

# The Conditions and Factors Associated with Successful Female Leadership in Thailand: a Conceptual Framework

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## *Abstract*<sup>1</sup>

*Female leadership is not simply the subject of a management consulting report supporting the worthwhile notion that women have a right to be located in leadership positions. This research develops a conceptual model linking the conditions and factors associated with female leadership in Thailand. It proposes a theoretical basis made on three levels: -Firstly, the macro-level: involving policy, economic, social and technological issues. Secondly, the meso-level: at industry levels, focusing on gender-based organisational practice in all sectors. Thirdly, the micro-level: at the level of the individual, concerning female leaders' characteristics such as their personalities and competencies. The purpose of this article is also to critically evaluate the relationship among different theories and show how they relate to this study and what variables are involved.*

**Keywords:** *Female Leadership, Competencies, Personalities, Organizational Practice, Culture*

**JEL classification:** M10, M14

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<sup>1</sup> The arguments proposed here are intended to provide the theoretical basis for an empirical study of the topic under review.

## **Introduction**

Over the past 20 years, many organisations have become less hierarchical and command-oriented. A profound change has occurred in the organisational world with structures becoming flat, more matrixes, more complex, and increasingly gender-diversity dependent and team-oriented for high-quality results. In the academic world, many scholars argue that the female leadership style is well suited to the current leadership paradigm of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that focuses on team-oriented leadership (Conlin, 2003; and Gergen; 2005). These studies shed additional light on factors that impact on the rise of females in leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Helgesen, 1990, 2003; Eisler, 2005, and Wirth, 2001), and identify factors that explain the shift toward increased female leadership.

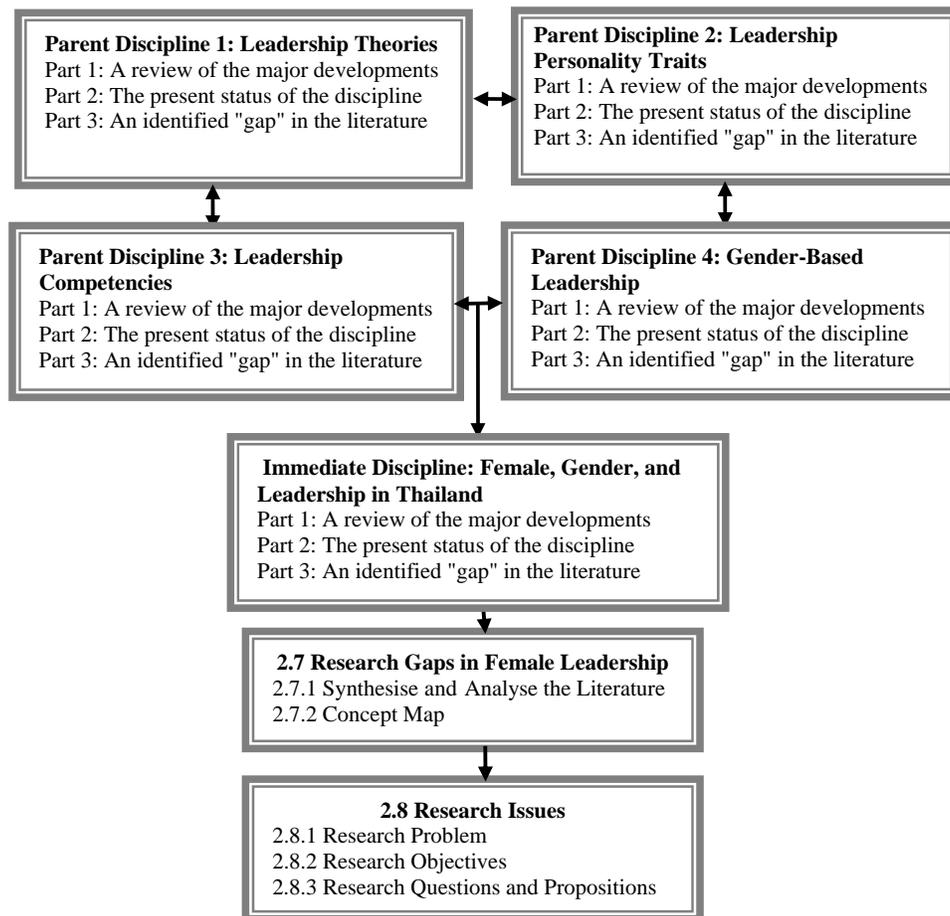
Turning from international issues to domestic concerns in Thailand, females hold significant leadership positions in national and local government, universities, business corporations and family business enterprises (Picavet, 2005; and Yukondi, 2005). Thai business operations are competing in an increasingly global environment, and female managers and entrepreneurs make substantial contributions in many industrial sectors. However, females continue to be underrepresented at higher organisational levels, and only a small proportion of females make it to the top of Thai organisations (Yukongdi, 2005). Recent official statistics show that females are underrepresented in top management positions in both private and public organisations, despite continuing improvements in educational achievements (Charmpoonod, 2001; Marie Col, Meksawan, Sopchokchai, 2001; Picavet, 2005, and Yukondi, 2005).

