adequate procedures and techniques are followed (Bryman, 2012). This research adopts a qualitative strategy. Creswell (2014) suggests qualitative strategy when the research aims to explore and understand a phenomenon and behaviours. The inductive approach is adopted to provide an investigation into female leadership traits and affective organisational commitment. According to Bernard (2011), this approach is extensively used with qualitative research. Besides, inductive reasoning focuses on comprehending dynamics, analysing patterns and generating a picture of the phenomenon studied (Saunders et al., 2019).

This investigation adopts an exploratory research design. Stebbins (2001) recommends using exploratory design when the research has a qualitative strategy and rely on an inductive

approach. Using an exploratory approach helps to provide insightful information and maximise the understanding of the field of study. Likewise, as Saunders et al. (2019) state, exploratory design has the advantage of laying the basis for future studies. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) argue that choosing the data collection method is a crucial step within the research process. To this end, this study applies secondary data collection performed by bibliographic research. According to Walliman (2011), secondary sources offer a comprehensive variety of knowledge and information previously studied by authors and scholars on the investigation subject.

According to Walliman (2011), the credibility of a study is measured by the honesty and integrity of the researcher. Hence, this research trust only on reliable sources, such as books, peer-reviewed journals, and published thesis and articles related to leadership styles, female leadership and organisational commitment, and follows Creswell's (2014) guidelines: observance of safe sources of information, accurate data, and absence of plagiarism. Through the qualitative secondary data analysis, this study delivers an extensive understanding of the research subject. This type of analyses has been used to investigate new questions of prior studies or to verify pre-existing research (Heaton, 2013). Thus, it explores the existing literature to examine the leadership and organisational commitment context to comprehend the characteristics of different leadership styles and their relation to affective commitment.

4 Literature Review

Elements such as globalisation, new technologies and the increase of women entering the workplace have played an important role in leadership framework development. Since the industrial revolution, particularly in the 20th century, women's participation in the workplace has increased. Yet, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2007) use the fifty largest corporations in each nation of the European Union to demonstrate the scarcity of women in leadership: on average, only 11% of the top executives of these companies are women. Eagly and Carli study emphasises the need to examine the leadership theme, mainly regarding the role played by women leaders. Thus, this chapter discusses the existing literature, with an emphasis on transformational and transactional leadership, to understand the leadership styles adopted by female leaders and how they may benefit the organisations.

While the theme of leadership is studied in daily life and an organisational context, there is no consensus between its theories and approaches (Wilson, 2013). Iszatt-White and Saunders

(2014) say that although leadership is a contested topic with theories frequently overlapping with the concept of power, there is an understanding that leadership is related to the concept of influence. Many experts in leadership (Bass, 1985; Kotter, 1990; Mintzberg et al., 2009; Tichy and Devanna, 1986) agree that leadership defines a direction, guiding the efforts of a particular group to achieve goals towards the social influence of a leader. Studies carried out by Handy (1993) draw attention to the issue of how to influence others, considering that the influence exercised must be given by social influence and not by power or hierarchy. This view is supported by Yukl (2010), who considers coercive approaches capable of influencing people, however, not sustainable in the long-term.

According to Drucker (1996), there is only one possible definition of a leader, a person who has followers, which Grint (2010) endorsed, saying that having followers is the condition of leaders' existence. A serious weakness of this argument, however, is that it is too simple. Iszatt-White and Saunders (2014) see Drucker's definition as a romantic vision of leadership because it does not explain the complex relationship between leaders and followers and ignores how the followership happens, that is if it is through social influence, power, or hierarchy. Rost (2008) considers leadership an influential relationship between leaders and followers, which expects changes, create a collaborative attitude and considers mutual objectives and goals. He also includes the ethical perspective within the leadership process.

Systematic leadership studies emerged in the early 20th century, with the theory of the traits, characterised by the approach of the leader's personality, passing through the behavioural, situational, and contingency theories (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014). Contemporaneously, starting in 1980, theories of charismatic leadership, transformational and transactional leadership gain a window, as well as the laissez-faire concept, considered by Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2007) as the abdication of the leader in taking decisions. Given the various possibilities on the topic, it was chosen as a theoretical framework for this research, the transformational and transactional leadership styles, to analyse in greater depth from a cut that has been comprehensively studied by Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1990, 1994, 1997; Blackwell, 2003; Boehm et al., 2014; Eagly et al., 2003; and Tichy and Devanna, 1986.

