

Leadership during Crisis – An analysis of how Women World Leaders have dealt COVID -19 crisis

Ms. Shweta Bane, Ms. Aishwarya Sanku - Students
Dr. Farida Virani - Professor, MET Institute of Management

ABSTRACT

<https://doi.org/10.34047/MMR.2020.8101>

Leadership as a soft skill is most vital for any individual employed under any organization or entity. It underlines different behaviors that an individual displays while handling a critical situation. Since ages, Leadership as a characteristic has been associated with being Male Prerogative. Through this research we have tried to put forward how Female Leaders have taken over & successfully managed to deal with the crisis that came ahead of them. Here we exclusively focus on Female World Leaders who effectively managed the COVID – 19 Pandemic & also have highlighted their distinctive leadership styles.

Keywords: Leadership, Soft Skill, Organization, Individual, Behaviors, Critical Situation

Introduction

There are numerous definitions of leadership available on the internet, each with its own meaning. In one of his articles published in 1971, W.C.H. Prentice described leadership as "the achievement of a goal via the guidance of human helpers," and an effective leader as someone who can understand people's motivations and enable employee engagement in a way that aligns individual wants and goals with the group's purpose.

Likewise, there are many such beliefs, definitions, perceptions about who is an ideal leader or what actually leadership is. However, we fail to analyze the leadership skills or misconceive a leader's task. The majority of the time, we think of leadership as a position of power, fame, showmanship, or intelligence.

While this might be true, it is necessarily not the essence of being a leader. Someone who successfully rallies his followers to achieve specified goals is referred to be a leader. On a daily and annual basis, a true leader is capable of doing so.

As 'Women in leadership' is a phenomenon that has received many attentions over the past couple of years, Women have now resolved to break the traditional glass ceiling that stopped them from entering leadership positions even if they possessed the required skill set and talent to occupy them. According to studies conducted women make up just 4 percent of CEOs of the world's 500 top companies. Less number

of women have participated as the heads of Government at national level and a very few at international levels.

The following are the challenges that women in leadership positions face:

1. Male leadership is preferred by society over female leadership.
2. Set of cultural practices to deny basic freedom to women.
3. Priority to male members in different situations leading to lower self-esteem of women.
4. Perceptions that female qualities are inferior to male qualities.
5. Perception that leadership is male dominant.

Various steps have been done to promote female leadership. However, it cannot be said that all of these have turned fruitful in bringing out more female participation.

When the actions of male counterparts are considered, it is clear that the majority of them have failed to match the success of nations led by women leaders.

But even so, not all countries led by women are successful in crisis management; for example, Bangladesh, led by Hasina Sheikh. Likewise, not all countries led by male leaders are failing at controlling the spread of pandemic. It basically has been seen that nations that were quick in their decisions, had a clear

vision of how to overcome and what measures would be required in the future whilst taking into consideration their citizen's responses have fared well.

Objectives

1. To understand various leadership styles applied by the female leaders in their respective countries
2. To highlight the major differences in Male and Female styles of leadership during crisis
3. To understand different strategies used by the leaders in their countries to overcome crisis
4. To understand the perceptions of the general population about these Women World Leaders

Literature Review

A lot of articles published during this phase suggest that countries with Women driven governments have dealt with the crisis more efficiently as compared to most of the countries led by Male driven governments. Female world leaders like the Chancellor of German, Prime Ministers of New Zealand, Taiwan and Finland, Iceland to name a few are some who have taken excellent measures to contain viruses in their respective countries.