This study explores the conditions and factors associated with female leadership in Thailand. Furthermore, the key objective is to view female leadership beyond the overriding aim of equality in society. More female leaders in institutions should assist to create a win-win situation within their families and other groups in society, as well as the performance of organisations and firms. This study aims to provide insights for corporations based in Thailand to acquire, cultivate and retain females in executive leadership positions. There is insufficient academic research that concerns female leadership, especially in Thailand. What is known about female leaders is no longer relevant today, and it is certainly timely to redress the inequities of the situation. Accordingly, there is sufficient evidence to show that this topic should be considered as a worthy issue for future, in-depth studies.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review clearly demonstrates a connection between the four parent disciplines underpinning the present study; Leadership Theory, Leadership Personality Traits, Leadership Competencies, and Gender-based Leadership. Additionally, a thorough review was conducted of contemporary literature, relating to the immediate discipline, which focuses on the emergence and development of female leadership in Thailand. Consequently, identifying and revising the conceptual

dimensions presented in the literature to define the research issues, addresses the need to form a new theoretical framework that will be dealt with in discussion of the methodology. The literature review is outlined as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 The literature review framework**  
Source: Developed for this study

### Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study evolves from four parent disciplines and one immediate discipline. Miles and Huberman (1994) pointed out that a conceptual framework is something that explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied, the key factors, constructs and variables and the presumed relationship between them. Maxwell (2005) also stated

that the conceptual framework is primarily a conception, or model, of what is out there that researchers plan to study and why and what is going on with these things that provides a basis for a tentative theory of the phenomena that researchers are investigating. The functions of this theory are to support the research design- and to help the researcher assess and refine the research goals, develop realistic and relevant research questions, select appropriate methods, and identify potential validity, reliability and sensitivity threats to research conclusions. It also helps researchers justify their research.

Leadership is one of social science’s most examined phenomena (Antonakis, Cianciolo, and Sternberg, 2004). The concepts of leadership are integrally linked to various factors. This conceptual framework is intended to help understand and explain the underlying factors requisite for females to become successful leaders. The framework is constructed by incorporating findings borrowed from parent and immediate disciplines. When overall coherence is built into the structure, and not ready-made, female leadership conceptual models can be developed, as illustrated in Table 1

### **Illustrating the concept from the literature review**

**Table 1**

<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>HIGHLIGHTING</b>	<b>PRODUCT</b>
Internal Factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Individual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Personality Trait</li> <li>▪ Competency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Female Leadership Profile,</li> <li>▪ Female Leadership Competencies</li> </ul>
External Factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organisational Practice</li> <li>▪ Women’s Contextual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gender-Based Related</li> <li>▪ Thailand Contextual Influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Female Leader Succession</li> <li>▪ Different Socialization Patterns for Women</li> </ul>

**Sources:** Developed for this study

#### **Key factors**

##### **1. Internal Factors: Individual Factors**

Internal factors illustrate the relationships of Parent Disciplines I, II, and III, that provide individual female leaders factors. This review commences with leadership theories linked to personality traits and competencies that relate to female leadership.

