The Role of Women's Organizations in Promoting Gender Equality

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Abstract: SDG 5.5 targets women's participation in and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making and policy-making in government and business. The Philippines ranks higher than other ASEAN countries in women leadership. However, a steady stream of women leaders is needed to ensure gender equality in private and public domains. NGOs for the integral development of women can potentially contribute to the promotion of gender equality in top leadership levels. This paper aims to describe the virtues of women NGO directors, how their virtues and the organization help the participants to develop women leader virtues. The research takes on the Aristotelian-based Virtue Ethics theory as a framework. The researcher surveyed participants of three affiliated NGOs. The responses of 204 female youth, on the perceived virtues of their leaders, were submitted to exploratory factor analysis. The results showed that the female participants perceive their leaders to possess thirty-four virtues that are summarized into 1) *care, concern, and competence*, and 2) *superiority and ambition*. These virtues inspire and motivate female students and young professionals to develop women leader virtues such as hard work, intelligence, competence, supportiveness, sympathy, trustworthiness, generosity, genuineness, social responsibility, self-confidence, achievement-oriented, ambition, aggressiveness, and superiority. The organizations educate and encourage the practice of leader virtues by providing a virtuous environment, and offering programs on leadership, virtues, and social issues. However, the NGOs can further develop women leader virtues associated with *superiority* and *ambition* which are vital to lead in competitive and sexist environments.

Key Words: women leaders; women leader virtues; Philippine organizations; women NGO; SDG 5

1. INTRODUCTION

Women managers and executives, more than men, can perceive and understand emotions, display empathy, care for employees, and adapt to stressful situations (Hopkins et al., 2008; Gonzalez et al, 2013; Melero, 2011; Spencer et al., 2019). Women adhere more to high ethical standards (Gonzalez et al. 2013; Spencer et al. 2019). Women design initiatives that impact society and contribute to nation-building (Ambepitiya, 2016; Bear et al, 2010; Spencer et al. 2019). Corporations with women executives produce better performance and financial outcomes than those without women (Offermann et al., 2020; Spencer et al. 2019). Thus, governments, industries, organizations, and their employees benefit from the presence of women in high-powered positions.

However, certain factors impede women from occupying leadership positions. Women are subjected to gender discrimination and harassment (Bowles & McGinn, 2004; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Meister, 2017; Sheerin & Garavan, 2021). They are perceived to lack certain leadership experiences and skills (Bowles & McGinn, 2004; Meister, 2017). Women do not aggressively compete for the top spot as men do (Bowles & McGinn, 2004; Spencer et al. 2019). They more easily leave or refuse leadership roles in corporations with questionable integrity (Spencer et al., 2019). Spencer et al. (2019) conducted interviews with 57 women CEOs in Fortune 500 firms in the US. They conveyed mindsets and competencies that address these obstacles. Many did not target to be CEOs but rather pursued challenges at work, took risks, and excelled. In a competitive environment, women learned to build confidence in performing better than their male contender and vie for the position. In a sexist environment, women CEOs set the boundaries, resolutely refused to be defeated and

victimized, and persevere despite criticisms. The majority were driven by purpose and values. They were happy and proud to have created work cultures that support people, families, and the community.

The thrust on gender equality is a global concern. UN Sustainable Development Goal 5.5 targets ensuring "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life." (United Nations, 2017, p.10).

The Philippines performs better than other ASEAN countries in gender equality having ranked 10th among 144 countries in 2017 (David et al., 2017) and topped Grant Thornton International's women in the 2020 business survey among 32 countries (Grant Thornton, 2020). Women occupy 43% of managerial posts and the C-suite (Grant Thornton, 2020). However, the percentage of the top three executive posts occupied by women declined and few reach the board level (Grant Thornton, 2020). In national and local government units, minimal participation of women in top decision-making positions persists (David et al., 2017). This translates to a low representation of women who can speak on behalf of women and vote on laws that defend the rights and protection of women. (David et al, 2018). Ensuring more women leaders can transform the work environment to favor gender parity, avoid discrimination of women, and promote work-life balance (David et al., 2018). Thus, there is a call for continuous and consolidated action towards women's success and leadership. While government and businesses are enjoined to legislate laws that promote gender equality, it is worthwhile to explore existing initiatives that can reinforce SDG 5.5, such as NGOs on women's development.

KALFI, Tawili, and PEPPI Foundation are affiliated NGOs that aim at the integral development of women. The NGO centers offer mentoring, programs on leadership, civic engagements, personality development, spirituality, and other activities that hone the character of female secondary and tertiary students, and professionals to excel, lead and serve. Various participants have become competent professionals in their respective fields.