4.1 Transformational and Transactional Leadership

The concept of transformational and transactional leadership emerged in 1978, introduced by leadership expert James V. Downton, expanded by James MacGregor Burns in 1978. In 1985, Bernard M. Bass deepened the theory and included ways for measuring the success of transformational leadership (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014). Burns (1978) defined the transformational leadership style as when leaders and subordinates interact at a high level of morale and commitment. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), this leadership style provides a positive environment for people development and ensures that needs are satisfied and recognised. Furthermore, Iszatt-White and Saunders (2014) consider that transformational leaders build an organisational culture, promoting individual growth and inspiring followership.

Bass and Avolio (1990) developed a framework for transformational leadership called Four I's; this framework contains four factors that guide the practice of transformational leadership. The first 'I', idealised influence, is frequently referred to as charisma, which may cause some confusion with the charismatic leadership theory (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014). However, in the transformational theory model (Bass and Avolio, 1990), idealised influence, or charisma, is linked to the moral and ethical conduct adopted by leaders when influencing their followers in order to pursue the goals of organisations. O'Reilly and Chatman (2020) argue that while leaders can use their charisma to influence followers to reach reasonable collective goals, they can also influence them to pursue goals that are less worthy for the organisation and only meet the main objectives of the leaders themselves.

Inspirational motivation is the second factor of transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1990). According to Avolio (2010), transformational leaders motivate, encourage, and challenge team members to surpass expectations. Iszatt-White and Saunders (2014) state that inspirational motivation occurs when leaders build employee commitment using symbolic language and emotional appeals. The third component of transformational leadership, intellectual stimulation, happens when leaders challenge assumptions (Bass and Riggio, 2006) and encourage creative and innovative behaviours (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014). The findings of Rafferty and Griffin (2004) revealed that inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation have a significant influence on creativity and innovation within organisations. These behaviours send encouraging messages to the employees, creating motivation and confidence to explore challenging tasks and situations better.

Individualised consideration, the last component of Bass and Avolio's (1990) leadership framework, is characterised by creating a supportive organisational climate (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014). Blackwell (2003) considers that transformational leaders listen to employees' needs and expectations and provide support. Transformational leaders know that employees are differently motivated by distinct aspects (Tichy and Devanna, 1986). This view is supported by Goleman (2013), who says that executives who effectively focus on others' needs are recognised as natural leaders within an organisation. They detain cognitive empathy and empathic concern, important characteristics for leadership effectiveness that enable leaders to understand employee's perspective and needs.

Unlike Burns (1978), who placed the transformational style to the opposite side of the transactional leadership, Bass and Avolio (1990) consider that both styles can coexist; a leader can present either transformational or transactional behaviour. Based on this supposition, Bass included a third element to his leadership approach: laissez-faire leadership, characterised as the absence of leadership. That is, the leader relinquishes responsibility and delays feedback and decisions (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014). According to Bass and Avolio (1990), transactional leaders are not committed to followers' personal development and needs; they reach the organisations' goals by exchanging rewards.

Bass and Avolio's (1990) transactional leadership model is divided into two constructs, Contingent Reward and Management by Exception (Active or Passive). Avolio (2010) describes contingent reward as the tool used by leaders to obtain support from followers in exchange for rewards, generally in the form of pay. Active management by exception happens when leaders search for mistakes and violations, while in passive management by exception, leaders take actions only after the organisation's goals and standards are breached. O'Reilly and Chatman (2020) argue that, although Bass transformational and transactional model dates to the seventies, it is still a popular approach to leadership styles practised at present. Moreover, the core difference between the two styles is that transformational leaders contest the status quo, while- transactional leaders seek to preserve the status quo.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1997) is the instrument employed to measure transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles. The MLQ includes all four I's of transformational practice (idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration), the transactional factors (contingent reward, management by exception active and passive) and the

laissez-faire style (non-leadership). Additionally, many scholars (Ayman et al., 2009; Bass et al., 1996; Begum et al., 2018; Eagly et al., 2003; Ismail and Al-Tae, 2012 and Stempel et al. 2015) have also used the MLQ to investigate the differences between female and male leadership styles. For instance, Eagly and Carli's (2007) research applied Bass and Avolio's framework to analyse female leadership styles and draw attention to the barriers women face while climbing the leadership ladder, a topic discussed in the next section.

4.2 Barriers to Female leadership

The growing presence of women at high management leadership levels is a key factor in changing leadership studies (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014). Most theories and research on the topic focus on the leader of the male gender. This premise is supported by Hoyt (2010), who says that women began to assume positions of real authority and to influence areas that were previously exclusive to men. Eagly and Carli (2007) underline the obstacles encountered by women while pursuing leadership positions: prejudice related to promotions; resistance to women's leadership; female leadership style issues (difficulties of conciliating qualities expected in women and qualities thought necessary to successful leaders); and family demands (women still play the role of interrupting their careers to attend to family demands). These obstacles are part of several structural barriers preventing women from reaching leadership positions.