- A. "What Do Countries with the Best Coronavirus Responses Have in Common?" writes Avivah Wittenberg-Cox in her paper. Truth, decisiveness, technology, and love are the four primary qualities that contribute to the success of women world leaders in managing the virus, according to Forbes' article "Women Leaders" (April 2020).
- B. According to an article titled "The real reason why countries with women leaders are handling Covid crisis better" published in "The Print" (May 2020) by Louise Paille and Anne Croteau, suggests that Countries that have Gender Parity are doing exceptionally well in handling the Coronavirus situation. It also suggests that the Success is an outcome of Gender Parity.
- C. Ravi Velloor in his article "Women leaders and alpha males up against Covid19" (April 2020) published in Observer Research Foundation (ORF) highlighted how the male counterparts have gone

wrong while handling the situations and how on the other hand the female leaders have excelled.

- D. Andrea S. Aldrich & Nicholas J. Lotito, in their research paper published by Cambridge University Press on the topic "Pandemic Performance: Women Leaders in the COVID-19 Crisis". The timelines of the leaders' actions were studied. During the research, they did not find any statistical evidence to support popular beliefs that female leaders outperform male leaders. However, their recommendation implies that gender equality and female leadership styles would have resulted in better outcomes to curb the situation.

Research Methodology

Research Type	Mixed Research-Qualitative & Quantitative
Sample Size	150
Sampling Technique	Random Sampling from Social Media-Twitter
Tools for Analysis	MS Excel-Sentiment Analysis

Data Analysis

1. Qualitative Analysis

a) Key Leadership Take-away from Jacinda Ardern

Ardern had already received praise for her outstanding leadership following a terrorist attack in Christchurch in 2019, and now, faced with another crisis, COVID - 19.

The 39-year-old prime leader acted quickly and decisively in response to health professionals' recommendations. She has been clear and consistent in her communication with the public.

She also used engaging Facebook Live sessions, which she conducted from her home occasionally, to communicate her thoughts. She appeared in a faded sweatshirt on a live broadcast to calm the public as stringent lockdown measures were enacted. In one of the other interviews, she appeared with her toddler on her lap to discuss the further measures that were taken in order to control the spread of pandemic in the country. All of her live sessions whether with the Members of Parliament or the citizens of New Zealand showed

her openness and collaborative style of leadership.

Despite her refusal to sugarcoat the risks the pandemic poses to lives and livelihoods, her messaging has been plain, consistent, and delivered in a confident, calm, and reassuring tone.

Ardern and her administration have repeatedly urged New Zealanders to "Unify Against Covid-19," and the prime minister has referred to the country as "its citizens team of five million." The public's support for the country's curfew has risen as a result of this. It has received widespread support across the country.

Her message of unity, according to Gavin Yamey, director of Duke Global Health Initiative's Center for Policy Impact in Global Health, contrasts sharply with that of several US leaders, particularly President Donald Trump. Despite health specialists' recommendations, Trump recently enlisted residents' long-standing protests to reopen the economy.

b) Key Leadership Take-away from Angela Merkel

Merkel's popularity skyrocketed after she continuously delivered sobering messages about the virus's toll on Germans' lives. She has called for a worldwide, multilateral response to the pandemic.

Reelection is not a priority for Merkel, who said last year that she would not seek a fifth term as chancellor, despite the fact that she is struggling to defend her record of handling successive financial crises and, as a result, the refugee problem. This could make delivering a difficult message easier. However, she has always approached her profession with a meticulous attitude, something Germans have come to value during a pandemic.

During the Parliament meetings, she stood up alone to keep up the restrictions that were imposed in Germany to avoid the spread of disease. The Federal Nations Government was always critical of what the Chancellor was saying, but she managed

to keep it all going.

Protests were held to loosen the restrictions on social gatherings, which were fueled by opposing parties. All of this did not deter her decision of lifting the bans which helped the country on a whole.

Ms. Merkel's government considered a variety of different information sources in developing its coronavirus policy, including epidemiological models; data from medical providers; and evidence from South Korea's successful program of testing and isolation. As opposed to most of the other nations, she relied more on data and consulted the doctors, health specialists or experts before taking any decision regarding the lockdown.

c) Key Leadership Takeaway from Tsai Ing-wen

There is more to be said for President Tsai's consistent composure and self-assured comportment. As president, the Cornell University law graduate and London School of Economics alumna has been praised for her relatable, congenial demeanor to citizens, a position she has held since May 2016.