Newstead et al. (2019) claim that we do not need more leaders, but rather more good leaders. They argue that good leadership is founded on virtues.

This study takes interest in how NGOs for women's development prepare their participants to be good leaders, i.e., women leaders with virtues. This paper aims to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the virtues exemplified by leaders of women NGOs, as perceived by the participants? 2) How do the NGO leaders' virtues aid the participants to develop women leader virtues? 3) How do women NGOs aid the participants to develop women leader virtues?

2. METHODOLOGY

This research takes on the theoretical framework of Aristotelian-based Virtue Ethics (VE) theory. VE claims that developing virtues is the key to be a good person, a good life, happiness, and human flourishing (Becker, 2020). Modern VE scholars define virtue as "an excellent, durable character trait that a person develops over time by (inter)action, reflection, and experience, and enables a person to act and get along with other people in an exemplary way" (Becker, 2020, p. 33). Virtues are learned through observation (Newstead et al., 2019), "exposure to exemplars leading to emulation of positive models" (Tanesini, 2016, p. 524), direct and formal instruction (Newstead et al., 2020; Tanesini, 2016), the practice of virtuous behaviors, and enculturation into virtues (Tanesini, 2016). The person, however, has to be well-disposed and needs to exercise good habits to acquire virtue (Tanesini, 2016). VE asserts that the moral character of the individual propels virtuous business conduct and ethical organizational climate (Wang et al., 2016).

Shanahan and Hyman (2003) developed a Virtue Ethics Scale to evaluate the value of virtues in business and aid in ethical decision-making. Subsequently, other scales followed such as the Virtuous Leadership Scale, Leadership Virtues Questionnaire, and Managerial Virtue Factors for Filipino corporate managers (Racelis, 2013).

Specific virtues are deemed desirable leader virtues in different contexts. Hühn, Meyer, & Racelis, (2018, as cited by Aguiling & Racelis, 2021) conveyed that diligence, courage, competence, justice, temperance, sobriety, honesty, humility, prudence, kindness, and magnanimity, among others are seen as virtues of good leaders in governance. Hendricks et al. (2020) identified prudence, temperance, justice, courage, and humanity of supervisors to positively influence the well-being of subordinates at work. Based on extant literature (Ambepitiya, 2016; Bear et al, 2010; Hopkins et al., 2008; Gonzalez et al, 2013; Melero, 2011; Offerman et al., 2020; Spencer et al., 2019), women leaders display the virtues of compassion, sympathy, empathy, adaptiveness, generosity, motivating, trustworthiness, genuineness, social responsibility, competence, and intelligence.

Apart from these, female CEOs in the F500 list of companies manifest leader virtues such as hard work, achievement-oriented, aggressiveness, ambition, self-confidence, superiority, determination, persistence, courage, and supportiveness.

This study employs the virtue inventory for Filipino corporate managers (Racelis, 2013). Racelis used an inventory of 34 virtues based on the study of Shanahan and Hyman (2003). She surveyed Filipino professionals for their opinion on the virtues possessed by their superiors. She submitted the results to factor analysis. Table 1 shows that 29 of the 34 variables loaded and converged into four factors namely *1) care and concern, 2) competence, 3) ambition, and 4) superiority* (Racelis, 2013).

Table 1. Managerial Virtue Factors (Racelis, 2013)

Factor	Items/Variables loading onto the factor
Care and concern	Sympathetic, sincere, respectful, pleasant, reassuring, trustworthy, socially responsible, generous, supportive, concern, secure, friendly, spirited, open, honesty, exciting
Competence	Innovative, leading, mature, competent, intelligent, reliable, confident
Ambition	Ambitious, aggressive, controlling
Superiority	Superior, proud

In this research, I used definitions of virtues based on literature (Murphy, 1999; Racelis, 2013; Shanahan & Hyman, 2003; Solomon, 1999). The questionnaire included Likert scale questions ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) on the participants' perception of the virtues exemplified by the program director/manager. It also included open-ended questions regarding the virtues possessed by the director which they appreciate most; director traits that seem unhelpful in program effectiveness, and desired traits of the NGO leaders. I invited the NGO head of a women's leadership program to participate in this study. Upon her recommendation, two other affiliate NGOs agreed to participate. The questionnaire was disseminated thru Google forms to 530 NGO participants. The survey was conducted from Nov. 2019 to April 2020. It yielded 204 responses from 15 to 31-year old females who are high school students, university students, and professionals. 71.6% of the respondents are 21 years old and below.