The glass ceiling metaphor expresses the invisible barriers holding women from ascending to top management-level positions. Pai and Vaidya (2009) point out that despite the organisational and governmental efforts to increase diversity and reduce gender bias, women still face a glass ceiling impeding them to advance to higher levels into the executive hierarchy. Besides the cultural biases and stereotypes, a study conducted by Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) showed that the glass ceiling also prevents women from having access to mentors and sponsors. This view is supported by Ely et al. (2012), whose research indicated that women suffer from a lack of female role models and the absence of a sponsors' network, which prevents them from shattering the glass ceiling. Moreover, referring to Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala (2020) views, many women only perceive the glass ceiling when they reach the invisible barriers preventing them from assuming the highest leadership role.

Conversely, Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that the glass ceiling metaphor is currently more wrong than right. The metaphor implies that women are turned away only when they reach the penultimate stage of a prominent career. However, the authors say that women encounter barriers during all their leadership journey. Hence, they suggest that the labyrinth allegory better represents the obstacles women face within the leadership scenario. Hancock et al. (2018) state that the leadership labyrinth represents the myriad barriers encountered by women at all positions levels while climbing the management ladder and considers the obstacles variety and complexity. Furthermore, Mavin (2009) states that the labyrinth depicts the multifaceted women's journey towards management roles. The key contribution of Eagly and Carli's (2007) labyrinth metaphor is that it enables an understanding of the various barriers (subtle or obvious) that form the maze and how some women manage to go through the labyrinth and reach the highest leadership position.

When women finally achieve a leadership position compared to men, they receive greater scrutiny and criticism (Eagly and Carli, 2007). To this end, Sabharwal (2013) argues that after female leaders have overcome all barriers and broke through the glass ceiling, they are placed on a glass cliff. This metaphor represents the challenges women face when occupying leadership positions. Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala (2020) describe the glass cliff as a phenomenon when organisations embrace women's leadership when they are in crisis. The term glass cliff, coined by Ryan and Haslam (2005), explains the phenomenon through which women are preferentially placed in leadership positions when there is an increase of risk of adverse outcomes. Consequently, women are likely to fall off the cliff because of their precarious leadership position. The glass cliff phenomenon can also be observed within the political arena. A study by Ryan et al. (2010) revealed that female candidates, compared to men candidates, were more likely to be chosen to run for hard-to-win seats than for the winnable ones. As a result, female leadership is presumably linked to elevated risk and failure.

The second wave of research about gender leadership has been summarised by Ibarra et al. (2013) and called Second-generation gender bias. This research movement focuses on the subtle and commonly invisible barriers to women leadership. These barriers arise from cultural conventions, organisational methods, and communication patterns that place women in a disadvantaged position. Even though organisations have tried to reduce the bias and create an environment in which men and women can develop equally. Dobbin and Kalev (2016) state that the critical problem of these settlements is that the companies are relying on the same systems used since the sixties. This approach focuses on controlling leaders' behaviours and

tends to stimulate bias rather than lessen it. The authors say that the solution is adopting programs that increase diversity in the workplace. As suggested by Ely et al. (2012), these programs need to be rooted in the idea of identity work. In other words, companies are recommended to implement methods to analyse the second-generation gender bias, create an environment that supports women's identity work, and support women to expand their sense of leadership purpose.

Yet all the barriers that women encounter when trying to reach a leadership position, the World Economic Forum's (2020) Global Gender Gap Report revealed that the number of women occupying leadership roles in the private and public sector increased 2% from 2019 to 2020. However, there is still a 31.4% average gap between female and male leadership. Likewise, Heidrick and Struggles' (2020) report, which analysed 965 of the world's largest companies, showed that only 5% of the companies have a woman holding the CEO position. In the past, common speculation suggested that the slow rise of female leadership was because women do not desire the top jobs. Nevertheless, Catalyst's (2004) research demonstrated that most women want to occupy the most senior role in the United States. Hence, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) suggest that it is an organisations' responsibility to support, promote and increase the opportunities for women to hold leadership positions.

Furthermore, Grant Thornton's (2020) Women in Business Report shows that in 2020 the global proportion of women in senior management roles was only 29% (the same percentage of 2019). Even though there is still a significant gap between female and male leadership, the report demonstrates that organisations are acting to increase the proportion of women occupying senior leadership roles. Complementary, Mercer's (2020) report, which researches 1.157 organisations from fifty-four countries located in six regions (Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Latin America, North America, Middle East and Africa), suggests that when women thrive, organisations and nations thrive too. This study shows that 66% of businesses' senior executives are engaged to make gender equality a business priority. Thus, benefit from strengthening both business and society by looking fair and being fair.

