Task and Relationship Orientation of Aspiring Leaders: A Study of Male and Female Adults in Business Education

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Abstract: *Leadership has many components, including being task and relationship oriented. There are creative, innovative, and tech-savvy aspiring leaders who are very good at building relationships but may experience some challenges in meeting deadlines regarding urgent and nonurgent tasks. This research aims to help managers and aspiring leaders better understand their dominant orientation as a leader and use whichever leadership dimension best matches a prospective project and its surrounding contextual elements. As such, respondents were asked to complete a leadership questionnaire for reflection on their dominant tendencies. The results of 3950 respondents (58.7% female and 41.3% male) showed a statistically significant difference in their task and relationship orientations, with the latter being a predominant skill for a majority. Furthermore, men are more task-oriented than female respondents, and women tend to be significantly higher on relationship orientation. These findings are useful for increasing diversity/gender equity in leadership positions and matching a current or prospective employee with a given project based on the criticality of meeting task deadlines and relationship maintenance requirements. Suggestions and implications for practice through a "person-job-fit" process are provided. Overall, this study explored the basics of leadership orientations based on quantitative research and provided information on the fact that females are more relationship-oriented than their male counterparts in the various fields of business education. Consequently, it would behoove organizations to increase the number of female managers, executives, and board members so firms can benefit from the diversity of their dominant styles in building stronger relationships at higher levels of the organization. Recommendations for discussion, reflection and training should be industry-specific and focused on the person-job-fit match to put the right people in the right jobs so aspiring leaders can be happy as they learn, grow, manage, lead, and become productive members of the organization and society at large.*

Keywords: leadership orientation, relationship-orientation, task-orientation, person-job-fit, situational leadership.

JEL Classification: Z1, M53.

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Introduction

The leadership styles and practices of working adults can be assessed to help them lead and manage effectively at any given project or situation. Leadership is about exerting influence based on knowledge, expertise, information, mutual respect, referent power, etc.; as such, it requires persuading or motivating one's team to solve urgent challenges effectively and efficiently (Hersey, 1984 & 1997; Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson, 2001; Mujtaba, 2022c; Mujtaba, 2019a). General Colin Powell, the former U.S. Secretary of State during the George W. Bush administration, said, "Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership." Consequently, influential leaders must focus on solving complex problems in a timely and team-oriented manner by being task-oriented, and they must also care for their colleagues, employees, and followers by building mutually beneficial and respectful relationships. After all, as the great Warren Bennis emphasised, "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality" regardless of one's formal rank or authority in the organisation. Leaders can best translate and transform their organisation's vision into reality by knowing their dominant tendencies in influencing people as well as the readiness levels of their followers so they can use an appropriate style with each person.

In general, aspiring leaders should know and acknowledge that leadership is not about one's formal position in the hierarchy of management ranks (Hersey, 2008) because it occurs whenever one person attempts to influence the behavior of another individual or group in the family, society, or organization which can be upward, downward, or sideways (Hersey and Campbell, 2004). Paul Hersey and Ron Campbell have consistently explained that effective leadership or influencing others requires the skills or competencies of diagnosing, adapting, and communicating:

➢ *Diagnosing* requires a good understanding of the situation one is trying to influence.
➢ *Adapting* means having to alter one's behavior as a leader, as well as the resources available to meet the possibilities of any given situation or context.
➢ *Communicating* involves connecting with and engaging others in a way that colleagues and team members can understand the ultimate vision or goal, accept it, and support its achievement.

Diagnosing the specific bottleneck or problem, adapting one's leadership style, and communicating to clarify the vision or outcome are not always sufficient to get everyone's support. Leaders must also function as effective managers by acquiring at least the three levels of expertise in their human skills by understanding why people behave as they do, predicting how people are likely to act in response to any future mandates or policies, and controlling or influencing the behaviors and appropriate activities of others toward achieving the stated outcomes (Hersey and Campbell, 2004). The functions of managers and leaders overlap in a complementary manner as both are important for leadership since they are not mutually exclusive. As such, one can function as an effective leader and manager simultaneously, depending on what is needed based on the context of the situation, urgency of the event, resources available, and the skills (i.e., readiness levels) of the people involved. In general, literature from experts like Paul Hersey and Warren Bennis has clarified some common differences in how leaders and managers are perceived in the workplace.

