

## **Transformational Leadership and Follower's Karma-Yoga: Role of Follower's Gender**

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***Abstract.** The relationship between leadership and followers' Karma-Yoga, and how followers' gender affects this relationship were studied using a sample of 70 male and 31 female managers from several organizations in India. Transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, follower's Karma-Yoga, perceived effectiveness of leader and work unit, follower's motivation to put in extra effort, and follower's satisfaction with leader were studied. Results indicate that in the case of male followers, Karma-Yoga is related to transformational leadership, effectiveness, extra effort, and satisfaction positively, and to laissez-faire leadership negatively. There is however no significant relationship between Karma-Yoga and any of the variables in the case of female followers.*

No one factor provides greater benefit to an organization than a practice of Karma-Yoga or a total dedication to work on the part of all its members. The primary purpose of effective leadership could be looked upon as enhancing Karma-Yoga. The role of transformational leadership in building greater commitment and causing performance beyond expectations has been established (Bass, 1998). There has not been much attention given, however, to the differential impact of transformational leadership on male and female followers. In this study, we look at the differential relationships that transformational leadership might have with male and female followers' Karma-Yoga.

### **Theory and Hypotheses**

Leadership could be described as transactional when the relationship is merely about an exchange of valued things and as transformational when leaders and followers are shifted to higher levels of motivation. Besides transactional and transformational leadership, the full range of leadership behaviors also includes laissez-faire leadership wherein the leader is practically uninvolved in the relationship. Transformational leadership and laissez-faire leadership are thus at the opposite ends in terms of the degree of involvement of the leader.

#### ***Transformational Leadership***

Burns (1978) first developed the concept of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders, through their personal traits and their relationships with followers,

go beyond a simple exchange of resources and productivity. In transformational leadership, leaders address themselves to followers' wants, needs, and other motivations, as well as to their own.

Transformational leadership comprises four factors—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1998). Idealized influence refers to leader behaviors because of which followers identify with and emulate their leaders, there is complete trust, and leaders are viewed as articulating an attainable mission and vision. Such leaders are thoroughly respected, have a very high degree of referent power, maintain high standards, and set challenging goals for their followers. Idealized influence has been operationalized and is measured through the two sub-factors of idealized influence attributed and idealized influence behavioral. Inspirational motivation involves providing emotional appeals to increase awareness and understanding of mutually desired goals. The leader elevates follower expectations. Intellectual stimulation is encouraging followers to question their old ways of doing things, or to break with the past. Followers are supported for questioning their own values, beliefs and expectations, as well as those of the leader and organization. Individualized consideration is seen when the leader treats his or her followers differently but equitably on a one-to-one basis. Not only are their needs recognized and perspectives raised, but also their means of more effectively addressing goals and challenges are dealt with.

Transformational leaders are able to recognize and address already existing but untapped needs of potential followers—needs that followers themselves may not have recognized (Burns, 1978). Very often transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often more than they thought possible (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders invoke inspirational, visionary, and symbolic behavior—behavior that is often described as charismatic (House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991). Transformational leaders are exceptional and have extraordinary effects on their followers and eventually on their social systems. They attract strong feelings of identity from their followers, generate intense feelings about themselves, and enhance congruence in value systems between themselves and their followers (Krishnan, 2002, 2004). They possess a sense of purpose, have a mission, generate excitement at work, and heighten expectations through images and meanings (Bass, 1998). They also cultivate strong bonds and empathize with their followers. Though Bass (1985) considered charismatic leadership to be a component of transformational leadership, several authors have used the two terms as synonyms or identical twins (Conger, 1999).

Studies have found significant and positive relationships between transformational leadership and the amount of effort followers are willing to exert, satisfaction with the leader, ratings of job performance, and perceived effectiveness (Bass, 1998). The transformational leadership model adds to the two fundamental leadership behaviors of initiating structure and consideration in explaining the variance of subordinates' satisfaction and ratings of leader effectiveness (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). Leader's vision and vision implementation through task cues affects performance and many attitudes of subordinates (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). Strength of delivery of vision by the leader is an especially important determinant of perceptions of leader charisma and effectiveness (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999). Barling, Loughlin, and Kelloway (2002) found that safety-specific transformational leadership predicted occupational injuries through the effects of perceived safety climate, safety consciousness, and safety-related events. Task feedback interacts with charismatic leadership in affecting performance, and this relationship is mediated by subordinate's self-efficacy (Shea & Howell, 1999).