4.3 Gender differences in leadership

The traditional understandings of leaders as heroes, great men rising up in times of crises and wars (Senge, 1994) shaped the image of leaders within the organisational landscape. According to Abu-Tineh (2012), this leadership myth reinforced leadership as a male domain and has delayed women to achieve leadership positions. Yet, despite decades of continued sex segregation within leadership roles, women have steadily increased their participation in leadership positions. Importantly, Catalyst (2004) observed that reducing the leadership gender gap is highly beneficial to organisations. Companies with the highest number of women CEOs and board directors experience a more significant return on equity, sales, and invested capital than companies with fewer women in the highest leadership role. Besides, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) argue that women are generally more stringent when participating in corporate boards and lead to challenging the existing hierarchies, which bring benefits to the organisation, such as fewer legal infractions resulting from frauds and embezzlements.

Many published studies show that women tend to be more transformational than men (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995; Ayman et al., 2009; Bass et al., 1996; Eagly et al., 2003; Stempel et al., 2015). Considering the subordinate's point of view, women bring greater satisfaction and effectiveness to organisations. Female leaders also positively impact individuals and groups (Bass, 1999). Abu-Tineh et al. (2008) used Kouzes and Posner's (1993) transformational framework to study the gender leadership differences in non-western countries. This study demonstrated that female leaders are better than men in enabling others to act, modelling the way, and encouraging the heart dimensions. On the other hand, men leaders are greater within challenging the process and inspiring shared vision dimensions. These findings are consistent with another research (Ismail and Al-Tae, 2012), who found that gender leads to variations in leadership practice. The authors also identify women as more transformational than men, with charisma and intellectual stimulation traits more accentuated than men. In contrast, men lead with an assertive, controlling, autonomist, boldness, self-trust and confident tendency.

A detailed examination of forty-five studies of transformational and transactional leaders' skills revealed that women were, by some means, more transformational than men. From this analysis, Eagly et al. (2003) identify that women are more supportive and encouraging than men. Considering the transactional style, female leaders also present a higher level of rewarding behaviours. Conversely, the same examination showed that men surpassed women when corrective and disciplinary actions are expected. This view is supported by Alimo-Metcalfe

(1995), who also investigates studies about the constructs of leadership and gender. She argues that women tend to be more accessible and inspiring to employees. Similarly, women focus on creating an environment in which people can grow and develop. In contrast, Iszatt-White and Saunders (2014) remind us that the same studies indicate that men, in comparison to women, are more independent and give clearer directions.

Another major study by Begum et al. (2018) also demonstrates that female leaders are more transformational when comparing to men leadership style. In this study, female leaders scored higher in idealised influence attributed, idealised influence behaviour and individualised consideration, while men had higher scores in intellectual stimulation. When considering the transformational inspirational dimension, there was no significance between men and women's scores. Research undertaken by Kent et al. (2010) considered the dimensions Visualising Greatness, Empowering the "We", Communicating for Meaning, Controlling Oneself, and Care and Recognition to analyse the differences between German man and women as transformational leaders. This study, in contrast to Begum et al. (2018), Ismail and Al-Tae (2012) and Eagly et al. (2003) findings, revealed that both genders perform these five behaviours dimensions to the same degree. In other words, no differences between female and male transformational leadership style were found.

An extensive literature analysis of gender differences in leadership styles, with less focus on the transformational and transactional framework, was carried out by Clisbee (2005), who examined thirty-six documents published between 1981 and 2002. Besides demonstrating that there are differences between female and male leadership styles, this study shows that personality traits are transferred to the leadership style adopted by men and women. For instance, men embrace competitive and authoritarian behaviours, whilst women are caring and collaborative. Additionally, it also indicates that a gender-based difference in leadership style relates to how men and women use and define power. These findings are supported by Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2007). They state that men display a more autocratic and directive style while women have the collaborative behaviours of consulting, debating or negotiating, depending on the situation. Clisbee's (2005) findings are also corroborated by Merchant (2012), who says that men are power-hungry and oriented to establish and maintain a dominant status. Women, on the other hand, pursue social connections to interact with others.