For example, managers are often seen as administrators, while leaders are seen as innovators since they come up with the right solutions based on detailed elements of the situation. The manager can be seen as a copy of others, while the leader must be an original. The manager can focus on maintaining the status quo while the leader develops people and organizations to achieve new milestones. The manager can stay focused on existing workplace policies, systems, and structures, while the leader focuses on the workers, teammates, customers, and other relevant stakeholders. The manager uses control based on authority, while the leader inspires trust based on effective communication and relationship-building skills. Managers tend to focus on the immediate or short-range solutions to any given problem, while the leader stays focused on the value creation perspective for all stakeholders in the long-term. Managers tend to focus on the bottom-line outcomes to keep the bosses happy, while the leader focuses beyond the short-term so everyone can see the distant horizon. Ultimately, managers focus on doing things right as they focus on efficiency, while leaders focus on doing the right things or effectiveness (Mujtaba, 2019b).

The co-founder of situational leadership and author of many great books such as "*The One Minute Manager*" and "*Raving Fans*", Dr Ken Blanchard, has mentioned that "The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority." Influence is the goal of leadership, and managers typically use authority to control behavior. While authority is helpful, it cannot and should not be one's road to sustainable leadership. As such, in this research, the term leadership refers to the influence and getting things done through coaching, developing, and motivating others using task-oriented and relationship-oriented skills and behaviors. Scientifically, we know that leaders can be task-oriented in some work settings while more relationship-oriented in others based on the situation. To explore the behavioral tendencies of aspiring leaders, we collected data from men and women to assess their leadership orientation similarities and differences for application in the workplace in business and other fields. Nowadays, professionals from many diverse areas, such as engineering, medicine, agriculture, and others, earn degrees and certifications in various business curricula to apply effective management and leadership concepts to their industries. For example, researchers have explicated that "There are numerous factors motivating a curricular shift that integrates the disciplines of business and medicine; one of those is to improve the overall competency of students flowing into the valuable health care sector as well as into medical schools" (Sainfort, Jacko, Cohen, Rosman, and Vieweg, 2022: 1). Mastering relevant management or economic business concepts and theories can help aspiring leaders in all fields of education in today's globally competitive world. According to research,

> *Structural and curricular innovations have the potential to tangibly improve the health care economy and enhance the practice of medicine by training physicians who also understand the business of health. Population health management can be a successful vehicle through which medical schools can work with business schools to create novel curricular programs that offer business skills and knowledge to premedical students (Sainfort et al., 2022: 1-2).*

Medical professionals, engineers, project managers, lawyers, politicians, and public sector officials must all learn to balance leadership skills to get the right tasks done on time and build fruitful relationships in their industries. Solving society's local and global challenges requires business colleges, company owners, policymakers, and professionals in all fields to have a new way of thinking and leadership because businesses shift their models, which should include the "3Ps" of people, profit, and the planet. Colleges must all develop "Societal Impact Leaders" with the necessary leadership skills to solve the upcoming challenges we will face in the decades to come. Leadership skills, also known as "soft skills", of getting along while driving tasks forward to bring about transformational changes that are best for our world, are vital for college graduates and future leaders. As such, the next section of this paper reviews the literature on workforce diversity, leadership, and the general styles of managers and working adults. Then, we explain the methodology, research hypotheses, and results. Finally, there is the discussion, implications, limitations, opportunities, and conclusions of the study.

Diversity in the Workforce. Today's workers are often exposed to many diverse leadership styles as people travel abroad for global education or work and use similar technologies through the internet (Mujtaba, 2022b; Karadjova-Stoev and Mujtaba, 2009). As such, there might be a convergence, divergence, and crossvergence of cultural practices and leadership styles in their behaviors (Nieves, Mujtaba, Pellet, and Cavico, 2006). Westerners, who are often conditioned to be individualistic, have adopted many high-context cultural practices as employers encourage employees to work collectively in achieving organizational goals through team or relationship orientation while fully acknowledging that in "highly competitive, rapidly changing environments, caring and appreciative leaders are the ones to bet on for long-term success" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003: 78). The call for participative, relationship-oriented leadership and continuous improvement practices through teamwork has been advocated in Western industries for many decades (Kreitner, 2007). In essence, globalization induces changes in all cultures and organizations (Adler, 1986). In today's competitive world, understanding and responding to culturally driven behaviors are paramount to succeeding in any professional or leadership position, especially in cross-cultural management, because the people in an organization are crucial to its performance and the quality of work-life (Habil, Aboramadan, and Zaqout, 2019).

