

Age and Gender Influence Upon Self-Reported Leadership Attributes during Recruitment

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Abstract

The rationale behind the present study was to analyse the self-reported responses to the JobMatchTalent (JMT) instrument describing personal attributes of male and female applicants seeking recruitment to executive leadership positions in combination with age levels in order to extract any consistent gender differences that may have arisen. "Willingness-to-take-risks" was observed to be the single attribute upon which female and male applicants differ with the latter expressing a greater extent. None of the other attributes, including "humor-equilibrium", "resilience", "will-power", "stamina", "initiative", "assent-image" and "openness" differed between the genders. Taking into account previous notions regarding the differential capacity of male and female leaders to withstand 'stress-and-strain', the present findings that concomitantly examine participants' variations due to age, imply that leadership-strength attributes are modulated by age but not gender.

Keywords: Recruitment; Leadership; Gender; Age; Attributes; Participants

Introduction

The recruitment of individuals for corporate/administrative/governmental positions of leadership has given rise to an assortment of instruments, generally involving assessments of personality and personal profiles, for the estimation of attributes/traits to identify decision-making, coping skills, resilience, etc. and numerous qualities that may contribute to effective executive performance within those concerns [1]. The JobMatchTalent (JMT) test instrument, for recruitment, in its original form, was developed, in collaboration with recruitment consultants, in order to derive an instrument particularly adapted to those requirements exerted by corporate and governmental pressures to recruit competent individuals to fill various leadership roles. As such, it measures individuals' occupationally oriented attributes in relation to those specific demands associated with the specific occupations and positions that were to be filled. In a large exploratory report, consisting of a data-base derived from over 6000 recruitment participants, the psychometric measurement of personality-related attributes of individuals who had applied for executive positions displayed marked and consistent relationships between the participants' age-group and their self-reported personal profiles [2]. It was shown that at the higher age levels the candidates for executive leadership positions expressed a lesser interest and focus upon the specific aspects of the tasks associated with 'job-performance' and lesser orientation towards their own personal ambitions and goals and instead were more concerned with the development of their staff and teams and building relationships with those whom they worked with.

Despite efforts to the contrary, there persists leadership situations in which women in leading positions, albeit underrepresented, report that they have been disadvantaged as a result of their gender [3]. It seems hardly a secret that there still remains some degree of inertia, for a multitude of reasons, among female applicants seeking or assuming executive leadership positions since various barriers for eventual recruitment appear to be an hindrance, such as real or apparent discriminatory tendencies, parenthood or lack of interest in leadership [4-7]. Nevertheless, there appears to be some substantial extent of overlap between how leadership profiles are expressed by leaders and non-leaders [8]. Gender, levels of education and degree of experience

(years) failed to influence significantly those strengths presented in leadership profiles whereas leaders were more likely to express "achiever-strength" than non-leaders. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that it is both organizational and personal factors that emerge as gender-related challenges against women attempting to procure leader status [9]. Organizational barriers were described by gender stereotyping and the well-known "good-old-boys" network whereas personal influences included a paucity of leadership aspirations, often arising from an insufficiency of role models, family and parenthood and a surfeit of workplace mentors. Female aspirants to executive leadership positions were found to be more likely to self-report that they would endorse an interactive style of management termed 'transformational leadership' with greater interpersonal-orientation [10-12]. In an industrial setting, female-dominated industries were more interpersonally-oriented than observed in the male-dominated, with the former reporting more pressure from their positions [13]. These findings showed greater effects of gender and gender ratios upon leadership styles as well as stress and mental health. In these contexts, the question arises as to whether or not leadership development initiatives promote leadership strengths for both genders or whether leadership strengths vary with position. In view of the paucity of women in senior veterinary positions, Castro and Armitage-Chan [14] examined the influences of gender, self-esteem and year-of-study upon these tendencies. They observed that career aspiration and leadership ambition were modulated by gender with greater numbers of males students than female students presenting career aspirations which were influenced positively by self-esteem, self-confidence and experience of previous leadership in clubs/societies all of which more apparent in the male students.

