

## Exemplary Leadership Skills: A Comparison between Queen Elizabeth and Margaret Thatcher

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### Abstract

The underrepresentation of women in the workforce, in politics, and in other facets of society was rampant during the 1990's. Women faced significant obstacles that restricted their prospects and positions across a range of professions and were not taken seriously by society, especially by men. Building inclusive and varied organizations and society requires promoting gender equality and offering equal opportunity for men and women to realize their leadership potential. Instead of gender stereotypes, leadership should be based on competence, qualifications, and capabilities. Two female leaders who exemplify this are the late Queen Elizabeth and Margaret Thatcher. Based on "The Iron Lady" movie and "The Crown" series using content analysis the research looks at the portrayed two types of leadership skills which adapt to changes and decisiveness.

**Keywords:** Gender, Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Thatcher, Elizabeth

### Introduction

In an evolving global landscape, the paradigm of leadership has undergone a significant transformation with women emerging as dynamic and influential leaders in various sectors. This ascent into leadership roles is not merely a trend but a significant movement that symbolizes progress, inclusivity, and leap from traditional notions of leadership. Gender and leadership are two concepts that have been intertwined for centuries (Eklund, Barry & Grunberg, 2017). Traditionally patriarchal leadership is accepted as a masculine trait with women's power being curtailed and suppressed (Akkesson, 2021). According to Morrison (2012) and Keohane (2014), hierarchical organizational structures probably play a role in making women feel uncomfortable because of gender differences, which leads to many women quitting their jobs or leaving an environment where their leadership skills are being questioned. Many occupations are created with men's goals in mind, which exacerbates this conflict, and many companies are unwilling to

help women in their employment, when possible, career conflicts develop (Kellerman and Rhode, 2012).

In recent years however, there is a shift and a growing need for gender equality in leadership as this can help promote better decision making. Gender diversity allows for a more inclusive decision and a wider range of options and decision making. As society accepts the strengths, perceptive and capabilities that women bring to the table, the concept of women leadership has gained momentum in reshaping communities and nations alike (Offermann & Foley, 2020). When women are encouraged to take on leadership roles, they often bring fresh ideas, creative approaches, and a heightened emphasis on teamwork to the table (Müil, 2023) as well as being empathetic as its mainly about nurturing relationships, diversity and working towards a unified goal (Frangos,2021).

In the series “The Crown” and “The Iron Lady”, the late Queen Elizabeth and Margaret Thatcher are synonymous with women in power and leadership. Through her leadership, Queen Elizabeth significantly influenced the development of English history, and her reputation as one of the country's greatest rulers persists even after her passing. Many addressed her as merely a colonizer, but being a woman in an era which was dominated by men, she managed to curtail their opinion of her and rule with grit and wisdom. In the same regard, Thatcher's rule was intricate and diverse. As the first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, she broke down barriers and paved way for women in politics shattering the glass ceiling in a male dominated political arena, thus the label “Iron Lady”.

### **Leadership Theory**

It is generally accepted that leaders are responsible for building routes in collective action, and as a result, they offer help to individuals to widen their skills to understand complexity, clarify vision, and construct common mental models (Beer et. al., 2019). Theories of leadership seek to explain the conditions under which certain people develop into leaders. Individuals' leadership qualities are discussed in terms of the traits and actions that can be cultivated (Leadership Theories and Styles, 2020). Leadership theory is not a static area of study; it develops along with our knowledge of organizational dynamics, human behavior, and larger social and cultural contexts. As a result, it continues to be a topic of discussion and research, providing knowledge that may help with leadership development, decision-making, and illuminating the intricacies of leadership in our ever-changing world.

### **Transformational Leadership**

One common definition of transformational leadership states that it is characterized by "leader behavior, influential traits, power, and situational variables that influence employee performance in a positive direction," such as inspiring workers to go above and beyond in their work (Behery, 2008 in Hoxha, 2019). Team performance is improved by transformational leadership because it influences the values, priorities, and motivations of its followers (Flanagan, 2019). Without open lines of communication, mutual respect, personal integrity, and a real concern for those that follow, it is impossible to develop a long-lasting, trusting interpersonal relationship between a leader and a follower (Whitmore, 2017 in Stevens, 2022). In addition, many people feel that because women are more emotional, they have less influence in leadership roles, and this is reflected in numerous beliefs (Alavi, Rabah & Jones, 2021). According to them, research showed that females would be an excellent leader in the transformational style because they are more willing to embrace other points of view from their followers and listen to what others have to say. On the other hand, women leaders

frequently exhibit a distinct style of leadership and a different set of characteristics depending on the setting in which they are operating, such as male-dominated environments, in which women are sterner and authoritarian. (Sharif, 2018 in Setia et.al., 2021)

### **Transactional Leadership**

The leader rewards followers for their efforts and punishes followers who fail to accomplish their objectives (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Samson & Ilesanmi (2019) have explained in their research that when a team member accepts a job, they agree to completely obey their leader. The organization pays the team members in exchange for their work and compliance, and as a result, the leader has the authority to discipline the team member. This type of leader operates within the organizational cultures of the organizations in which they work. Transactional leaders demonstrate two distinct styles of leadership behavior, according to L. Guarana and Avolio (2022). They begin by setting goals and regularly monitoring and assessing progress toward those goals. Second, they chart a path of action and shared understanding to achieve the objectives, and then they encourage and reward accomplishment. Sharif (2018) in Setia et. al. (2021) discovered that when faced with pushback from subordinates or when pushed as a minority in a male-dominated workplace, women leaders frequently adopt a transactional leadership style. He went on to say that when women leaders were pushed to exert power in this type of context or situation, they adjusted their leadership behavior to be more masculine and transactional.