Shamir House and Arthur (1993) argued that transformational leadership affects the follower's self-concept by heightening self-esteem and self-worth and results in personal commitment to leader and mission, self-sacrificial behavior, organizational commitment, and task significance. Shamir, Zakay, Breinin and Popper (1998) found that a leader's emphasis on collective identity was related to subordinate's level of identification with the leader. Transformational leadership could be potentially effective across a variety of situations, though certain contextual factors could facilitate the emergence and impact of transformational leadership (Waldman, Ramirez, House, & Puranam, 2001).

Burns (1978) claimed that transformational leadership is morally uplifting. True transformational leadership is necessarily ethical, though the relationship might be moderated by contextual factors (Banerji & Krishnan, 2000). Transactional leaders are more likely to engage in unethical practices and transformational leaders are less likely to do so. Transformational leaders tend to concentrate on terminal values such as integrity and fairness. They are likely to give greater importance to values pertaining to others than to values concerning only themselves (Krishnan, 2001). Leaders, however, can be pseudo-transformational as well as transformational. Transformational leadership is authentic when it increases awareness of what is right, good, important, and beautiful, and when it helps elevate followers' needs for achievement and self-actualization. Krishnan (2003) found that moral leadership is high when ratings of transformational leadership given by the leaders themselves are lower than those given by their followers. Authentic transformational leaders foster in followers higher moral maturity, and move followers to go beyond their self-interests for the good of their group, organization, or society (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Therefore, a key variable of interest when we look at transformational leadership is the extent to which followers become dedicated to and involved in their work.

### ***Karma-Yoga***

“Societies vary in the extent to which they inculcate in their members the importance of work relative to other life roles” (Sinha, 2000: 19). The larger societal culture may socialize the members of a society such that they remain dedicated to work without bothering about what they gain from their effort. The culture of India wherein we conducted this study fundamentally differs from many other cultures in one essential aspect related to work. The people who are socialized in this culture consider themselves to be born with duties rather than with rights (Sinha, 1997). Thus, work is a duty to be discharged. We therefore operationalized Karma-Yoga through the basic belief structure of the society.

According to the Indian worldview, no one remains even for a moment without doing work. All are made to work under compulsion by their very nature. If a person withdraws physically from work, succumbs to inertness, and sits mentally recollecting various actions, he or she is of deluded mind and is a hypocrite. One has a duty to perform one's prescribed activities since performing actions is better than renouncing actions; by ceasing activity even bodily maintenance will not be possible. The objective of human existence is to transcend nature and this is best done by doing one's duty in a dedicated manner. Therefore, prescribed actions or duties should be performed without too much attachment to the personal gains of work, without interruption, and with complete dedication. It is only by performing action that a person attains the highest satisfaction. Steadfastness in action is required without much thought of the fruit (Chakraborty, 1987; Radhakrishnan, 1923).

### ***Leadership and Karma-Yoga***

Burns (1978) considered moral leadership to be an essential aspect of transformational leadership. Moral leadership emerges from, and always returns to, the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations, and values of the followers. It produces social change that will satisfy followers' authentic needs. Burns also claimed that there are certain stages in the moral leadership process. At levels of safety and security, followers tend to conform to group expectations and to support and justify the social order. At the highest stage of moral development, persons are guided by near universal ethical principles of justice such as equality of human rights and respect for universal dignity. To achieve this kind of leader-follower relation, moral leadership should operate at need and value levels higher than those of the potential follower but yet not so high that he or she loses contact. Secondly, it also needs to be the kind of leadership that can exploit conflict and tension within followers' value structures—for example, a conflict between a person's terminal and instrumental values. Leaders may simply help followers see these types of contradictions, or they might actively arouse a sense of dissatisfaction by making the followers aware of contradictions in or inconsistencies between values and behaviors.

Transformational leadership is a form of leadership where the leaders and the led have a relationship not only of power but also of mutual needs, aspirations, and values. In addition, in responding to the leaders, followers have adequate knowledge of alternative leaders and programs, and the capacity to choose among these programs. Moreover, leaders take responsibility for their commitments. If they promise certain kinds of economic, social, and political change, they assume leadership in bringing about that change. The ultimate test of a transformational leader is whether the leader can elevate the followers to a higher plane or not (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders would help the movement of followers from a lower mental and spiritual plane to a higher one. Being dedicated to the work on hand is a means of evolving into something higher, according to Indian culture. Transformational leadership would therefore inspire followers to revel in complete dedication to the work they do, without the followers being unduly influenced by the personal rewards that the work offers. We therefore hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 1.* Follower's Karma-Yoga would be positively related to transformational leadership, perceived effectiveness of leader and work unit, follower's motivation to put in extra effort, and follower's satisfaction with leader, and negatively related to laissez-faire leadership.