This study seeks to expand our knowledge of leadership practices by comparing the task and relationship orientation of respondents while also assessing if there are any significant differences based on their gender. The knowledge of a person's dominant leadership orientation can be used for "person-job-fit" practices to recruit, hire, and match candidates with suitable projects, tasks, and responsibilities (Oyserman, 2002;

Schwartz, 1994; 1999) in the modern post-Covid-19 workplace where some American employers seem to face difficulties in retaining workers (Mujtaba 2022a; Korman and Mujtaba, 2020). Person-job-fit or matching candidates with suitable projects and tasks can reduce employee turnover, increase retention, maximize productivity, and create a happier employee that looks forward to being engaged at work (Sarwar, Maqsood, Mujtaba, 2021).

Today's competitive environment of competition in this globally connected e-commerce era has changed many aspects of work in dramatic ways (Ibrahim, Imtiaz, Mujtaba, Vo, & Ahmed, 2020; Ahmed, Khan, Khan, & Mujtaba, 2020); and professionals demand a more ethical, flexible, and sustainability-focused workplace that better suits their lifestyle (Mujtaba and Meyer, 2022). The modern world has achieved innovations and brilliance without constantly developing a higher level of conscience since we often see "ethical infants" in leadership positions (Drumm, 2002: 17). Some leaders that are strictly focused on the tasks at the cost of hurting the relationship can be rated as unethical or unfair by their employees (Huang, Ryan, and Mujtaba, 2015), thereby increasing employee dissatisfaction and turnover intention. Reischl, Cavico, Mujtaba, and Pellet mention, "Although the natural sciences paved the way for advancement in the quantity of life, little has changed in the way of advancement in the quality of life" (2010: 7). Managers and entrepreneurs should emphasize that effective leadership means efficiently doing the right tasks at the right times while building sustainable relationships (Wolf and Mujtaba, 2011) with all relevant societal stakeholders. Focusing on effective leadership encourages ethical behaviors and legal compliance, which can keep organizations away from legal problems (Cavico and Mujtaba, 2021).

Leadership. Leadership is something that any professional or worker, regardless of rank or authority, can practice because it is about influencing and guiding others to achieve organizational objectives (Habil, Aboramadan, and Zaqout, 2019). The behavioral perspective of leadership has two clusters of behaviors that focus on the people and tasks which can help aspiring leaders bring about positive changes in their organizations (Lawrence, Weisfeld-Spolter, Tworoger, Yurova, and Mujtaba, 2022). First, *people-oriented* behaviors emphasize mutual concern, trust, and respect for others during all interactions. People-oriented leadership tends to result in higher job satisfaction among subordinates and lower levels of absenteeism, grievances, and turnover than task-oriented leadership.

However, the job performance of workers whose managers are relationship-oriented can sometimes be lower than those with task-oriented leaders (Mujtaba, 2019a/b; Hersey and Campbell, 2004). Second, *task-oriented* leadership styles generally include behaviors that describe, explain, and closely structure work roles to ensure everyone follows the established rules to reach performance capacity and meet the standards. An unintended consequence or side effect of task-oriented leadership is that it can result in lower job satisfaction and higher absenteeism and turnover among subordinates (Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson, 2001). In other words, employees of task-oriented leaders can quickly become dissatisfied and leave their positions mentally (staying disengaged and doing the minimum work to get by) or physically (quitting) since they consider the boss to be rude or a bully (Baillien, Camps, Van den Broeck, Stouten, Godderis, Sercu, & De Witte, 2016). Behavioral leadership scholars conclude that most leaders are situational and fall somewhere in between in the continuum of being people-oriented or task-oriented (Hersey, 1984). Regarding the abilities, skills, motivation, and leadership practices over the past century, Paul Hersey has said that,

1. The key to being an effective manager is leadership.
2. People differ not only in their ability to do but also in their 'will' to do.
3. There seems to be adequate evidence that the number one motivator of people is feedback on results.
4. It is not enough to describe your leadership style or indicate your intentions. A Situational Leader assesses the performance of others and takes the responsibility for making things happen (Van Vliet, 2012).