### **Portrayal of Leadership Skills by Queen Elizabeth II and Margaret Thatcher based on 'The Iron Lady' Movie and 'The Crown' Series**

#### **Adapt to Changes**

##### **Queen Elizabeth II**

Her own reign was contemporary from the beginning. The advent of television roughly coincided with the new queen's birth, so when it came time for her coronation, she defied convention and let the BBC broadcast the ceremony live on television. It was the first coronation to ever be broadcast on television and practically started must-see television. The monarchy has been able to change and remain relevant to contemporary society because of her ability to adapt and be receptive to new ideas. It's crucial to remember that the Queen's job involves more than just adjusting to change—it also involves protecting the monarchy's traditions and continuity. Her prolonged and well-respected rule has been a result of her capacity to strike a balance between tradition and modernity and to relate to different generations. This can be supported by Ruiyao, Keat, & Ahmad (n.d.) in their research that female business owners are more likely to create an environment that values creativity and cooperation because their management style is more receptive to the requirements of the team and the culture of the organization.

The Queen values modernity and technology to be up to date with the trends and getting closer to society. Although during her reign she was surrounded by men who were not very welcoming of her as a leader, the Queen managed to change the monarchy in line with the developments. Brown & Washington (2023) agreed that women leaders will flourish in challenging and complex situations, and they frequently find themselves rising to positions of leadership in a company during a difficult period.

**Margaret Thatcher**

Margaret Thatcher's two political advisors advised her to modify her appearance before becoming Prime Minister. One of her advisors stated that she looked like a *privileged conservative wife* in an interview. They advised Margaret Thatcher to take voice lessons to appear more confident and influence the audience. Margaret Thatcher initially opposed changing her voice to appear forceful. However, her enthusiasm to change her party better made her willing to change for better leadership as a woman leader. A leader should be willing to open to new ideas and changes and according to Putra & Fitri (2018) in Fitri (2019), employers that are open to change have a positive perspective that the adjustments made would be able to foster future growth and advancement for the organization. Positive attitudes that demonstrate ready for change include actively participating in and accepting change (Henricks et al., 2020). The depiction of this attitude by Margaret Thatcher shows her leadership characteristics that should be followed by all leaders, especially women in this male-dominated era.

**Decisiveness****Queen Elizabeth II**

The Queen often met with the Prime Minister and other government representatives to talk through important state concerns. Even though these conversations were private, and the Queen's thoughts not made public, they provided her information on government activities and policies. Through this she made wise decisions before taking any action regarding important matters. This can be supported by Hai, Van & Thi (2021) where they stated leadership thinking has evolved with time, which has had a considerable impact on the evolution of the leader's behavioral style; nonetheless, regardless of the changing objective situation, effective leaders frequently display deep leadership thought in all aspects for effective decision-making. According to Daei (2023), personality attributes like decisiveness, honesty, and open communication can be useful in making crisis decisions. Queen Elizabeth II has had a lot of obligations and challenges as the monarch of the United Kingdom. She has shown a level of serenity and composure when making judgements, whether they were on political issues, family matters, or ceremonial responsibilities.

**Margaret Thatcher**

Thatcher was known for making difficult decisions and sticking to them. She did what she thought was right, even if it was not popular in all circles, and she wasn't easily moved by political or public pressure. Thatcher was known for her tenacity in diplomatic encounters. She was not afraid to speak out for and defend British interests, even if it meant contradicting other foreign leaders. Grube & Killick (2023) in their research stated that if a leader is overbearing, other members of the group may develop the practice of repressing their own opinions to adhere to what they feel the leader wants. This happened during Thatcher's reign as Prime Minister. However, Thatcher would listen to every opinion and ideas from her team members, but, if it contradicted her ideas and point of view, she would tell them the reason for her taking the steps.

Thatcher was a well-known international figure. Her decision to reclaim the Falkland Islands from Argentine occupation shows her tremendous leadership and commitment during the Falkland War in 1982. She received a lot of resistance from her team members on taking the decision of sending troops to the war. However, it did not tear down Thatcher's spirit to protect the sovereignty of the United Kingdom which at last brought her name up as the

greatest female leader. According to Emere et.al., (2019), leaders with good issues taking care of capacities suspect issues, acknowledge reality, can see the comprehensive view, handle one thing at once, and never abandon a noteworthy objective when they are down.

### Conclusion

These two illustrious leaders serve as a reminder that leadership may take many different shapes and can be significantly impacted by the difficulties in each era. The leadership abilities of Queen Elizabeth and Margaret Thatcher continue to be topics of study, discussion, and inspiration, whether through the prism of history or from a personal viewpoint. This illustrates the continuing significance of successful leadership in determining the course of nations and civilizations. Both leaders provide insightful explanations of the complex nature of leadership and demonstrated exceptional abilities that made an enduring impression on history, arousing praise and, at times, controversy.

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