##### ***1.1 The Concept of the Personality Trait***

In this study, personality traits are defined as inborn talent or early-life experiences that promote a consistent pattern of leadership performance across a variety of group and organisational situations (Antonakis, Cianciolo, and

Sternberg, 2004). Personality traits can then explore how leaders differ from nonleaders. The development of effective leaders must rely on selecting the right people, since it's not easy to change traits. Unfortunately, leadership researchers have yet to unlock the mystery or describe to individuals the right way or direction to select a profile that represents an ideal leader. According to the factors likely to support the possibility for females to attain leadership positions in Thai society, human personality directly copes with the problem in two ways;

First, these associations may be important factors in discovering the characteristics of females as successful or unsuccessful leaders. The personality attributes of the female leaders study was undertaken to identify whether female leaders possess common qualities that distinguish them in Thailand, and to identify personality traits of these females to create a leadership profile conducive in today's diverse workplace where information is shared freely, collaboration is vital and teamwork distinguishes the best organisations.

Second, the natural leader defined in Five-Factor Model<sup>1</sup> terms is visionary (O+); dedicated to a goal (C+); energetic, outgoing and persuasive (E+); competitive (A-); and resilient (N-). This pattern is presented as a five factor profile (Howard and Howard, 2001). Ideal types are not explanations because they do not tell why or how something occurs. This study will use the ideal profile for leadership to see how well observable female leadership phenomena match up to the ideal type. Even if no real-life leaders match the ideal type, the model is worth thinking about when studying leadership. Should a female leader possess a profile that is off-target, or matches the ideal one, the way that leader compensates is not merely just interesting but worth reporting.

### ***1.2 The Concept of the Competency-Based Approach***

In contrast, the concept of a skill or competency-based approach helps believe that leadership can be learned. The focus on behaviour competencies, however, implies that many people can become better leaders, by gaining new knowledge and skills that will make them better leaders (Tubbs & Schulz, 2006).

Leadership competencies associated with leadership effectiveness are those most likely to be changed through leadership development efforts. Current trends indicate that identifying competencies is valuable when understanding the leadership development puzzle (Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). A question to be answered is how similar or different are these attributes of effective global leadership, from female leadership development priorities in Thailand?

Although, much of the literature on leadership competencies and talents clearly show that related results, conducted on the leadership competency models are rooted in research dealing mainly with male leaders. In addition, there is a gap in recent research, where leader selection and leadership skill development are

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<sup>1</sup> The Five-Factor Model of personality categorises traits typically referred to by the five letters O, C, E, A, and N. **O** refers to openness to new experiences, **C** refers to conscientiousness, **E** refers to one's "extraversion.", **A** refers to agreeableness and **N** refers to negative emotionality (Howard and Howard, 2001).

both important for female leadership. Current research does not sufficiently account for this deficiency. Thus, it is necessary to find an appropriate model for female leadership. Nevertheless, the world is changing in ways that can profit from women's skills as well as those of men. As the female mind becomes unleashed on the modern world, societies will benefit, even in lands where it is currently shackled (Fisher, 2005). Consequently, for companies to ignore this way of leading in a globalised world and to ignore it is to risk being left behind where women, as well as men, will lead the major global corporations in this new century. Such literature is relevant to this study in relation to competency as a factor that allows the possibility for females to attain leadership positions.

In conclusion, the combination of these two leadership perspectives, the trait school of leadership and competency based school of leadership, can provide a background for a female leadership study. It is likely that both perspectives provide value and complement each other by helping to understand leaders, demonstrating emerging issues, and integrating and hybridising this research where configuration of traits should be linked to leadership competencies, and the context in which they emerge, and be used to predict emerging leadership. Consequently, this study will also attempt to analyse the relationship between competence and personality.

## **2. External factors: Gender Based Organisational Practice and Thailand Contextual Influence.**

The external factors showed an association between Parent Discipline IV, and the Immediate Discipline that provides gender based organisational practice and Thailand contextual influence.