Effective leadership is assessing one's dominant style and determining how others are best motivated to get the job done. Consequently, effective leadership requires understanding the skill and performance levels of employees, teammates, colleagues, and bosses to work with based on an appropriate style. Literature has proven that leadership is both a science as well as an art (Habil, Aboramadan, and Zaqout, 2019; Barnard, 1948; Bass, 1990), as the behaviors of leaders can be studied and practised in terms of initiating structure (task-orientation) and consideration (relationship-orientation) (Halpin and Winer, 1957; Fleishman, 1967). Bass (1990) found that relationship-oriented functions are associated with subordinate satisfaction and task-oriented functions are linked with higher performance. Similarly, the relationship function is positively associated with group performance.

Situational leadership theory states that the best leadership style depends on the variables surrounding each decision, person, and strategy. One dimension of each person's leadership style is the extent to which he or she is people-oriented or task-oriented. Depending on whether a person is more relationship-oriented or more task-oriented, he or she can be matched for the role or job in the workplace, known as person-job-fit. *The "person-job-fit" or "personality-job-fit"* is often a consideration by managers and human resources professionals to assess employees for what is also known as the "person-environment fit", which can include person-manager-fit, person-team-fit, and person-project-fit. Having the right people in the right jobs can be a huge competitive advantage for today's competitive firms (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright, 2019; Mujtaba, 2022b). *The "person-job-fit"* theory assumes that candidates' personality traits, such as whether he or she is task-oriented or more relationship-oriented, can reveal relevant insights into their flexibility, malleability, or match within an organization for different jobs, tasks, and departments. The overall match level or confluence between a person and the specific job, team, department, or organization is called person-job-fit. It is important to study diverse leadership orientations so employees can be matched with suitable projects and developed in their areas of non-dominant leadership skills to enhance productivity, job satisfaction, and employee retention in today's world where we observe cultural divergence, convergence, crossvergence.

One example of cultural convergence in today's global world of education is the use of technology and virtual reality programs to help prepare aspiring leaders for future management and leadership positions where they can influence, innovate, and transform their organizations to meet the needs of our changing society effectively. According to Andrew Rosman, Dean of the College of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University in South Florida, educational institutions need "to make business students prime candidates for future employers" (Rosman, 2022: 11). Rosman continues to explain that educational leaders can make their students prime candidates by exposing learners to settings, scenarios, and relevant exercises so they are experienced before they embark on any real-world experiential learning assignment. This current research is based on the actual survey of leadership orientation of aspiring leaders from diverse fields as they assess themselves for personal reflection and growth in developing consciousness of their dominant leadership tendencies while strengthening their passive style to become effective and flexible situational leaders in any context and organization.

Methodology

In this study, to better understand a leader or manager's task and relationship orientation, we used the Northouse Style Questionnaire survey to obtain a general profile of each respondent's dominant leadership tendencies or behaviors in the future. This instrument was selected for the study because it has short statements that make it easy for the respondents to fill out, reducing the chances of misunderstandings and misinterpretations between diverse respondents. The statistical output for the reliability data of this survey has shown that Cronbach's alpha is 0.887, which means that the questions are good for tests, and are acceptable in social science research (Nguyen, Mujtaba, Tran, and Rujis, 2013; Nguyen, Mujtaba, & Pham, 2013).

In the Style Questionnaire, a respondent selects one option that best describes him or her regarding each statement related to getting the job done or keeping the relationship strong. In other words, for each statement, the respondent indicates the degree to which he or she engages in the stated behavior. For example, the respondent rates himself/herself on a statement such as "*I provide a plan for how the work is to be done*" or "*I help others feel comfortable in the group*". In the survey, a rating of 1 means "never," and a rating of 5 means "always" the person demonstrating the specific behavior. To determine one's scores, one can add the responses for the odd-numbered items to determine the score for task-orientation behaviors and sum up the responses for the even-numbered items to determine the score for relationship-orientation behaviors. Northouse's (2007) scoring interpretation ranges from "Very high" to "Very low" as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Task and Relationship Score Interpretations

45-50	Very high range
40-44	High range
35-39	Moderately high range
30-34	Moderately low range
25-29	Low range
10-24	Very low range

Source: Northouse, 2007: 87

Sampling Procedures. This study targeted students, workers, and managers enrolled in the Master of Business Administration programs, majoring in marketing, finance, accounting, human resources, international business, public administration, and management. Many of these learners are working professionals from diverse fields. This population was chosen because they are aspiring leaders for the global world and higher education knowledge and curriculums are now becoming more internationalized and standardized across the globe (Buckner, 2019; McFarlane, Mujtaba, and Cavico, 2009). To increase both accuracy and response rates, the questionnaire was only offered in English since all respondents spoke English as their primary tongue or were assessed for language proficiency as part of their enrollment process requirements in the English-language program. The self-administered questionnaire through the self-paced online medium offers more comfort and anonymity (Nguyen, Mujtaba, & Pham, 2013), which is important when conducting research related to the leadership and management characteristics of respondents or their superiors.