Her public persona has an approachable tone and a candid "reputation for being wonky." She does not use complicated language in her speeches, as many world leaders do. Her linguistic approach is more simple and clear. She wants to make sure that when she speaks, everyone understands her, regardless of class or background. Her voice has a casual tone.

Though President Tsai lacks the charisma and outgoing personality of some more well-known world leaders, Taiwanese citizens have grown increasingly fond of her truthfulness, intellect, and persistence.

d) Key Leadership Take-away from Erna Solberg

Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg declared a state of emergency on March 12. According to Politico, Norway has had 6,798 coronavirus cases, with more than 116 deaths.

However, Norway is experiencing a slight improvement, with fewer hospitalizations. According to the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, the number of COVID-19 patients hospitalized in Norway has dropped to its lowest level since March 26. To track the spread of the coronavirus, Solberg's administration has collaborated with Telenor, Norway's largest mobile operator.

Solberg also closed a number of public and private institutions, including schools and eateries, and quarantine measures were implemented for people with a travel history. The government promised to help small business owners and to increase paid leave for parents who care for children at home.

Due to extremely low local transmission rates, the Prime Minister declared that emergency measures would be relaxed after Easter. Kindergartens will open on April 20th, with junior high schools following a week later. On April 20, the prohibition on people staying in cabins and other recreational properties outside of their home municipality will be lifted.

"The contagion curve has flattened out. Together, we have reached the goal that each infected person does not infect more than one other person. It is pleasing, but just a snapshot. We can't lower our guard. We are still far from half-time," Solberg said at a recent press conference.

The ones most affected by the pandemic are the children and hence in order to calm them down and assure them that the situation would be back to normal soon, Solberg arranged an online session with children only to reassure and calm them down. She also arranged for a question-and-answer session for kids to make them aware of what is required to be safe from the virus.

e) Key Leadership Take-away from Sanna Marin

Last year, she became the world's youngest Prime Minister of Finland, and she is known for making straightforward decisions. All neighboring

countries, including Norway, Sweden, and Russia, were subjected to a strict curfew. It helped the country limit the virus's spread to 4,000 cases and 140 deaths.

The nation is already famous for having high levels of happiness, a good education system, and a social safety net. Marin is now exemplifying true effective leadership.

Paavo Lipponen, former Prime Minister of Finland, praises her. "Sanna Marin is a one-of-a-kind natural political talent," he said. In addition, according to a recent poll, 85 percent of citizens supported the Prime Minister's approach to dealing with the pandemic.

f) Key Leadership Take-away from Mette Frederiksen

Mette Frederiksen shut down her country's borders on March 13th, while many of her European neighbours were unsure what to do. She then ordered the closure of kindergartens, schools, and universities, as well as the prohibition of gatherings of more than ten people.

Denmark appears to have escaped the worst of the pandemic: the death toll is less than 250, and the number of coronavirus patients being treated in hospitals is declining. It has also distinguished this accomplished and successful politician, who was already the country's youngest Prime Minister, as a once-in-a-generation political figure. A poll conducted at the beginning of this month found that 79 percent of Danes thought she was doing a good job, a 40-point increase from the previous month.

Her honest and direct speeches and clear directives to the country have received widespread acclaim. She's even managed to have some fun, posting a video on Facebook of herself doing the dishes while singing along to 1980s Danish popsters Dodo and the Dodos during the country's weekly TV lockdown singalong.

2. Quantitative Analysis

a) Reactions collected from an article titled "Why have female leaders been so successful in handling

COVID-19?” authored by Giulia Carbonaro for CGTN was posted on Twitter.



