

*Original Research Article***A Focus Group Study Management and Decision Behavior: Examining Gender Differences With Management and Decision Behavior in Donald Trump's *The Apprentice***

ABSTRACT

Management decisions are a key factor in driving management's control of valuable resources. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of gender and its role in termination decisions. This research is the result of a four-year study on management decisions on termination in Donald Trump's *The Apprentice*. This crosstab analysis was conducted with three focus group studies using *The Apprentice*. This study is a continuation of a prior study conducted on *The Apprentice*. For conducting the focus group studies, a two-phase protocol was implemented to examine the role of gender on termination decisions. A sample of ($N = 299$) participants were used for the focus group. The participants viewed various episodes of *The Apprentice* and were administered a survey based on their observations and decisions. The research design used an independent sample *t*-Test, crosstabulation, and ANOVA. The results indicate there were some significant gender differences with firing individuals based on viewing the television show. Between males and females, male participants' mean and standard deviations were higher. Furthermore, the crosstabs analysis indicated a significant correlation between gender and termination decisions use.

Keywords *Gender behavior, management decisions, Donald Trump, The Apprentice, termination, independent sample t-Test, management, ANOVA, crosstabulation, focus groups.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous studies that measured gender differences, disparity, and comparisons. Gender disparities in business and education, particularly in the area of management decision-making, are considered as being thought provoking. Are there gender disparities between males and females in terms of decision-making? This is a question guiding the development of this paper. The gender disparities between males and females are not limited to the business world; this disparity extends to the education sector, particularly in the academic environment.

The Apprentice is a business reality show created to depict business and management decision-making situations. One aspect related to the success of the show is the gender dynamics in the management of teams and the termination decisions. The use of a focus group helped to facilitate the examination of termination decisions along gender lines; the study used the reality television show for the focus group. This research is the result of a four-year study on *The Apprentice* that extends the prior research on the television show by using a focus group approach with a survey. The participants in the study were working professionals and MBA students selected to examine gender disparities in the perceptions of termination decisions in television show

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Prior Studies On Gender Differences

Limited research exists on gender differences in decision-making. Other studies on gender and decision-making suggest that women are more concerned with uncertainty, doubts, and the dynamism that are involved in the decision (Hooft et al., 2006; Sanz de Acedo Lizárraga, Sanz de Acedo Baquedano, & Cardelle-Elawar, 2007). Females are more aware of the constraints that the setting and close persons put on them; their emotions are more important to them in the decision process. Conversely, males assign more importance to the analysis of the information required to carry out the decision and to the definition of the goals or purposes of the decision. They are more motivated during the process and also feel more intensely the pressure from all the work-related aspects (Sanz de Acedo Lizárraga, Sanz de Acedo Baquedano, & Cardelle-Elawar, 2007). In terms of decision processes, job application decision processes may vary depending on applicant characteristics such as gender. Women were found to be more sensitive to the opinions of significant others (Hooft et al., 2006).

In terms of financial decisions and when compared to men, women are significantly more risk averse, tend to be less overconfident, and behave less competitively oriented. Furthermore, women behave differently in these three domains, which are highly important in the financial industry as risk taking, confident decision-making, and tough competition (Beckmann & Menkhoff, 2008). The existence of gender differences in *multiple-choice performance* might be due to the test area, instruction/scoring condition, and item difficulty (Ng & Chan, 2009). In terms of study of reactions to ambitious decision makers and followership, female decision makers are not perceived to be as *self-seeking* compared to male decision makers; so decisions made by females are less likely to be rejected (Larimer & Hannagan, 2010).

Dretsch and Tipples (2011) conducted an experiment in which individuals must select cards from decks that offer high initial losses if they are to eventually make a profit. The results, according to Dretsch and Tipples, showed that males, who tend to be high impulsive

sensation seekers, learned to select cards more quickly from advantageous decks than female high impulsive sensation seekers. Gender differences were significant when it came to deciding how much money respondents were planning to withdraw from the balances in their banks or financial institutions to get the family ready for Y2K arrival (Walker, Waiker, & Davis, 2011).

Other studies have shown that women showed less *confirmation bias* when the decision concerned them and their mate (interdependent decision) compared to a decision concerning only them (independent decision). However, men showed less confirmation bias when they made an independent compared to an interdependent decision (Traut-Mattausch et al., 2011). In another study, Lighthall et al. (2012) concluded there were gender differences in behavior present in stressed participants but not control; according to the researchers, stress led to greater reward collection and faster decision speed in males but less reward collection and slower decision speed in females.