In this study, 3,950 candidates' responses were selected for analysis. These data were collected during 2005-2020. The convenience sample was obtained through private and public sector educational institutions where lawyers, medical doctors, pharmacists, educators, and political leaders were obtaining business degrees or certifications. As part of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, a paragraph explaining the purpose of this research and guaranteeing confidentiality were included with the survey, along with the fact that each respondent could abandon filling out the study at any time. The names and email addresses of respondents were not asked, nor kept or tracked via traceable cookies on the website. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire at their own pace voluntarily. Once each respondent submitted the survey, they automatically received their scores for task and relationship orientations along with some initial interpretations for their reflection.

Research Hypotheses. The research question for this study was to determine whether the respondents have similar or different scores on the relationship orientation and task orientation dimensions of leadership. Additionally, the study compares the leadership styles of men and women to determine if there are any statistically significant differences based on gender. The specific hypotheses for this study are as follows:

1. *Hypothesis 1:* Respondents will have similar scores for relationship and task orientations.

2. *Hypothesis 2:* Males and females will have similar scores on task and relationship orientations.

Task and Relationship Analysis and Results. The study findings demonstrate that the respondents are significantly more relationship oriented. In this research, male and female respondents have shown statistically significant differences in task and relationship orientations. As such, there are significant differences in the leadership orientations among the total respondents as well as based on gender. Overall, we used the responses of 3,950 individuals who successfully completed the style questionnaire on a voluntary basis for their own benefit of assessing and reflecting on their leadership orientation. Of the total population, 1197 (30.3%) of the respondents were 26 years of age or younger, and the remaining 2,753 (69.7%) were working adults about 26 years of age or older. Regarding educational levels, 257 (7.3%) of the responded had reported having a high school degree, while the remaining 3,693 (93.5%) had earned bachelors, masters, or doctoral degrees in their professions. Since most of the respondents were enrolled in the masters or executive education programs, only 288 (7.3%) reported having no work experience, while the remaining 3,662 (92.7%) reported having at least two or more years of work and management experience. As shown in Figure 1, the 2318 female respondents make up 58.7% of the population and the 1632 males make up the other 41.3% in this study.
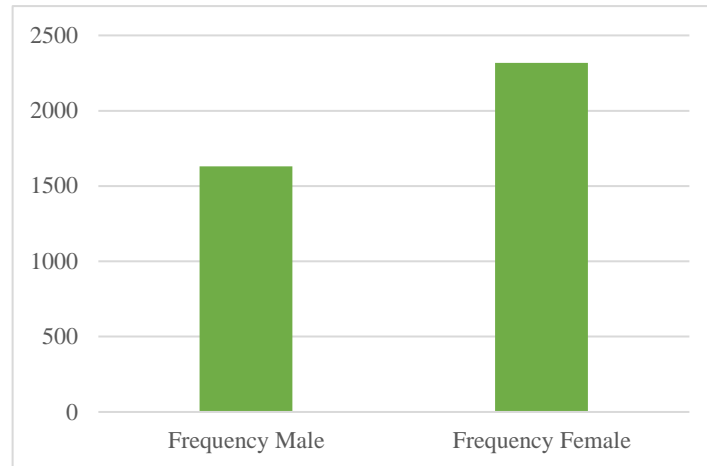
Figure 1. Gender Frequency

Source: Compiled by the author

The correlation between task and relationship orientation scores is 0.368462. The positive correlation coefficient indicates a positive, linear association between these aspiring leaders' tasks and relationship orientations. The magnitude of the correlation coefficient is a positive association of a medium effect size, which indicates that there is not much redundancy (shared variance) between them. In other words, to a moderate extent, a higher level of leaders' task orientation is associated with higher levels of relationship orientation and vice versa. In the regression statistics (Table 2), note that the R-Square value is 0.14, which means that the predictor variable in the model (relationship orientation) explains 14% (0.14 x 100) of the variance in the outcome variable (task orientation). At the bottom of the table, where we see the regression model estimates, the first column contains the names of the predictor variable and the intercept. The second column contains the regression weights (coefficients). The fifth column contains the p values associated with the regression weights, which can be used to determine whether they are statistically significant (i.e., significantly different from zero). As the data shows, the regression weight for relationship orientation (in relation to task orientation) is positive and has a p value that is less than the conventional two-tailed, cutoff (alpha level) of .05, which means we can treat this regression weight as statistically significant.