### ***2.1 Gender Based Organisational Practice***

The literature review on gender-based leadership searches for conditions that explain arguments for and against female leaders in organisational practice. Gender bias is related to three issues: gender stereotypes, gender prejudice, and gender discrimination (Matlin, 2008). Gender stereotypes are, therefore, the beliefs that one associates with females and males. In other words, stereotypes refer to thoughts about a social group; which may not correspond to reality (Matlin, 2008, p. 37). Prejudice is a negative attitude or emotional reaction toward a particular group of people. Discrimination refers to biased treatment of a particular group of people (Matlin, 2008).

Resultant outcomes provide many disadvantages and explanations why women have not reached the top, due to gender bias, gender prejudice, and gender discriminations in the workplace. Despite penetrating the middle management ranks of many businesses, women continue to lag far behind men in their appointments to top leadership positions. Many explanations exist about why the glass ceiling exists, but few theories offer suggestions as to how women break through this ceiling.

Although, female leaders tend to be more transformational than male leaders (Bass, 1999; Eagly & Carli, 2004; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen 2003; and Jogulu & Wood, 2006), female leaders score somewhat higher than males on an assessment of leadership effectiveness, and also correlate with high business profit margins (Adler, 2001; Konrad & Kramer, 2007; Smith, Smith, & Verner, 2006). Surprisingly, most research suggests that more people say they would prefer to work for a male than for a female (Eagly & Carli, 2003, and Eagly & Karau, 2002). Female leaders are especially likely to be downgraded when they act in a traditionally masculine fashion and when they are rated by traditionally masculine males (Matlin, 2008).

Organisational practices in Thailand, in the public sector, involve a long-term women's development master plan (1983-2001) approved by the cabinet that foresees women as a minimum of 30 percent of officials working in local and national administration and constituting decision-making positions. There are no clauses or provisions that can be said to discriminate against women. However, the data reveals bias in the upper levels. As the parable states, women have been considered the 'hind legs' of the civil service and have been expected to follow the leadership of men (Marie Col, Meksawan, & Sopchockchai, 2001).

On the other hand, in the private sector, women accounted for 30 per cent of the supervisors in Thai firms, while there were two or three times as many women in upper management than in multinational companies. Furthermore, relative to the US and Japanese organisations, a greater representation of women was found at both the bottom and top of the organisational hierarchy in Thai firms (Yukongdi, 2005). Equal opportunities in foreign firms are more real (Picavet, 2005). There seems to be different organisational practice in both sectors.

For this study, the proposal is to understand "*Why some Thai women ascend to leadership positions in both the private and the public sectors*". As Appelbaum, Audet, and Miller (2003) propose, the assessment that a female leadership style is less effective than a man's is not fact-based but rather driven, by socialisation, to a perception that certainly persists. Research focusing on the debate between male and female effectiveness should be redirected, since it seems quite clear that questions regarding leader effectiveness and leader emergence are better than an individual's sex or even gender role. As a result, it is important to gain a better understanding of how women successfully lead.

## ***2.2 Thailand Contextual Influence***

Like many other countries, Thailand's understanding of a woman's rights, role and status is less than progressive. By the start of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it could almost be said that Thai men and women are walking "side by side" (Marie Col et al., 2001). The perception that leadership is the males' domain further creates a barrier for females to move up into leadership positions. However, some women do emerge as leaders in Thai society.

The immediate discipline explains the conditions that influence female leadership in Thailand and how they are embedded within the following structures: economic, socio-cultural, and political.

It also highlights the many problems that female leaders face in these conditions. Picavet (2005, pp 50) pointed out that, on the one hand the Thai people have preserved their fundamental cultural value. While, on the other hand, Thai women are increasingly equal to men in a context where harmony is primordial. In Thai culture, the stereotyping of gender roles appears to be accepted by society (Marie Col et al, 2001, Picavet, 2005, and Yukongdi, 2005). The western concept of discrimination is largely unfamiliar to Thai people. Consequently, understanding and appropriating Thai society and culture that influence female leadership is critical.