In a study of gender differences in the hotel industry, the findings indicate there are potential gender differences in ethical decision-making and have a significant impact towards the daily operation in hotel industry (Chan, Jamilah, & Rusinah, 2012). Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003) noted that ethical decision-making aligned with three human qualities: (a) autonomy or self-ownership, (b) connectedness or establishing a network of relationships, and (c) transcendence or striving for excellence in the profession. The aforementioned qualities align with Chan et al.'s (2012) assertions that female practitioners tended to be more sensitive and more concerned on the process of ethical decision-making when compared to their male counterparts who were more concerned on the results of their decision when there was an ethical dilemma raised.

Within the field of education, the discussion on gender differences in decision-making could be a reflection on the promotion of women into the higher echelons. In a study conducted by Switzer (2003), there was a review of the American Council on Education reporting of an increase of female college presidents from 9.5 to 21.1% between the periods of 1986-2001. According to those findings, "Of these women, 26.8 percent led two-year institutions; 18.7 percent led baccalaureate schools; 20.3 led comprehensive universities; and only 13.3 percent headed doctorate-granting schools; with the remaining 14.8 percent guiding specialized schools" (Switzer, para. 1).

Issues of cracking the glass ceiling in K-12 public education exist for women and minorities at the superintendency level as well. While current research is limited, the percent of women superintendent between 1910 and the 1990s dropped from 8.9% to 4.9% respectively (Keller, 1999). In those percentages, there is an underrepresentation of minorities in those positions according to Keller. What is interesting is that there are a greater percentage of women who are principals as well as in district central offices, 57% of the professionals are women (Keller, 1999). Five years later, in a study sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators, Curphey (2003) reported that 13% of the superintendents in public education were women. In 2007, the American Association of School Administrators reported that out of 13,000 superintendents, there is a national average of 17% of them being women (Conroy, 2007).

Women in the superintendent's position are still facing stereotypes that question their ability to lead, even though evidence shows that women in these positions appear to be more dedicated in ensuring that the position is not tainted with concerns over their competencies; hence, they work harder. Martin (2002) observed, "... academic careers, ostensibly open to women, remain based on a patriarchal model of intellectual labor that assume indefatigable devotion to one's institution (and hence no or few familial obligations)" (para. 6). Based on

this argument alone, one could conclude that the decision-making capabilities of a woman might be a factor; furthermore, Campbell (1996) believed that “narrow definitions of leadership based on male models or theories need to be expanded to include women’s values, beliefs, and experiences” (p. 9), especially when comparing gender termination decisions.

2.2 Prior Studies on *The Apprentice*

There has been limited research conducted on *The Apprentice*. Many university MBA programs around the country have used the television show to teach general business and management practices in the classroom (Gyenes, 2004). There has been no prior empirical research conducted on the television show. However, there are some interesting research and findings. The University of Washington developed a business course based on the television show (Gyenes, 2004).

Kinnick and Parton (2005) argued communication skills are critical to success in contemporary American business in *The Apprentice*. The conclusions of their study were: (a) leadership skills and interpersonal skills were the most frequent subjects of criticisms, far outnumbered comments of praise; (b) effective leadership and interpersonal skills were essential *must haves*; a lack of them is a fatal flaw; and (c) leadership and interpersonal skills were critical to success. In contrast to Kinnick and Parton’s findings based on an examination of the leadership styles witnessed on *The Apprentice*, Wright (2014) concluded that the tournament-style promotion observed with the announcement of the winner did not necessarily create an altruistic leader. When there is a tournament or a tournament theory of promotion, Wright concluded that the following behaviors become more apparent: (a) high levels of ambition, (b) confidence, (c) energy, (d) intelligence, and (e) opportunism as well as arrogance.

Feeney (2007) conducted a semester-long game called, *The Cartographic Apprentice*, which simulated Donald Trump’s business tactics to engage students, create competition, and mediate group dynamics. The conclusions of the study were: (a) most students reported a satisfaction of group participation and learning; and (b) it did force students to evaluate and critically analyze their maps and the work of their peers. Lastly, McGuigan (2008) concluded *The Apprentice* is imbued with market values and seeks to validate the absolute worth of capitalist business. On a prior study on *The Apprentice* with university students, the conclusions of the study were: (a) there were no significant gender differences between management students in termination decisions; and (b) there were no significant ethnicity differences between management students in their termination decisions (Miles, 2013).

2.3 Objectives of the Study

This study used focus groups to measure participants’ perceptions with termination decision behavior in *The Apprentice*. This is to compare measure the participants’ perceptions in focus groups. The research questions guiding the investigation were:

- 1) Using Donald Trump’s *The Apprentice* as a focus group study, are there gender differences in terms of **decision behavior**?
- 2) Are there decision behavioral differences based on **industry type**?
- 3) Are there decision behavioral differences based on **task type**?
- 4) Are there decision behavioral differences based on **focus group type**?