Research has shown that female and male leaders differ in their communication traits and styles. Men tend to be more assertive, dominant, task-oriented and result-focused, while women are

more tentative, social, democratic, participative, and relationship-oriented (Basow and Rubinfeld, 2003; Begum et al., 2018; Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2007). Merchant (2012) indicates that men are likely to use assertiveness and personal appeal to influence followers when it comes to influencing tactics. Women, on the other hand, apply consultation, inspirational appeal and integration. This view is corroborated by Stempel et al. (2015), who say that agentic characteristics such as logical reasoning and assertiveness are commonly associated with men, while expressivity, emotionality, and heartiness are traits typically related to women. Merchant (2012) also draws attention to the fact that women leaders often assume a caretaker role from the carried nurturing stereotype. In this sense, Goffee and Jones (2000) argue that female leaders have benefited from this stereotype. Since this is an expected characteristic, women have played the nurturer leader role to personal advantage. However, this behaviour does not sustain in the long-term, besides strengthening the stereotype and reducing opportunities for other female leaders to show genuine personal differences.

The Global Executive Leadership Inventory (GELI), a 360-degree feedback instrument used to identify critical components of leadership behaviours (GELI, 2021), was used by Ibarra and Obodaru (2009) to evaluate 2,816 executives from 149 countries. The 360-degree evaluations' results suggested that men are more visionary than women. Female leaders had a lower score than men leaders in some critical components of leadership, such as the ability to sense opportunities and threats, set strategic direction, and inspire constituents. These findings are, to some extent, similar to Appelbaum and colleagues' (2003) research, which shows that men tend to score higher on leadership traits oriented to strategic planning and organisational vision. Conversely from Ibarra and Obodaru's (2009) results about women's ability to inspire. Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) state that female leaders, in comparison to men, are more likely to have higher scores in inspiration behaviour. Besides, women also adopt people development, role modelling, expectation and rewards, and participative behaviours more often than their male counterpart.

The research to date on gender leadership differences has focused on the transformational and transactional styles. Most of these studies (Alimo-Metcalf, 1995; Bass et al., 1996; Begum et al., 2018; Eagly et al., 2003; Stempel et al., 2015) demonstrate that there are differences between female and male leadership styles and that women leaders are more transformational (follower centred) while men tend to adopt the transactional style (task centred). Although the research body suggests that the transformational style is the most beneficial to manage the complexities facing contemporary organisations. It is important to say that there is some

research (Abu-Tineh, 2012; Northouse, 2004) showing that men and women leaders do not differ when effectiveness is considered despite the differences in female and male leadership styles. The difference that seems to emerge in some cases is that women tend to be more democratic than men when making decisions, while men tend to be more autocratic.

4.4 Affective Organisational Commitment

Organisational commitment has received significant attention in academic studies due to the general understanding that this variable can be the main component of organisational performance and effectiveness (Meyer et al., 2002; Riketta, 2002). Mowday et al. (1982) define organisational commitment as the individual's psychological attachment and identification to the organisation. Employees strongly believe and accept the company's values and are eager to use their skills and effort to benefit the organisation, besides, they have an intense willingness to remain in the organisation. In order to integrate existing research about commitment, Meyer and Allen (1991) developed a three-component model of commitment, which divides the individual's motivation to continue employment in an organisation into three dimensions reflecting a desire (affective commitment), a need (continuance commitment), and an obligation (normative commitment).

According to Meyer and Allen (1991), workers with a high continuance commitment remain in the organisation because they believe they "need to" due to the absence of better employment alternatives or the sacrifices they will have on leaving. In the normative dimension, the individual has a moral duty with the organisation, evidencing a feeling of mandatory permanence. In other words, employees with a high normative commitment think that they "ought to" stay in the company. Whereas, in the affective dimension, the individuals are emotionally connected to the organisation and feel they "want to" stay and are satisfied with their work. A large volume of published studies is dedicated to understanding and identifying the level of commitment and its respective dimensions (Lok and Crawford, 2004; Mercurio, 2015; Noblet et al., 2005; Riketta, 2002). Furthermore, existing literature indicates that of the three components of organisational commitment, affective commitment has more favourable results for the organisations (Meyer et al., 2002). Mercurio (2015) argues that affective commitment is the core essence of organisational commitment.

Some scholars have critically examined the relation between female leadership and organisational commitment, especially within the affective dimension. A recent study by Sloan

(2017) showed that the leader's gender influences organisational commitment, mainly in the affective dimension. Compared to men, women perceived as supportive by employees reported higher levels of affective commitment. This view is supported by Ibarra et al. (2013), who indicate the likelihood of women raising affective commitment through connecting employees to the company's purpose, solving problems and helping colleagues to discover deeper meaning in their work. Likewise, Thien and Adams' (2019) research in the Malaysian primary school context showed a stronger relationship between affective commitment and female leadership supervision. This result confirms the finds of Kacmar et al. (2011), who state that female leaders tend to engage in interpersonal behaviours, and develop close connections with others, thus contributing to employees' feelings of commitment.