Table 2. Regression Statistics

Multiple R	0.37							
R Square	0.14							
Adjusted R Square	0.14							
Standard Error	6.25							
Observations	3950.00							
ANOVA								
	df	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*Significance F*			
Regression	1.00	24221.89	24221.89	620.20	0.00			
Residual	3948.00	154189.72	39.06					
Total	3949.00	178411.61						
	Coefficients	*Standard Error*	*t Stat*	*P-value*	*Lower 95%*	*Upper 95%*	*Lower 95.0%*	*Upper 95.0%*
Intercept	20.15	0.77	26.09	0.00	18.63	21.66	18.63	21.66
Relationship	0.45	0.02	24.90	0.00	0.41	0.48	0.41	0.48

Source: Compiled by the author

In this study (Table 3), the task orientation score (39.2235) and the relationship orientation score (42.7438) are statistically different as the p-value is less than 0.05, thereby we cannot accept the first hypothesis as these respondents are more relationship oriented. While the task orientation of the respondents falls in the "moderately high range" as presented in Table 1, their relationship orientation scores are at the "high range." This study has shown that respondents studying in business programs have dissimilar scores for relationship and task orientations. Overall, these respondents do value human capital and are likely to keep the relationship intact while getting the job done.

Table 3. Task-Relationship Orientation: t-Test (Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances)

	Task	*Relationship*
Mean	39.2235	42.7438
Variance	45.1789	30.8004
Observations	3950.0000	3950.0000
Pooled Variance	37.9897	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0.0000	
df	7898.0000	
t Stat	-25.3819	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0000	
t Critical one-tail	1.6450	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0000	
t Critical two-tail	1.9603	

Source: Compiled by the author

As can be seen in Table 4, the task orientation scores of men (39.547) and women (39.0) are statistically different as the p-value is 0.012, thereby we cannot accept the second hypothesis as there is a gender effect, with men being more task-oriented compared to their female colleagues. While both men and women have moderately high scores on the task orientation range, this study has shown that men tend to be more task driven than women.

Table 4. Task Orientation Based on Gender t-Test (Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances)

	Male	*Female*
Mean	39.547	39.000
Variance	41.954	47.311
Observations	1632.000	2318.000
Pooled Variance	45.097	
df	3948.000	
t Stat	2.519	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.006	
t Critical one-tail	1.645	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.012	
t Critical two-tail	1.961	

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 5 shows that the relationship orientation scores of men (41.985) and women (43.278) are also statistically different as the p-value is less than 0.05, thereby providing additional support that the second hypothesis cannot be accepted as women are more relationship oriented compared to their male colleagues in this study. While both men and women have scores that fall in high range for relationship orientation, this study has shown that women tend to be more conscious of keeping and developing stronger connections with people and teams in the workplace. This finding provides strong support for diversifying leadership positions that are predominantly occupied by men.

Table 5. Relationship Based on Gender t-Test (Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances)

	Male	*Female*
Mean	41.985	43.278
Variance	31.038	29.956
Observations	1632.000	2318.000
df	3948.000	
t Critical one-tail	1.645	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000	
t Critical two-tail	1.961	

Source: Compiled by the author

As shown in Table 6, female respondents have a significantly higher score for relationship orientation (43.278) than their task orientation (38.996). Similarly, as shown in Table 7, male respondents also have a significantly higher score for relationship orientation (41.985) than task orientation (39.547). Interestingly, the female respondents in this study helped the overall scores for the entire population to be higher on the relationship orientation.