In summary, the literature shows an insignificant amount of empirical research into female leadership in Thailand. Basically, the research is dated. In addition, recent doctoral dissertations focus on transformational leadership and, therefore, do not fully take into account the impact of multiple influences on the present leadership status of Thai women. The underlying factors that influence Thai female leaders to be successful in leadership position are not specifically addressed in current research. Moreover, the actual practice in Thailand is distinct and different to what western research suggests.

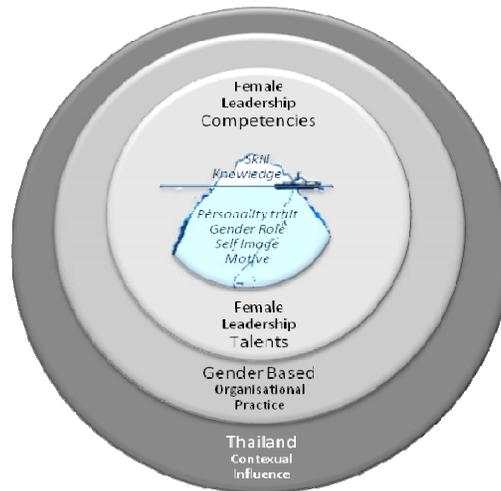
### **Concept Map**

A concept map of a theory is a visual display of that theory- a picture or what theory says is going on with the phenomenon of the study (Maxwell, 2005). Like theory, a concept map consists of two things: concepts and their relationships.

The female leadership concept map, illustrated in the Venn diagram, Figure 2, representing concepts as overlapping circles (Maxwell, 2005), helps make comparisons. Similarities are shown in the overlapping area and differences are shown in the areas that do not overlap.

Figure 2 represents the concept map by means of three concentric circles that describe factors that condition the possibilities of female leadership; internal factors and external factors. The circle illustrates the direct influence of female leaders.

The innermost circle illustrates the internal factor of female leaders. It is the strongest influence on leaders, highlighting female leadership talents and female leadership competencies, as illustrated by the iceberg model. Female leadership talents are hidden and difficult to change. Female leadership competencies are easy to see on the surface and are easy to change through leadership development. These conditions appear to be under the control of the individual. A combination of them seems to be required to improve the productivity of the organisation. Female leaders need to assess their competencies and talents so that the most qualified and interested women put themselves forward for promotion to higher positions (Marie Col et al., 2001).



**Figure 2 The concept map for female leadership**

Sources: Developed for this study

The second circle and the third circle demonstrate external factors. The second circle emphasises gender-based organisational practice and then generates female leader succession. Yukongdi (2005) also supported an observation that the position of future female leadership in Thailand will depend on the effectiveness of organisational practices and policies that are in place to eliminate discrimination in the workplace, and the role of the government in regulating the environment and ensuring that it promotes gender equality.

The outer circle represents Thailand contextual influence that is seen to give rise to or inhibit leadership dispositional antecedents. Antonakis et al., (2004) states that it is crucial to understand the contextual factors in which leadership is embedded, before we can obtain a more general understanding of leadership. Leaders are capable of environmental monitoring and of adjusting their style to fit a particular context.

### **Research Issues**

The development of a conceptual framework and concept map essentially allows focusing on the most meaningful aspects of this study. The ability to focus on research is achieved by creating a research problem then putting it into a research context. Consequently, research problems, research questions, research propositions, and research objectives can then be developed.

## 1. The Research Problem

To begin researching this subject it was first necessary to explore the conditions and factors that are influencing the emergence and development of the female leadership phenomenon in Thailand context. What factors facilitate a female's ability to be successful in a leadership position? How to acquire, cultivate and retain talented female leaders? Deficiencies in the literature give rise to the following problem:-

*“What are the factors that allow the possibility for females to attain leadership positions in Thai society?”*

## 2. The Research Questions, Research Objectives and Research Propositions

The literature is unclear when explaining underlying factors that promote female leaders to be successful. The main theories of leadership are still defined by male traits. Based on the conceptual framework developed, research question 1, research objective 1 and research proposition 1 have been developed.