### ***Gender Differences***

Gender differences are reflected in roles, responsibilities, access to resources, constraints, opportunities, needs, perceptions, views, etc. held by both women and men. Gender bias refers to actions against women (or men) based on the perception that the other sex is not equal and does not have the same rights.

One of the first inventories that were carried out in the area of gender biases was the famous Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). Here subjects were asked to select words that best described their personalities. Based on these choices a person was determined to be feminine, masculine, or androgynous. According to Bem, feminine traits include being child-like, eager to soothe, gullible, shy, gentle, flatterable, and yielding. Masculine traits include being assertive, self-reliant, analytical, competitive, and ambitious. The obvious implication of this inventory is that men are more suited than women to hold positions of power that demand all these masculine attributes in business. In addition, gender moderates the effect of personality traits on power and influence. Rajan and Krishnan (2002) found that

authoritarianism is related positively to legitimate power and to the influence strategies of assertiveness, bargaining, and friendliness, only in the case of men.

Women are brought up to feel that they are different from men. These gender stereotypes make themselves felt in the organizational context. Mulla-Feroze and Krishnan (2000) studied a sample of officers in the defense services and found that women perceive themselves to be exhibiting lower levels of the two basic leadership characteristics of consideration and initiating structure than men do; the differences in consideration and initiating structure continue to exist even after controlling for transformational leadership. The concept of management has been portrayed as masculinism and characterized by high control, competitive, strategic, unemotional, an analytical approach, rational problem solving, and emphasis on winning and managerial effectiveness in terms of financial gains instead of employee satisfaction (Baker, 1991; Smith and Smits, 1994).

In contrast, women have been characterized as being non-rational in their social encounters, submissive, and passive and are thought to possess "feminine traits" like warmth, kindness, selflessness, and compassion. This leads to the belief that women are unfit to function as successful leaders in organizations, though there is evidence to show that women have a greater tendency to be somewhat more transformational and to display less management-by-exception than their male counterparts (Bass, 1998). Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) meta-analyzed 47 studies and showed that women exceeded men significantly on individualized consideration. Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003) did a meta-analysis of 45 studies of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles and found that female leaders were more transformational than male leaders and that male leaders were generally more likely to manifest laissez-faire leadership. Both men and women in the business world believe that a good manager has a masculine personality (Powell & Butterfield, 1979). Baker (1991) suggested that in organizations, women also use communications strategies that make them appear more affiliative than men and recommended the use of reciprocal accommodation to combat this perception.

Some authors claim that gender differences are largely a matter of perception. There are three theoretical perspectives concerning this perceived difference regarding women in management—person-centered, organization-centered, and context (Gregory, 1990). Person-centered view blames women's limited corporate progress on factors that are inherent to women. According to the organization-centered view, it is position and not gender, which determines actions and traits in organizational settings. The context perspective is influenced by research in stereotyping, numerical proportions, and ascribed social status and it considers a mix of all these factors to influence the perception of women.

Gender bias seems to exist even in teaching on campuses. Students have not encountered many successful women in leadership positions or management roles on campuses. Receiving information and observing women in executive and leadership positions seems to reduce the gender bias that permeates the minds of male students in the management area (Butler, 1997). One of the most interesting of the studies is one that identifies a declining rate of female enrolment in graduate business schools. The cause is identified as the male gender bias inherent in current business education (MacLellan & Dobson, 1994). Behavioral assumptions that underlie business education are not only morally insensitive, but they actually exhibit a significant male bias. Women are therefore increasingly avoiding MBAs because they find the value system promulgated not only morally impoverished but also inherently hostile.

A study of workers in Sweden investigated gender wage inequality, specifically, whether earnings are affected by the gender composition of establishments' managerial and

supervisory staff (Hultin & Szulkin, 1999). Theoretical arguments focused on managers' propensity to create and maintain or to undermine institutionalized gender bias and employees' capacity to mobilize resources and establish claims in the wage distribution process, mainly through social networks. Results showed that earnings are affected because there exists a gender bias in women's access to sources of organizational power. Women who work in establishments in which relatively many of the managers are men have lower wages than women with similar qualifications but who work in establishments with more women in the power structure.