Table 6. Female Orientations t-Test (Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances)

	Task	*Relationship*
Mean	38.996	43.278
Variance	47.343	29.956
Observations	2318.000	2318.000
Pooled Variance	38.649	
t Critical one-tail	1.645	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000	
t Critical two-tail	1.960	

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 7. Men Orientations t-Test (Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances)

	Task	*Relationship*
Mean	39.547	41.985
Variance	41.954	31.038
Observations	1632.000	1632.000
Pooled Variance	36.496	
t Critical one-tail	1.645	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000	
t Critical two-tail	1.961	

Source: Compiled by the author

Discussion

Leadership is both a science and an art, which means that a person can study it and improve his/her influence by consciously practicing either a task or relationship-oriented style of leadership based on the context requirements and situational variables surrounding a project, team, or department. Management practices through high relationship orientation can help aspiring leaders manage projects and teams by maintaining harmony through effective interactions and "face-saving" strategies essential for workplace harmony. Of course, when urgent actions are needed to meet revenue or budget quotas and/or prevent the organization from bankruptcy, a high focus on a task-driven leadership style might be appropriate. Since leadership is both a science and an art, professionals can learn more about situational leadership styles to tell, sell, participate, and/or delegate jobs and tasks to candidates who best match the job based on the person-job-fit model and assessment.

Henry Minzberg (1985) mentioned that organizations can be seen as political arenas; as such, since women seem to be more focused on relationship orientation, it makes sense to promote more females into the higher ranks so their dominant leadership approach can reduce the negative implications of politicking and discriminatory practices (Lopez, Marquez, Martinez, Marretta, Briana, Lozovnoy, and Mujtaba; Mujtaba and Cavico, 2022; Mujtaba, 2022b). Sadly, many lawsuits and cases are related to gender pay inequity and illegal, discriminatory practices that females face. Since female respondents and aspiring leaders are better able to build stronger relationships and get tasks done at the same time, corporations should work hard to recruit, hire, and promote more women to higher-ranking positions to bring equity, justice, and equal representation of both genders. The good news is that learning and benchmarking leadership best practices can occur at any time by new and experienced male or female managers, so they can be task-oriented or relationship-oriented depending on what is needed for the given situation, project, or department. The hope for every manager or leader is that between birth and death, he or she makes a positive difference in the lives of others while leaving this world a little bit better and greener than s/he found it.

Any person can become an effective and better leader by understanding his/her dominant tendencies and making conscious improvements toward a desired leadership orientation by using relevant influence tactics (Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Unfortunately, most individuals spend their days, weeks, and years making little progress in a million different directions (Raynor, 2020); as such, they become competent at many things but exceptional at none of them. Today's aspiring men and women should explore, choose, eliminate, and master the "one thing" that will make a long-lasting, impactful, and sustainable positive difference in their lives as managers and leaders at any given time (Mujtaba, 2019b). It is exactly what the father of scientific management, Frederick Taylor, emphasized at the beginning of the 20th century when he said managers and leaders should find "First-Class" employees at each specific task. Taylor believed that everyone is a "first-class" professional in something, and managers should match employees with the right projects and responsibilities based on the person-job-fit theory.

Naturally, the right design that allows flexible leadership, along with effective standardization in any organization matters (Ouchi, 1979) in encouraging aspiring leaders to be the best in their jobs. Like all studies, there are several limitations to this study. First, the data from a convenient population of business students is one of them. Future studies should compare specific people in other academic fields and different industries with similar working backgrounds and demographic variables. While male and female populations seem to have a significantly higher focus on relationship orientation, this might be true simply because they understand the importance of maintaining good connections with others in society due to the economic necessities and not necessarily years of conditioning or biological elements associated with their gender. Researchers should also note that the quality of education, age and ethnic background might also be important variables or factors in the respondents' scores. Therefore, future studies should test "age", "culture", and "education" to see if these are significant variables in the task and relationship orientation scores of diverse respondents in this post-Covid-19 era.

Conclusion

This research provided a brief overview of men and women respondents' leadership orientations to assess whether they are likely to focus more on tasks or relationships in their departments and organizations. The results show that their relationship orientation scores are significantly higher than the task orientation. This research found that men are more focused on tasks than women respondents and female professionals demonstrated a higher and statistically significant focus on the relationship orientation than males. Today's global and competitive work environment needs creative, flexible, educated, and diverse situational leaders who can think critically about their decisions based on current facts in any given project or team while being developmental with their colleagues and followers. As such, leaders and managers can better educate themselves by learning some of the best practices in being task-oriented and/or relationship-oriented as relevant to any specific project, team, or department. As often emphasized by the coauthor of situational leadership theory, Dr Paul Hersey, effective situational leaders must be able to use different leadership styles (or different strokes) with the same folks in distinct times and contexts based on the follower's level of readiness to complete the job efficiently and qualitatively.

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