*Research question 1: What are the underlying factors associated with successful females in leadership positions in both the private and the public sector?*

*Objective1: To build a model for successful female leadership that is appropriate for both the private and the public sectors.*

*Research Proposition 1: That the underlying factors such as certain kinds of personality and leadership competencies associated with successful female leaders contribute significantly to the prediction of leader effectiveness, leader emergence, and leader advancement.*

The number of working females in both the private and public sectors are greater than that of males (Picavet, 2005, and Yukongdi, 2005). Furthermore, the number of females in leading positions is relatively small compared to males in similar positions (Marie Col at el, 2001; Picavet, 2005, and Yukondi, 2005). Additionally, the private sector differs from the public sectors in terms of values and objectives of organisations (Picavet, 2005, and Yukongdi, 2005). Public sector organisations are more value-based since their activities and their functions are related to the public good. They operate within a legislative framework and are responsive to citizens of the state (Marie Col at el, 2001). Alternatively, private sector organisations have profit as their responsible. It is important to understand how these conditions affect successful females in leading positions in both the private and public sectors, to ensure that the selection and development of female leaders is reliable. From this foundation, research question 2, research objective 2 and research proposition 2 are developed.

*Research Question 2: How does organisational practice impact on female leadership development?*

*Objective2: To examine the factors influencing the development of females in leadership.*

*Research Proposition 2: That successful female leadership development depends on the context of female leaders interaction, in particular, in the “public/private” sectors.*

On reviewing gender-based and cultural perspectives in leadership studies, many explanations exist as to why the glass ceiling exists, but few theories offer suggestions how women break through this ceiling. Whether cultural factors influence peoples’ ratings of male and female leaders, and are people especially likely to downgrade Asian women if they are in leadership positions in a traditional masculine field? Unfortunately, few studies on leadership examine cultural factors.

It is, therefore, important to gain a better understanding of why some Thai women ascend to leadership positions in both the private and the public sectors, how some women successfully lead, what strategies female leaders adopt to deal with these constraints in gender-based organisational practice. From this groundwork, the research question 3, research objective 3 and research proposition 3 are developed.

*Research Question 3: How do female leaders ascend to leadership positions in both the private and the public sectors?*

*Objective3: To examine the strategies that successful female leaders use to break through discriminations in the workplace.*

*Research Proposition 3: Successful female leaders are able to maintain harmony between their roles as women in Thai culture and their roles as leaders within gender-based organisational practice.*

In today’s global world, organisations do not seem to make enough effort in developing and taking advantage of the expanding pool of female leadership talent (McCracken, 2000; and Werhane, 2007). Within the Thai context, they need to maintain world competitiveness, and ensure that female leaders are prepared to conquer the economic challenges of the present global world. This is the basis on which research question 4, research objective 4 and research proposition 4 are developed.

*Research Question 4: How do factors such as personality traits and competencies relate to the global perspective?*

*Objective4: To examine and compare gender and female leadership globally.*

*Research Proposition 4: That underlying factors associated with successful female leaders in Thai society can be matched with an ideal type of leadership profile, because no real- life leaders perfectly match the ideal type. When female leaders have a profile that is off-target, the way that they compensate is interesting.*

### **Conclusions**

Building a conceptual framework is the first step in conducting a study into the conditions and factors associated with successful female leadership in Thailand. The initial discussion considered the contribution of the parent and immediate disciplines based on female leadership. It also justified the value of this research as being a contribution to the development of theory and practical value to corporations based in Thailand to acquire, cultivate, and retain females in executive leadership positions. Moreover, within the parent discipline, the concepts of leadership to understand and explain the underlying factors for females to become successful leaders can be made. Furthermore, the immediate discipline will provide an update of the overall status of the female leadership phenomenon and female leadership studies in the context of Thailand.

This paper seeks to contribute to the academic literature of female leadership development. The conceptual model provides clarity for design of future empirical studies focused on the conditions and factors associated with successful female leadership in Thailand. On a practical level, this study proposes a model to promote successful female leadership that is appropriate for both the private and the public sectors.

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