The primary objectives of this study were to: (a) investigate behavioral and gender differences in termination decisions, (b) determine decision differences based on industry

type, (c) determine decision differences based on industry type, (d) determine decision differences based on tasks type, and (e) determine decision differences based on focus group type.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Subjects

The respondents consisted of three focus groups: (a) Marketing, (b) Management, and (c) Other (Business). The focus groups were conducted with ten to fifteen participants in each group, respectively. The focus groups' participants engaged in numerous workshops/sessions. The groups consisted of 150 males and 149 females. The focus groups primarily were in the age groups of 35– 45 and 46 – 55. All participants were industry professionals and MBA students in graduate programs; the researcher moderated each of the focus groups.

2.2 Data Collection and Measurement

To collect data, 299 surveys were obtained from the participants of the three focus groups as well as those who attended workshops using showings of *The Apprentice*. This study used an instrument containing structured questions to help collect data from the various participants of the focus groups as well as those who attended the workshops; the questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale. Due to the time constraints and one-hour episodes, there was limited time for administering the survey. Given these constraints, the participants only responded to five questions (see Table 1). For the study, three focus group sessions were conducted.

Table 1. Survey Questions used in Focus Groups

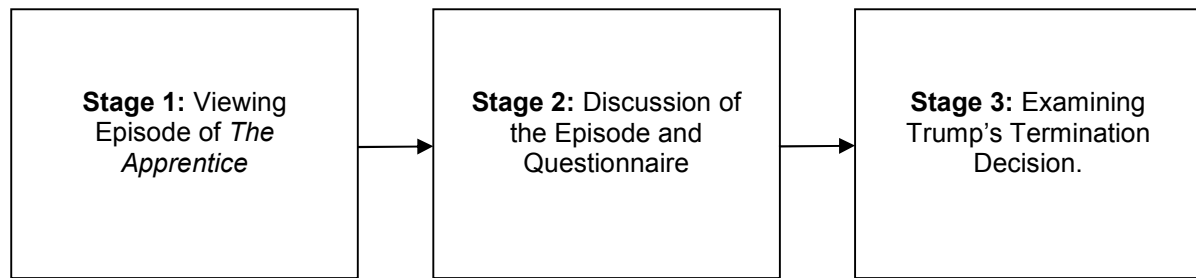
<i>The Apprentice</i> Focus Group Questionnaire
1. What is your gender?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. Who do you think should be fired?
4. Did you agree with Trump's decision?
5. Did you enjoy this case study (<i>The Apprentice</i>)?

(N = 299)

2.3 Procedures of the Study

The researchers and an assistant facilitated the focus groups. To accomplish the objectives of the study, a two-stage approach was used to conduct research on the focus groups. Three focus group sessions were conducted using the television show as an observation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework and Procedure of the Study



2.3.1 Stage 1: Viewing Episode of *The Apprentice*.

During this stage, the participants in the focus groups viewed a one-hour episode of *The Apprentice*. The participants observed the two teams competing in the show. The first stage of this study served as the basis for administering a survey questionnaire.

2.3.2 Stage 2: Discussion of the Episode and Questionnaire.

During this stage, the video was stopped after observing the boardroom scene in *The Apprentice*, where Trump discusses the issues of the losing team and the project manager. The video was stopped before the Trump's firing decision in the episode. A discussion was conducted in the workshop sessions. Then the moderator (researcher) discussed with the participants the reasons why both teams won and lost. After the discussion, the participants were asked to fill out the survey question, "Who do you think should be fired?"

2.3.3 Stage 3: Examining Trump's Termination Decision.

During this stage, the video was resumed and the participants viewed Trump's firing decision in the episode. After viewing the firing decision, the participants were asked to complete the survey and answer the survey questions, "Did you agree with Trump's decision?" and "Did you enjoy this case study (*The Apprentice*)?" The workshop session was concluded and the surveys from the participants were collected.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 299 individuals participated in the focus group study. Table 2 shows the demographics of the sample were as follows: (a) 50.2% were males and 49.8% were females; (b) 61.6% of the industries in the focus groups were in manufacturing sector; and (c) ethnicity, 67.6% of the participants were Hispanic. Table 3 shows the crosstabulations of gender differences with focus group types in *The Apprentice*. The table was as follows: (a) 67 males were in the marketing focus groups; 93 females were in the management focus group; (b) 61.6% of the industries in the focus groups were in manufacturing sector; and (c) 73 males were in the manufacturing sector.