The subject that has been widely discussed in this article is on how the female leaders have reacted to the pandemic and what were the precautionary measures taken. With the help of the sentiment analysis done on this article, it can be seen that most reactions obtained are positive. This indicates that the majority of the crowd agrees and appreciates the actions taken by these leaders in their respective countries in the face of the pandemic.

The negative reactions here, suggest that some people assign the success of these leaders to not just the actions taken by them but also other factors like the demographics or the support of its citizens to avoid the spread of the pandemic. The neutral reactions obtained indicate that fewer people believe that it is the cumulative result of both the leadership style being applied and the other non-leadership factors mentioned above.

b) Reactions collected from an article titled **“Women leaders are doing a disproportionately great job at handling the pandemic. So why aren't there more of them?”** authored by Leta Hong Fincher, for CNN was posted on Twitter



The article majorly focuses on how Women Leaders have been more successful in handling the crisis than their male counterparts. It widely discusses the simple, humane strategies applied by these female leaders in their respective countries which the male counterparts failed to recognize. It also discusses why is there a need for more female leadership and also the reason for the lack of it currently. The positive reactions reported here support the argument of having more females in the leadership positions.

Whereas the negative comments outline a few female leaders from some other countries who failed terribly to rescue their nation from the pandemic and hence support the fact that the success of the country in controlling the crisis is not because of their female representatives but due to the leadership style they adapted which if was adapted was any male leader have also resulted in a success.

c) Reactions collected from an article titled **“Are female leaders more successful at managing the coronavirus crisis?”** authored by Jon Hanley and Eleanor Ainge Roy for The Guardian was posted on Twitter



This article is entirely dedicated to female leadership, as well as the strategies and methods employed by these leaders to improve the medical and economic conditions of their respective countries. When the Sentiment Analysis is performed, it is possible to see that the users' choices are conflicting. The positive responses here indicate that they agree with what was written in the article about female leaders; however, a large portion of this population believes that the Female Leaders of only a few countries are compared with countries managed by male leaders that are not

doing so well, rather than drawing a comparison between countries that are doing well and are managed by both male and female leaders. The negative reactions reflect the users' resentment of the authors for being biased against their female counterparts.

Conclusion

There is a well-developed script for crisis management to follow, and most leaders in large organisations are prepared to use it if necessary. They are aware of the unique risks that their industry, operations, or locations may present and are prepared to deal with an accident, a cybersecurity breach, or a hurricane that disrupts business as usual. In a nutshell, the script reads as follows:

- Have a crisis management plan in place, including a crisis team and strong connections with experts in the areas where your company is vulnerable.
- Be as prompt as possible with a factual response, the actions being taken, and where individuals can go for informational updates.
- Provide accurate public information through a spokesperson, assist those in need, and listen to community concerns; and
- Declare when the crisis has ended and what steps are being taken to prevent similar events in the future.

Most leaders are equipped to work through crises in a way that is responsive to the needs of the public while limiting the organization's reputational harm when handled sensitively and empathetically.

This crisis, on the other hand, is unlike any other. It addresses issues that go far beyond the scope of even the most foreseen crises and exemplifies some of the more difficult aspects of leadership. More than in any past economic, social, or political situation, if leaders do not act quickly, events will snowball, burdening the organization and exceeding its ability to respond. This applies to everyone, from families and schools to businesses and governments. The best examples of leadership anticipate the future and respond decisively with facts and courage.

So, why are some able to meet the challenge while

others are unable? Other than vision, I can think of two primary reasons why most people do not act quickly or wisely. First, acts of commission carry more psychological weight than acts of omission. In other words, those who act are frequently held to be more accountable than those who do nothing.

As a result, in uncertain times, doing nothing is frequently regarded as preferable to doing something potentially questionable. Second, when there are options (including doing nothing) and no clear path forward, we frequently don't understand or appreciate which "mistake" is the best one to make. Too often, the default position is to continue down the most familiar path. We see opportunities in the familiar and fail to recognize the potential for catastrophic losses.