Transformational leadership has been considered an essential precursor of increasing employees' attachment to the organisation (Ribeiro et al., 2017). More specifically, several studies (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Amin et al., 2018; Bono and Judge, 2003; Burton and Welty-Peachey, 2014; Kent and Chelladurai, 2001; Lee et al., 2017b; Rafferty and Griffin, 2004) have demonstrated a strong and positive correlation between transformational leadership and affective commitment. Weymer et al. (2018), apart from investigating the relationship amongst these two variables, examined the contribution of women leaders within this context. Their research reported that when employees identify in their female leader a transformational leadership style, they present a higher level of affective commitment. This result confirms Lee and colleagues' (2017b) understanding that transformational leadership brings positive work outcomes, including job satisfaction, psychological empowerment, and organisational commitment. Conversely, Triana et al.'s (2017) cross-country analysis pointed out that female leaders inspired less affective commitment than male leaders, even adopting the transformational leadership style.

Given that the connection concerning gender and affective commitment is affected by the positive association between affective organisational commitment and the quality of supportive social relationships in the workplace (Hassam, 2012). Sloan (2017) states that while, on the one hand, the assumption that women leaders have superior sensitivity and nurturant skills may lead to greater perceived affective commitment levels. On the other hand, because women are expected to have such behaviour, it may increase the stereotype that women need constant support. However, as Eagly and Carli (2007) suggested, having more women in leadership positions contributes to increasing affective commitment. Women help create a more supportive workplace by establishing diverse and inclusive policies, opening opportunities for

other women, and promoting more balance in the work environment. Furthermore, according to Ely et al. (2012), female leaders tend to mitigate better conflicts related to discrimination, sexual and moral harassment and fear of dismissal due to pregnancy.

Moreover, Lok and Crawford's (2004) study about the effects of leadership styles and organisational commitment in Hong Kong and Australian's companies demonstrates that when employees are less committed, they will quit or emotionally or mentally distance themselves from the organisation. Mercurio (2015) draws attention to the consequences of low and elevated levels of affective commitment. While low affective commitment increases turnover and consequently impacts financial costs, high affective commitment reduces absenteeism, increases organisational citizenship behaviours, and improves employee well-being. Given its relevance, affective organisational commitment has assumed a strategic role in organisations. Therefore, it is a psychological state that employers should seek to encourage among their employees: Committed employees are likely to stay with an organisation even when pressured by external forces.

5 Research findings

Even though since the latter half of the 20th century, women have increased their participation in the workforce. One significant finding emerging from this study is that there is still a 31% average gap between leadership positions held by women and men. (World Economic Forum, 2020). Furthermore, women carry only 29% of the global senior management roles (Grant Thornton, 2020). Given the low proportion of women in leadership positions, it is possible to assume that there are several barriers to female leadership. Thus, this research identified three main structural barriers preventing women from reaching top executive leadership positions. The first one, the glass ceiling, this barrier limits women to the role of number two and prevents them from reaching the number one (Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala, 2020). In other words, there is an invisible wall between female leaders and the highest executive position.

Second, the labyrinth of leadership barrier encompasses all obstacles female leaders encounter during their entire career, not only the last barrier between women and top management positions (Eagly and Carli, 2007). The glass cliff, the last barrier, represents the challenges women face when they reach top leadership roles. Sabharwal (2013) explains that female leaders often assume the highest leadership position when organisations are experiencing crises. Thus, they are exposed to more criticism than men and are likely to fail or fall off the cliff.

Besides discussing the barriers distancing women from leadership, this research also addressed the leadership gender differences and the relationship between female leadership and affective commitment. The findings related to these questions are presented next.

5.1 Are women more transformational than men?

To answer this question, this research analysed ten peer-reviewed articles and studies related to gender differences within the transformational and transactional leadership styles framework. Of the ten studies summarised in this review, seven studies were realised using Bass and Avolio's transformational and transactional framework (Ayman et al., 2009; Bass et al. 1996; Begum et al., 2018; Eagly et al., 2003; Ismail and Al-Tae, 2012; Stempel et al. 2015; and Weymer et al., 2018). Alimo-Metcalfe's, 1995 used a distinct approach, which not considers the transactional factor; Abu-Tineh et al.'s (2008) study was undertaken using Kouzes and Posner's (1993) transformational theory. The last research's results (Kent et al. 2010) were assessed using Leadership Behaviour Inventory (LBI). This model, developed by Kent et al. (2001), divides leadership into five behaviours categories: Visualizing Greatness; Empowering the We; Communicating for Meaning; Managing Oneself; and Care and Recognition.