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The rationale for the present study was to examine the self-reported personal attributes of male and female applicants, as a function of age, for recruitment to executive leadership positions both in corporate enterprises and governmental/local council/educational departments [15-17]. Since it has been shown that women's narratives relating to their notions of principal leadership styles and their perceptions of leadership capabilities appear to persist in a dissonant relation to the opinions expressed by their male colleagues [18]. It is expected that a better understanding as to why women tend to be underrepresented at higher levels of corporate/council/educational/governmental leadership may support both genders in leadership development of personal attributes associated with empowerment.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether or not apparently ambiguous JMT scales pertaining to personal attributes that were seemingly related to gender, but could in fact be a function of the participants' age.

Method and Materials

Participants

A general grouping of executive leaders (N=6789) participated. The mean age of the leaders was 44 years (SD=9.3). There were 39% women and 61% men included in the study. The self-report and workplace-oriented recruitment inventory, JobMatchTalent (JMT), was used.

Instrument

Personal attitudes to and experiences of job relations and characteristics are measured with the JMT. The JMT test is based on ten main scales, each presenting three subscales. For a detailed description of the scales, in Archer et al. [2].

Statistical procedure

Analyses were done by use of ANOVA and ANCOVA. The 30 JMT scales were subjected to an exploratory two step procedure. Initially, significant main gender effects were selected ($p < 0.001$) from ANOVAs. Next, age of leaders was used as a covariate for re-analyses of the selected scales. Conditions of the ANCOVAs were controlled for (independence between main effect and covariate; parallel slopes of lines).

Results

For the following eight JMT scales, the previous gender effects ($p < 0.001$) from the ANOVAs disappeared ($p > 0.05$) wherein the age of the leaders was included as a covariate:

(b3) "Humor-equilibrium" (c2) "Resilience" (d2) "Will-power" (d3) "Stamina"

(g2) "Initiative" (g3) "Willingness-to-take-risks" (h1) "Assent-image" (j3) "Openness"

However, there was one boundary effect of gender for (g3) "Willingness-to-take-risks" ($p = 0.050$). All effects of age were highly significant ($p < 0.001$) but with two exceptions: $p = 0.044$ for (g3) "Willingness-to-take-risks", and $p = 0.123$ for (h1) "Assent-image".

The conditions for proper interpretation of the effects of the covariate were fulfilled. Gender and age was independent ($r = 0.004$), and all interactions between gender and age were not significant ($0.20 < p < 0.89$). Thus, from a statistical point of view, the lines were parallel. See further Figure 1.

Moreover, for the two upper diagrams (b3 & c2) and for the two lowest (h1 & j3), the correlations among the JMT scales and age of leaders were positive. For the four other diagrams (d2, d3, g2 & g3) the corresponding correlations were negative.

Discussion

The present study was designed to examine whether or not gender differences in self-reported personal attributes would emerge during recruitment of executive leadership positions within corporate/county council/ governmental enterprises as a function of age-group. It was observed that with the exception of "willingness-to-take-risks", wherein female participants expressed a lesser propensity, no significant differences emerged with regard to "humor-equilibrium", resilience", "will-power", "stamina", "initiative", "assent-image" and "openness". Both genders expressed increased "Humor-equilibrium", "resilience", "assent-image" and "openness" with advancing age concomitant with decreased "will-power", "stamina", "initiative" and "willingness-to-take-risks" as they grew in age and experience. It is interesting to note