I analyzed the responses on perceived virtues of leaders using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) through Jamovi 1.6.3 software. EFA, a multivariate technique, allows the reduction of large variables to a fewer set of factors in order to consolidate information (Racelis, 2013). This research complies with the argument of Gorsuch (as cited by MacCallum et al., 1999) that the sample size should not be lower than 100 and a minimum of 5 for every variable. Thus, a sample size of 204 responses exceeds the minimum of 170 for 34 variables. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity rejects the H0 that the correlation coefficients are not quite far from zero with p< 0.001. Thus, the variables are significantly correlated which supports the use of Factor Analysis. Furthermore, the overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy is 0.941 and the KMO MSA of all variables is higher than .70. This indicates reliability and suitability for factor analysis (Anastasiadou, 2011).

I used the statements of the respondents in the survey, information from the social media of the NGOs, and electronic mail exchanges with the directors, to corroborate the quantitative results from EFA and to answer research questions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The scree plot showed that factor extraction should end at 2. Simultaneously, following the K-1 rule, only 2 factors have an eigenvalue greater than 1 (Thompson, 2004). The principal axis extraction method was used in combination with an oblimin rotation, based on an eigenvalue greater than 1. Factor loading was cut-off at 0.35 for ease of interpretation.

Table 2 shows the results of the EFA. The NGO leaders are perceived to exemplify 34 virtues which are loaded into two factors. Guided by the factor descriptions used for Filipino corporate managers (Racelis, 2013), I call the first-factor *care*, *concern*, and *competence*. The description of *care and concern* could have converged with *competence* due to two reasons. First, followers probably view leaders of character-oriented NGOs as *competent* if they are friendly, sympathetic, and supportive. For instance, R19 conveyed "Confident, friendly, and sympathetic are the traits that I wish to see in a director because these traits can help in the development of leadership for the youth." Second, women are seen to have stronger behavioral competencies such as empowerment and care for employees (Hopkins, 2008). This sheds light on why the perception of competent-related virtues of female directors follows the same pattern as care and

concern-related virtues. I refer to the second factor as *superiority* and *ambition*. *Superiority* is defined as "higher in quality". *Ambitious* means "getting ahead' being tenacious".

Table 2. *Virtue Factors of Directors in NGOs for Women Development*

Factors (Description)	Variables that loaded to the Factors
Care, Concern, and Competence	Sincere, respectful, concerned, supportive, trustworthy, sympathetic, hardworking, generous, mature, friendly, reliable, pleasant, honest, socially responsible, spirited, secure, reassuring, confident, competent, open, intelligent, leading, attractive, exciting, independent, innovative, imaginative achievement-oriented
Superiority and Ambition	Controlling, aggressive, superior, ambitious, proud, straightforward

The first factor of *care, concern, and competence* explains 42.78% of the variance of the 34 variables while the second factor of *superiority* and *ambition* explains 9.74%. The loading of 28 (out of 34) variables in the first factor partly accounts for its high explanatory power. The variables *sincere, respectful, concerned, supportive, trustworthy, and sympathetic* had factor loadings above 0.800. The cumulative power of the factors is 52.5%. Some respondents recommend other virtues they desire to see in their NGO leaders such as *accepting, energetic, flexible, inspiring, passionate, well-rounded,* and *wise*.

Based on the respondents' feedback, the directors' virtues of *care, concern, and competence*

• highlight their intelligence, competence, and hard work in achieving program objectives. R68 appreciated that the directors are intelligent and competent "(they) have good ideas and suggestions to problems, do well in their profession (which) makes them credible and inspiring." R29 appreciates hardworking directors "because they put the effort in the activities that they do and they go the extra mile just to implement and execute something effectively."

• accentuate their sincerity in forging trustworthy relationships. R130 shared "…I feel that I am understood and really cared for. (It) helps build a good relationship with others as well as it promotes an honest and open communication."

• underscores the leaders' generosity and genuineness to serve. R143 shared "I appreciate my coordinator's generosity because she is a good example for me and always gives more people opportunities to help others too." R153 disclosed that the director

"initiates projects not because she is supposed to but because she is genuinely driven to lead them to a brighter future. Furthermore, these virtues inspire the youth to do their best and serve society."