Changes that are being demanded today are disruptive, painful, and the long-term consequences are unknown. They range from deciding to close down a country/state/city before a widespread viral infection has taken hold, to asking parents who work from home to take on their child's education, to deciding to furlough employees in order to save money while maintaining healthcare benefits.

The common element is that there are many situations in which leaders must act before the need to act becomes obvious, or risk falling behind and having insufficient resources to catch up, remedy a problem, etc. once hindsight is known. These are not decisions for the faint of heart. We need visionaries with imagination and courage to show us the way, even if they don't have a script.

References:

- Awasthi, P. (2020, April 14). *How women leaders outperform their male counterparts in flattening the Covid-19 curve*. The Hindu BusinessLine. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world/how-women-leaders-outperform-their-male-counterparts-in-flattening-the-covid-19-curve/article31337332.ece>
- Bello, M. (2020, April 17). *Female Leaders Show Remarkable Crisis Management Skills*. Mexico Business. <https://mexicobusiness.news/health/news/female-leaders-show-remarkable-crisis-management-skills>

- Fincher, L. F. H. C. (2020, April 16). *Women leaders are doing a great job at handling the pandemic. So why aren't there more of them?* CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/14/asia/women-government-leaders-coronavirus-hnk-intl/index.html>
- Fries, K. (2018, May 23). *8 Essential Qualities That Define Great Leadership*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimberlyfries/2018/02/08/8-essential-qualities-that-define-great-leadership/>
- Giles, S. (2016, March 15). *The Most Important Leadership Competencies, According to Leaders Around the World*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2016/03/the-most-important-leadership-competencies-according-to-leaders-around-the-world>
- Hansen, S. (2021, January 7). *Breaking From Republican Leadership, Some GOP Senators Push To Speed Up Next Stimulus Bill As McConnell Delays*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahhansen/2020/05/21/breaking-from-republican-leadership-some-gop-senators-push-to-speed-up-next-stimulus-bill-as-mcconnell-delays/>
- Henley, J., & de Jong, E. (2020, April 25). *Are female leaders more successful at managing the coronavirus crisis?* The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/25/why-do-female-leaders-seem-to-be-more-successful-at-managing-the-coronavirus-crisis>
- Karabell, S. (2016, May 14). *10 Commandments For Women In Leadership*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shelliekarabell/2016/05/14/10-commandments-for-women-in-leadership/#2393268372e0>
- McCarthy, N. (2020, May 7). *COVID-19 Wreaks Economic Havoc Across Europe [Infographic]*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2020/05/07/covid-19-wreaks-economic-havoc-across-europe-infographic/>
- Prentice, W. C. H. (2004, January). *Understanding Leadership*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2004/01/understanding-leadership>
- Taub, A. (2020, August 13). *Why Are Women-Led Nations Doing Better With Covid-19?* The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/world/coronavirus-women-leaders.html>
- Taylor, P. (2020, March 25). *Coronavirus brings out best (and worst) in world leaders*. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-brings-out-best-and-worst-in-world-leaders/>
- Times, T. N. Y. (2020, May 21). *Opinion | Women in Charge: Success Against the Coronavirus*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/21/opinion/letters/coronavirus-women-leaders.html>
- Tiwari, A. (2020, April 11). *In the world's fight against coronavirus, female leaders show the way*. Newsland. <https://www.newsland.com/2020/04/11/in-the-worlds-fight-against-coronavirus-female-leaders-show-the-way>
- Velloor, R. (2020, April 29). *Women leaders and alpha males up against Covid19*. ORF. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/women-leaders-and-alpha-males-up-against-covid19-64967/>
- Wittenberg-Cox, A. (2022, April 14). *What Do Countries With The Best Coronavirus Responses Have In Common? Women Leaders*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/avivahwittenbergcox/2020/04/13/what-do-countries-with-the-best-coronavirus-reponses-have-in-common-women-leaders/#5fe497f23dec>