Two major deductions were drawn from the analysis of the literature. First, leadership scholars have preferred to use Bass and Avolio's framework when investigating gender-based differences in leadership styles. Given that most analysed studies used Bass and Avolio's model of transformational and transactional leadership styles, it is possible to confirm that this is the most common framework used to examine leadership patterns. This finding agrees with Yukl's (2010) conclusions that Bass and Avolio's framework had been widely accepted as the dominant theory influencing the leading academic research. These outcomes further support Iszatt-White and Saunders' (2014) findings that most studies related to leadership styles have been generated using the transformational and transactional leadership theory proposed by Bernard Bass Bruce Avolio in 1990.

Second, most peer-reviewed studies indicated that the dominant leadership style is correlated with the leader's gender. The results of this research reinforce the claim that women are more transformational than men (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). This study has found that women leaders are generally more transformational than men leaders. The overall male-female comparisons on transformational leadership styles indicate significantly higher scores among

women than men. Only two studies have shown different outcomes. Ayman et al.'s (2009) research suggested that the gender of the leader was not directly related to transformational leadership. Similarly, Kent et al.'s (2010) result demonstrated that female and male perform the leadership behaviours at the same level. That is, the leadership style is independent of the leader's gender.

In general, therefore, it seems that despite the gap between female and male leadership and the general idea of leadership being a typically male domain (Eagly et al., 2003), transformational leadership is indeed recognised to be consistent with female traits and styles. Given that transformational leadership is believed to be more effective within modern organisations (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995) and transformational leaders inspire, influence and encourage followers to achieve organisations' goals (Bass, 1999). Thus, the understanding that female leaders are more transformational than men contributes to increasing the participation of women in leadership roles. In fact, Vinkenbug et al. (2011) suggest that this stereotyped belief may help women break the barriers encountered when pursuing leadership.

5.2 Differences between female and male leadership traits

Besides endeavouring to verify whether female leaders are more transformational than men, this research also sought to understand if there are differences between female and male leadership traits. Table 1, Female and Male Traits, draws attention to differences found during the literature review analysis.

Table 1
Female and Male Traits

Author	Female Traits	Male Traits
Alimo-Metcalf (1995)	Supportive, Creative and Accessible	Purpose-driven, give clear directions and career-driven.
Appelbaum et al. (2003)	Participative, Socio-expressive, People-Oriented.	Autocratic, Instruction-giving, Business-Oriented and Strategic.
Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017)	Stringent, Inspirational, Role modelling, Participative.	Greater in Intellectual stimulation.
Clisbee (2005)	Caring, collaborative.	Competitive, Authoritarian.
Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2007)	Consultive, User Debate and Negotiation to solve conflicts.	Autocratic, Directive.
Eagly et al. (2003)	Built trust, Innovative, Empower followers	Corrective, good at taking disciplinary actions.
Ibarra and Obodaru (2009)	Emotional Intelligence, energising.	Visionary, Strategic, Inspirational.
Merchant (2012)	Social, Interactive, Consultive, Inspirational, Nurturer.	Power-hungry, Assertive, Dominant, Task-Oriented, Result-focused.
Stempel et al. (2015)	Expressive, Emotional.	Apply logical reasoning, Assertive.

The literature analyses' findings suggest that in general, women leaders are supportive, caring, collaborative, expressive, social and often adopt communications strategies orientated to integrate and inspire followers, besides using debates and negotiation channels to solve internal disputes. These findings are consistent with those of Basow and Rubenfield (2003) that women are more communicative and likely to use social interactions to seek agreements, while

men seek to control and remove problems quickly. Table 1 shows that focus on results, directiveness, strategy, vision, and assertiveness are often associated with men leaders, supporting the traditional leadership stereotype, which considers men better at decision-making and problem-solving (Abu-Tineh, 2012). Interestingly, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) state that female leaders present higher levels of stringent behaviours. This point is valuable considering that this trait can be beneficial to organisations. In fact, Adams and Ferreira (2009) argue that business with high female participation on boards of directors experiences a stricter monitoring and higher levels of corporate governance compliance.

Furthermore, these findings support the answer to the first question of this research: women are more transformational than men. For instance, Table 1 shows that women empower followers, build trust, are role modelling and people-oriented, typical behaviours of transformational leaders (Burns, 1978). On the other hand, men are listed as autocratic, directive, business-oriented, strategic, task-orientated and good at giving instructions and taking disciplinary actions, traits of transactional leadership style (Bass and Avolio, 1996). However, the literature analysis corroborates Iszatt-White and Saunders' (2014) beliefs that a leader can adopt traits of both leadership styles. To exemplify, Ibarra and Obodaru's (2009) research indicates that men are inspirational, and Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) argue that men are greater than women in intellectual behaviour traits. However, both characteristics are related to transformational leadership. Thus, women and men have certain traits in common, and both genders can inspire and stimulate followers to exceed performance levels and drive business effectiveness.