The leaders' *superiority and ambition* motivate the participants to excel. The directors' *achievement-oriented* trait encouraged R95 to aim for more and R178 to work hard to reach her goals. The director's *aggressive* trait pushed R178 and co-participants to develop their maximum potential. R152 communicated that *superiority* provides the leader the compelling personality to put things in motion. R77 wrote, "Her *aggressiveness* and *ambitiousness* challenged me, which I really like". R126 appreciates a *straightforward* leader as she wrote "I really appreciate her manner of being direct to the point with opinions, suggestions, constructive criticism."

74.5 % of the respondents expressed their high satisfaction with the NGO leadership. They think the directors do not possess traits that hinder program effectiveness. Nonetheless, a few conveyed leader traits that impede women's empowerment. R112 shared that their leader has to be less controlling to allow others to plan and execute (plans) with freedom and initiative. R116 expressed that superiority makes her feel being lectured than guided.

Based on their social media accounts, the NGOs offer programs related to faith, skills, virtues, career, and socio-civic issues. Virtue-related activities include discussions on resilience, friendship, family, charity, and leadership. Socio-civic activities include training of public-school students, tutorials and outreach projects. Tawili conducted a workshop on Gender Development and the Magna Carta of Women.

The foregoing provides the answers to the research questions. In answer to the first question, the leaders of women NGOs exemplify 34 virtues summarized into 1) *care, concern, and competence*, and 2) *superiority and ambition*.

As regards the second question, the directors' virtues expose the participants to positive models of hard work, intelligence, competence, supportiveness, trustworthiness, generosity, genuineness, social responsibility, self-confidence, achievement-oriented, ambition, aggressiveness, and superiority which are women leaders virtues. The leaders' virtues, which were observed in events and appreciated by participants, reflect the directors' virtuous leadership (Aguiling & Racelis, 2021; Wang, 2011). Their virtuous leadership motivates participants to emulate their directors in serving society and achieving lofty objectives. However, there are mixed reactions to

controlling and superior qualities. A controlling behavior could deter the development of adaptiveness which is a women leader virtue.

The directors' virtuous leadership provides an organizational environment and culture conducive to the practice of virtues (Wang et al., 2016; Zamahani et al., 2012). In answer to the third question, the NGOs influence the participants to develop leader virtues through the virtuous example of their leaders (Aguiling & Racelis, 2021) and their programs. The programs promote care and concern for family and others, compassion, social responsibility, hard work, competence, and self-confidence. However, the NGOs seem to offer few programs related to laws on women. These programs could inform participants on women's rights and prepare them for greater courage, determination, and superiority in dealing with men at work and in society.

Given the low (9.24%) explanatory power of *ambition* and *superiority,* instruction on, exposure, and enculturation to women leader virtues needed in sexist environments are not strongly manifested. *Superiority* and *ambition* would include women's virtues of persistence, courage, and determination.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The participation of women NGOs in the promotion of women's leadership merits attention. This paper describes the virtues exemplified by directors of three affiliated NGOs as perceived by the participants. The female participants perceive 34 virtues of directors which are summarized into *care, concern, and competence*; and *superiority and ambition*. The directors' virtues inspire and motivate female students, and professionals to develop women leader virtues such as hard work, intelligence, competence, supportiveness, trustworthiness, generosity, genuineness, social responsibility, self-confidence, achievement-oriented, ambition, aggressiveness, and superiority. The NGOs educate and encourage the practice of leader virtues by providing a virtuous environment, leadership activities, virtue-related and socio-civic programs. However, the NGOs and their leaders can further develop women leader virtues of aggressiveness, ambition, courage, persistence, and superiority. They may achieve this through activities on laws protecting women and girls, gender equality at the leadership level, and with women in C-suite and top public posts who can give testimonies.

This research has various limitations. First, the virtue inventory is limited to 34 virtues listed on Filipino corporate managers. It did not specify women leader virtues such as courage, persistence, determination, and prudence. Second, the respondents were not asked how the leaders' virtues and the NGO help them develop certain virtues. Third, the research is limited to women organizations focused on integral development. However, the paper has relevant contributions. It made an initial articulation of women leader virtues based on extant literature. It provided insights that women organizations, which do not have gender equality as their primary mission, can contribute to gender parity in policy-making and decision-making levels. For future research, I recommend a study on the women leader virtues perceived by Filipino women occupying top spots in publicly listed corporations and the government, a comparison of the leader virtues in the two domains, and cross-cultural studies. I also recommend expanding the virtue inventory to include all leader virtues identified by the top women public and private officials in the country. Researchers can undertake mixed-method research on how NGO leaders and organizations can aid participants to develop women leader virtues, especially in competitive and sexist environments.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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