Research also indicates that gender bias can act in an opposite direction. Numerous investigations of unethical selling behavior report gender bias and conclude that women are more likely to receive lighter penalties than men for the same infraction (Sayre, Joyce, & Lambert, 1991). However, these kinds of studies are very few. Most studies in this area indicate a widespread prevalence of gender bias with an unfavorable bent towards women in nearly every form of organization and across the globe. Socialization and gender bias would have only resulted in women being dedicated to work because of their internal drive rather than because of external factors. In other words, women's Karma-Yoga would be less affected by external factors like leadership than in the case of men. We therefore hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 2.* The relationship between leadership and followers' Karma-Yoga would be stronger for male followers than for female followers.

*Hypothesis 3.* Women's Karma-Yoga would be higher than that of men, if the relationship between leadership and Karma-Yoga is controlled for.

## **Method**

This study was conducted across several organizations in India. The organizations included a large nationalized bank, a consulting firm with offices worldwide, a large British bank in India, two large manufacturing organizations based in Eastern India, and a newly formed software company located in southern India. Leadership questionnaires were distributed to a randomly selected sample of male and female managers of these organizations. The sample size was 101 consisting of 70 male managers and 31 female managers. The designations varied from chief managers (indicating a work experience of over 25 years) to project leaders (indicating possibly a work experience of 4 years).

The 101 managers answered the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to describe the laissez-faire leadership and the five factors of transformational leadership of their superior. The questionnaire had four items for laissez-faire leadership and four items for each of the five factors of transformational leadership—idealized influence attributed, idealized influence behavioral, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The managers also responded to a questionnaire for measuring their Karma-Yoga; this questionnaire was developed for this study. According to the Indian worldview, there are four primary characteristics of Karma-Yoga—significance of work, successful work, detachment from work, and setting an example (Radhakrishnan, 1923). We developed ten items to capture these four characteristics. Managers responded to these ten items on a 5-point scale (1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree). The items are included in the Appendix.

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and standardized Cronbach coefficient alphas for and correlations between all variables used in the study. Karma-Yoga was significantly positively related to transformational leadership and follower's satisfaction with leader, and significantly negatively related to laissez-faire. It was also moderately ( $p < .10$ ) positively related to perceived effectiveness of leader and work unit, and follower's motivation to put in extra effort. Therefore, our Hypothesis 1 obtained support.

*Table 1*  
*Means, Standard Deviations, Standardized Cronbach Coefficient Alphas, and Correlations among Variables Studied*

	(N = 101)	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Transformational leadership	2.31	0.65	(.88)					
2	Laissez-faire	1.19	0.93	***-.44	(.72)				
3	Karma-Yoga	3.90	0.48	*.23	*-.25	(.64)			
4	Effectiveness	2.43	0.92	***.69	***-.46	†.16	(.82)		
5	Extra effort	2.44	0.93	***.71	***-.33	†.17	***.72	(.70)	
6	Satisfaction	2.34	1.10	***.64	***-.40	*.22	***.80	***.69	(.78)

Standardized Cronbach coefficient alpha is in parentheses along the diagonal.

† =  $p < 0.10$  \* =  $p < 0.05$  \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$

We did analyses of variance to test for significant differences between men and women for all the variables. There was a significant difference in mean only in the case of one variable—laissez-faire leadership. Female subordinates rated their superiors to be significantly lower on laissez-faire leadership as compared to male subordinates ( $F=7.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 2 presents the correlations between all the variables for women and men separately. In the case of men, Karma-Yoga was significantly positively related to transformational leadership, and was significantly negatively related to laissez-faire leadership. In addition, Karma-Yoga was positively related to effectiveness, extra effort, and satisfaction for men. There was however no significant relationship between Karma-Yoga and any of the variables in the case of female followers. Our Hypothesis 2 was thus supported.

We used general linear modeling to test if gender moderated the strength of the relationship between Karma-Yoga and the two leadership variables. We tested for heterogeneity of slopes by modeling Karma-Yoga against each leadership variable, gender, and the product of gender and leadership. There was no significant difference in the gender by leadership relationship as a function of gender in the case of both transformational leadership and laissez-faire leadership. We then proceeded to do analyses of covariance, since the assumption behind analysis of covariance that the slope of the covariate (leadership) by independent variable (gender) is the same for all levels of the independent variable (Scheffe, 1959) was satisfied in the case of both transformational leadership and laissez-faire leadership. The analyses of covariance tested whether Karma-Yoga varied across women and

men after controlling for its common variance with the leadership variables. The results did not show any significant differences. Thus, our Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