5.3 Relationship between female leadership and affective commitment

Affective commitment describes the individual's positive emotional attachment to the organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1991) and has been considered the most significant dimension influencing the overall levels of organisational commitment (Mercurio, 2015). This research has found several studies indicating that transformational leadership styles are directly related to employees' affective commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Amin et al., 2018; Bono and Judge, 2003; Burton and Welty-Peachey, 2014; Kent and Chelladurai, 2001; Lee et al., 2017b; Rafferty and Griffin, 2004). However, the literature analysis revealed a scarcity of studies dedicated to investigating the relationship between female leadership and organisational commitment, only four studies (Sloan, 2017; Thien and Adams, 2009; Triana et al., 2019; and Weymer et al., 2018) examining the connections between the two matters were found.

The studies undertaken by Sloan (2017), Thien and Adams (2009), and Weymer et al. (2018) suggest that affective commitment is higher among employees lead by female leaders. These findings are significant because they establish a connection between female leadership and positive organisational outcomes. The positive relation between women leaders and affective commitment is also recognized by Ibarra et al. (2013), who indicate that the female leaders raise affective commitment levels by connecting followers to organisation's purpose and inspiring employees to commit to the company because they 'want to' rather than because they 'ought to'. In contrast, Triana et al.'s (2017) cross-country study, which analysed gender leadership and affective commitment in companies from Turkey and United States, revealed that the leader's gender is not relevant in influencing affective commitment levels.

Even though most studies analysed in this research presented findings associating female leadership with high levels of affective commitment, it is important to emphasise that a larger sample of investigations would be needed to draw further conclusions. Nevertheless, independently of leaders' gender, affective commitment expresses the employee's emotional attachment, identification and involvement with a company. Besides, it is essential to increase organisation performance (Allen and Meyer, 1996) and reduce absenteeism and turnover intention (Mowday et al., 1982). Therefore, companies must concentrate efforts to enhance levels of affective organisational commitment and guarantee business effectiveness.

6 Conclusions and Further Work

This research showed that there is a consistent argument from empirical studies indicating that women are more transformational than men. Transformational leadership has been considered ideal for inspiring people to accomplish unforeseen and remarkable organisational results. Leaders with this style provide a positive environment for people development and satisfaction, besides encouraging cohesive teams and enhancing performance and commitment. Thus, the understanding that transformational leadership is the dominant style perceived in women should be enough to increase the proportion of female leaders. However, this study also demonstrated that there is still a gap between female and male leadership. As a result of the obstacles women encounter, it is much more difficult for them to become leaders.

Importantly, this research provided an investigation into female leadership, shedding light on the invisible and structural barriers women face while pursuing leadership. Furthermore, it

showed that when women finally reach the highest executive position, they receive more criticism and pressures than men. Despite the resistance to women's leadership, this study reported that the proportion of female leaders has improved throughout the years. Possibly, as a consequence of the benefits inherent to the transformational leadership style adopted by female leaders bring to the organisations. Thus, the broad implication of the present research is to provide evidence that transformational female leaders can help companies achieve success and effectiveness.

This study supports the traditional view of the differences between female and male leadership traits. In other words, women being considered more emotional and people-orientated and men assertive and task-orientated. It also confirms that the leadership traits adopted by men are consistent with transactional leadership, and women leadership traits are coherent to the transformational. Additionally, the research's findings suggested a positive relationship between female leadership and affective commitment. Although this is a significant finding to promote female leadership and enlighten the benefits of having more women leaders, the literature analysis demonstrated that there is a scarcity of studies dedicated to investigating the relationship between female leadership and affective organisational commitment. Consequently, further work is required to analyse in-depth this relationship and validate the findings of the present research.

Furthermore, most studies analysed during this research applied Bass and Avolio's (1990) transformational and transactional framework to evaluate gender-based differences in leadership styles. Therefore, it would be interesting further investigation comparing the results of a distinct framework to assess if the model employed to influence the outcome. Whereas most leadership theories and research focus on the leader of the male gender, research is also needed to develop a better understanding of the dynamics between gender and leadership, mainly due to the growing number of publications directed to other forms of leadership rather than transformational and transactional. Future research should continue to explore the benefits of female leadership in organisational and also governmental context. Perhaps such investigations could help women shatter all the walls and glass barriers, detaining them from reaching leadership roles.

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