

Men and women in leadership roles: A comparison of two universities

Recent decades have recorded a widening of access of women to education but this trend has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the numbers of women occupying management positions. In higher education, some countries recruit women to around 40 per cent of its academic staff positions, yet their advancement into management positions is slow and negligible.

Among the explanations offered to account for this anomalous situation, leadership attributes are shown as contributory. The paucity of women in management is attributed to the personality characteristics, attitudes and behavioural skills of women themselves. Sri Lanka provides a unique situation among South Asian countries in respect of women's representation in higher education management is very low.

Leadership attributes are qualities possessed by the individual that shape his/her leadership behaviour. As such, measures of leadership attributes should be highly related to measures of leadership performance. The present study attempts to examine whether men and women in academic and administrative positions exhibit more traditionally male/traditionally female attributes respectively. The Leadership Attributes Inventory used for a self-rating of leadership attributes of academic and administrative managers in the Open University of Sri Lanka in 2002 March was administered to their counterparts in the University of Colombo in order to compare the ratings of managers in the two universities. The attributes were clustered into four groups : Ethical characteristics, Action-oriented skills, Intellectual skills and Interpersonal skills and analysis of variance was carried out to examine the significance of the differences in relation to clusters by gender, age, educational qualifications , and position . Mean ratings of individual attributes were compared to identify similarities and dissimilarities by gender.

It is envisaged that there would be similarities in the ratings of leadership attributes by men and women managers and that these ratings will not differ between the two universities. However, differences between academic managers and administrative managers may emerge. It is also possible that there is a significant relationship between leadership attributes clusters and the educational qualifications of managers.