The Relationship Between Gender Stereotypes and Female Leadership Effectiveness:A study of Female Leaders in Mainland China

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Abstract:

This study is aiming to examine the relationship between subordinates' gender stereotype towards female leaders and female leadership effectiveness in Mainland China business originations, from the perspective of subordinates; and investigate the power of female leadership, through finding gender differences between male and female leaders, in hope to help enhance female leadership effectiveness.

In recent years, female leaders are emerging in a variety of organisations' managerial and administrative positions all around the world, as well as in Mainland China, taking heavy responsibilities and engaging in various decision-making and problem-solving tasks. Despite the escalating number of female leaders in managerial and administrative positions, studies on female leadership still remain scarce and are urgently needed and to be developed, especially in Mainland China. As a potential key difference between female and male leaders, gender stereotypes would be a significant aspect in leadership studies, as long suggested by gender studies scholars. Thus, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender stereotypes and leadership effectiveness, hopefully to improve the female leadership effectiveness in Mainland China organisations, and help female leaders to leverage the power of female leadership, this study sets out to ascertain that (RQ1) subordinates' stereotypes towards female leaders have a relationship with female leader effectiveness in Mainland China, to explore (RQ2) in which way do subordinates' stereotypes towards female leaders have relationship with leadership effectiveness in Mainland China organizations, to investigate (RQ3) if there are any differences between male and female leadership effectiveness, and finally to find out (RQ4) whether subordinates' gender moderates the relationship between subordinates' stereotype and leadership effectiveness.

In this research, stereotype is defined as beliefs and expectations toward certain groups' characteristics, properties or conducts, which determine a or a set of descriptive attribute to be stereotype. In the research "stereotype" is set as independent variable, and "leadership effectiveness" as dependent variable. Partly referring to past studies on "stereotypes towards female leader" both in China and western contexts, this study adopts nine sub-categories of stereotype from subordinates, namely Communal, Verbal Proficient, Home-Oriented, Not Aggressive, Emotional, Unconfident, Low Anti-Pressure Ability, Uncompetitive, and Hard to Make Decision; 22 items are adapted from Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ). Answer scores indicate whether subordinates have specified masculine or feminine attributes in each stereotype sub-category. At the same time, "leadership effectiveness" is measured according to the procedure described in the "Leadership Behaviour Description Questionnaire" (LBDQ) which divided effectiveness into two dimensions, namely consideration and initiating structure.

The data was collected by snowball sampling of the working population, and in total there were 334 subordinates who had direct female supervisors, and for RQ3 additional 327 who had

direct male supervisors, in Mainland China organisations and provided valid responses to this study. The researchers conducted factor analysis to test the construct validity of the independent variables and finally adopted nine of the preliminary sub-categories measured with 22 items, satisfied with adequacy of the adaption of established measurement. After the reliability test and validity test, the data collected were put to the correlation analysis, for answering the first research question, and the results were positive for several variable pairs and analyzed further, as reported next. For the second research question, this study conducted stepwise regression for gradually excluding the insignificant independent variables in the final regression model.

Analysis result indicates that "Communal" sub-category is a significant positive predictor of "Consideration Effectiveness", but "Not-aggressive" and "Hard to make decision" are significant negative predictors. The result also shows that "Unconfident", "Not-aggressive" and "Hard to make decision" are significant negative predictors for "Initiating-Structure Effectiveness". Additionally, "Unconfident", "Communal", and "Hard to make decision" are significant predictors of overall leadership effectiveness. Generally speaking, only "Communal" is a feminine attribute and positively associated with female leadership effectiveness; other 3 sub-categories are agentic attributes and might threaten perceived working effectiveness of female leadership.

For the third research question, this study adopted independent-samples T-test to compare differences of male and female leadership effectiveness. Surprisingly, the result indicates that only for "Initiating Structure Effectiveness", male and female leadership effectiveness are significantly differentiated, and female's effectiveness is significantly higher than male's. While for "Consideration Effectiveness" and "Overall Effectiveness", female's are higher than male's as well, albeit not significant.

Last but not least, again for the subsample with female leaders, this research conducted hierarchical regression, basing on the outcome of second research question, entering the four significant stereotypes and subordinates' gender in two blocks for each effectiveness variable (consideration, initiating structure, and overall effectiveness), to assess if subordinates' gender moderate the association between stereotypes and leadership effectiveness. The result shows that subordinates' gender only moderates the relationship between "Hard to make decision" and "Initiating-Structure Effectiveness". After entering subordinates' gender to the regression, "Hard to make decision" becomes a positive predictor for "Initiating-structure Effectiveness".

In general, confident, aggressive, decisive, and competitive attributes, which are commonly recognized masculine stereotype, and communal attribute, which is a feminine stereotype simultaneously merge in the mind of employees of female leaders in Mainland China. According to the result of this study, female leaders there are both expected to be agentic as a leader does and to be communal as a female does. Pragmatically, female leaders could leverage their gender power in a leadership position. To do that, female leaders should display communal attributes, and meanwhile appearing aggressive and confident to enhance perceived working effectiveness. When confronting with male subordinates, female leaders could leverage gender power to enhance initiating structure effectiveness, leave the decision-making opportunities to male subordinates in certain circumstances; while for female subordinates, female leaders should keep their decisive characteristic.