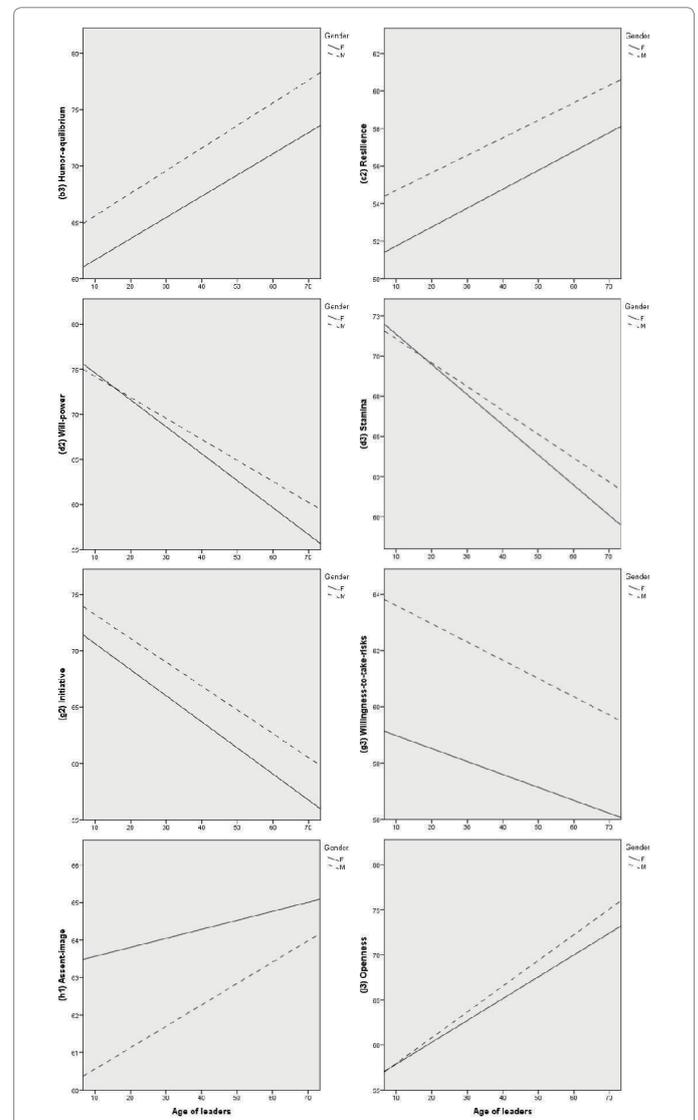


Figure 1: The slope of lines for JMT scales and the age of leaders across gender for a general grouping of leaders (N=6789). All the interactions between gender and age were found to be non-significant.

that in expressions of workplace “pride” female participants were not observed as being deficient to males in ‘agency-related’ attributes and relative competency neither did they appear to be any more exceptional in ‘community-related’ attributes and competency [19]. It was observed previously [2] that “will-power” abated with advancing age since it appears that younger executives attempt to provide an impression or decisiveness and determination; nevertheless, this type of attributes bears a price with it since an over-indulgence of “will-power” implies stubbornness and a lack of receptivity to modulating sources of information and viewpoints. Although it appears as if “assent-image” increased more rapidly among female participants than among their male counterparts with advancing age and experience, this tendency did not reach significance. The absence of any differences whatsoever between the female and male self-reports with regard to “humor equilibrium” and “resilience” makes an interesting observation in view of indications that women are more affected by stress [20] and emotional exhaustion [21] than men. Nevertheless, it has been shown that there was no association between gender and rising levels of overall burnout among educational leaders wherein low self-efficacy, poor leadership, high job demands and lecturing at the highest levels were associated significantly with burnout [22] (Figure 1).

Limitations

It is always necessary in self-report studies, undertaken upon participants who are presenting themselves for recruitment purposes, to maintain an awareness of their proclivity for manipulation, to greater or lesser extent, of the personal attributes as situational demands emerge on the basis of which factors may be considered assets and which tendencies may emerge as liabilities for eventual recruitment [23]. Not least for a better understanding of gender influences, future investigations could contribute to the recruitment utility of the JMT instrument through co-administration with the Workplace Resilience Instrument which optimizes factors involving “active problem-solving”, “team efficacy”, “confident sense-making” and “bricolage” [24].

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