*Table 2*  
*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations by Gender*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Only Women (N=31)</b>							
1 Transformational leadership	2.46	0.58					
2 Laissez-faire	0.81	0.67	-.13				
3 Karma-Yoga	3.88	0.50	.01	-.15			
4 Effectiveness	2.55	0.80	*.37	*-.42	-.10		
5 Extra effort	2.65	0.75	***.60	.11	.02	** .52	
6 Satisfaction	2.50	1.09	*.37	-.18	.03	***.71	***.57
<b>Only Men (N=70)</b>							
1 Transformational leadership	2.24	0.67					
2 Laissez-faire	1.35	0.99	***-.50				
3 Karma-Yoga	3.90	0.48	** .33	*-.30			
4 Effectiveness	2.37	0.97	***.78	***-.47	*.27		
5 Extra effort	2.35	0.99	***.74	***-.40	†.23	***.78	
6 Satisfaction	2.26	1.11	***.74	***-.46	** .31	***.83	***.73

† =  $p < 0.10$  \* =  $p < 0.05$  \*\* =  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$

## Discussion

Authors on gender bias in organizations highlight a need to treat men and women on an equal basis. However, this study provides some preliminary evidence on the difference between men and women followers as far as the effects of transformational leadership on their Karma-Yoga is concerned. The study suggests that transformational leadership is likely to enhance Karma-Yoga for men but not for women. The results perhaps also suggest that these differences cannot be ignored. A possible implication that follows from the above finding is that in studying the effects of transformational leadership, studies that use a mixed-sex sample might have to analyze effects sex-wise to yield meaningful results.

Results show that there is no difference in the perception of transformational leadership as far as follower's sex is concerned. This indicates that the men and women in the study both recognize and acknowledge their leader to be transformational. However while Karma-Yoga of men is affected by how transformational their leader is, Karma-Yoga of women remains unaffected. A conclusion that might perhaps be drawn from this is that transformational leadership cannot be used as a tool to increase Karma-Yoga when the follower is a woman.

It is possible that for a woman, Karma-Yoga is less dependent on environmental factors than on the individual herself. The environmental variables might be seen as including

transformational leadership besides the cultural context of organizations. The opposite might hold true for men whose Karma-Yoga is sensitive to external factors like the perceived transformational behaviors of their leader.

The finding that Karma-Yoga is related to transformational leadership only in the case of men is partially supported by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory findings (Bem, 1974). This inventory indicated that subjects included nurturance and consideration for others as traits that were feminine. Masculine traits included being assertive, self-reliant, analytical, competitive, and ambitious and it was felt that these were “managerial” traits implying that men therefore made better managers. Male followers possibly do not let any display of transformational leadership by the superior affect their Karma-Yoga because they perceive it as a feminine trait.

### ***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

The operationalization of Karma-Yoga done based on Indian culture may not have been completely applicable to all the respondents. Some of the respondents surveyed were part of multinational corporations whose cultural context and ideas about Karma-Yoga may be very different from the ones prevailing in the outside society at large. The scale used to measure Karma-Yoga could be refined further by studying a larger variety of organizations. A use of a bigger sample with multiple follower responses for every leader could have also yielded richer data. Another limitation of the study could be the small sample of women as compared to men. An equal number of men and women would have been more desirable.

### ***Conclusion***

The results of this study suggest that follower’s gender might play an important role in deciding how a transformational leader affects follower’s Karma-Yoga. Men’s Karma-Yoga is positively correlated to the transformational capabilities of their leader, while there is no such relationship in the case of women. This could be because women respond less than men do to environmental variables including characteristics of their leader, when it comes to being dedicated to their work. May be women are, by their nature only, dedicated to their work, and therefore, leadership has less effect on them than what it has on men. There is a need for more studies on transformational leadership that are gender-specific and do not rely on findings drawn from a mixed-gender sample.

## **Appendix**

### **Questionnaire Items for Measuring Karma-Yoga**

#### *Significance of Work*

I feel life is meaningless without work to do

I feel enthusiastic about the work that I do and uplifted by it.

#### *Successful Work*

I feel that the most successful people are the ones who are always active in their work.

Mental control over the task is essential for achieving success in it.

Complete dedication to one's work is required in order to succeed.

#### *Detachment from Work*

A certain degree of detachment to my work is essential for success in it.

An action performed without too much attachment to the result is likely to result in the highest satisfaction.

For a job to be successful, one should relinquish ideas of self-advancement.

#### *Setting an Example*

I like to inspire my subordinates by the force of my actions.

One of the hallmarks of a good leader is that he or she can inspire his or her subordinates to behave as he or she does.

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