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Demographic Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Males	150	50.2
Females	149	49.8
Ethnicity		
Asian	4	1.3
Black	22	6.7
Hispanic/Latino	202	67.6
White	68	22.7
Other	5	1.7
Industries		
Manufacturing	131	44.0
Retail Trade	101	34.0
Services	25	8.4
Other Industry	42	14.0
Focus Group Types		
Management	167	56.0
Marketing	113	38.0
Other/Business	19	6.4

(*N* = 299)

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Table 2. Demographics of Gender Differences in *The Apprentice*

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274 **Table 3.** Crosstabulation of Gender Differences with Focus Group Types in *The Apprentice*

Descriptive Crosstabs and Variables					
Focus Group Type	Marketing	Management	Other/Bus.	Total	
Male	67	74	9	150	
Female	46	93	10	149	
Total	113	167	19	299	
Industry Type	Manufacturing	Retail Trade	Services	Other Indus.	Total
Male	73	42	17	18	150
Female	58	59	8	24	149
Total	131	101	25	42	299

(*N* = 299)

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The findings from the crosstabulations of the gender decisions in *The Apprentice* focus groups are shown in Table 4. When examining the question, (V3) *Who Should Be Terminated*, 71 males felt the project manager should be fired; (b) 52 males felt the team member should be fired compared to 59 females. However, 26 females felt both the project manager and the team member should be fired compared 18 males. When examining the question, (V4) *Did You Agree With Trump's Decision*, 28 disagreed with Trump's decision compared 18 females; however, (b) 34 females strongly disagreed with Trump's decisions compared to 24 males. The table was as follows: (a) 67 males were in the marketing focus groups; 93 females were in the management focus group; (b) 61.6% of the industries in the focus groups were in manufacturing sector; and (c) 73 males were in the manufacturing sector (see Table 4).

Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations of the focus groups. When examining (V2) ethnicity, males had higher standard deviation ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.072$) compared to females ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .941$). When examining (V3) *Who Should Be Terminated*, females had a higher mean ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.106$) compared to males ($M = 2.08$, $SD = .995$), however males had a standard deviation compared to females. When examining (V4) *Did You Agree With Trump's Decision*, males ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.496$) compared to males ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.585$) were nearly equal. There were not much any significant gender differences.

Lastly, the findings from the independent sample *t*-Test are shown in Table 6. Statistically significant differences were found between three variables: (a) (V6) task type, ($t = 1.867$, $df = 297$, $F = 14.567$, $p < .000$); (b) (V5) focus group type, ($t = -2.152$, $df = 297$, $F = 6.077$, $p < .014$); and lastly a slight significance with (c) (V2) ethnicity, ($t = .607$, $df = 198$, $F = 4.673$, $p < .031$) (see Table 6). These findings mean there were some significant gender differences between these variables.

Table 4. Crosstabulation of Gender Differences with Decisions in *The Apprentice*

V3 - Who Should Be Terminated? Crosstabulations						
Gender	Project Manager	Team Member	Neutral	Both PM. & Team Mem.	Total	
Male	71*	52	9*	18*	150	
Female	59*	45	19*	26*	149	
Total	130	97	28	44	299	
V4 - Did You Agree With Trump's Decision? Crosstabulations						
Gender	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	50	27	21	28*	24*	150
Female	50	32	15	18*	34*	149
Total	100	59	36	46	58	299

Note: *Denotes significance in data and noteworthy. ($N=299$)

306 **Table 5.** Means and Standard Deviations Results: Group Means and Standard Deviations
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Gender Groups	Means and Standard Deviations and <i>n</i>	V2 - Ethnicity	V3 - Who Should Be Terminated?	V4 - Did You Agree With Trump's Decision?	V5 - Focus Group Type	V6 - Task Type	V7- Industry Type
MALES	Mean	3.45	2.08*	2.69	2.76*	1.05	6.47*
	Std. Dev.	1.072*	.995*	1.496*	.600*	.318*	.995*
	<i>n</i>	150	150	150	150	150	150
FEMALES	Mean	3.48	1.95*	2.68	2.69*	1.08	6.35*
	Std. Dev.	.941*	1.106*	1.585*	.565*	.226*	2.068*
	<i>n</i>	149	149	149	149	149	149
TOTAL	Mean	3.41	1.83	2.66	2.61	1.11	6.23
	Std. Dev.	1.007	1.058	1.539	.586	.277	1.981
	<i>n</i>	299	299	299	299	299	299

Note: Bold*. Denotes critical differences in mean/standard deviation coefficients. (*N* =299)

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Table 6. Independent Sample *t*-Test Results: Group Means and Standard Deviation Statistics

Independent Sample <i>t</i> -Test		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Mean Difference	Confidence Lower	Interval Upper
V2 – Ethnicity	Equal variances ass.	4.673	.031*	.607	297	.071	-.159	.300
	Equal variances not ass.			.608	292.583	.071	-.159	.300
V3 – Who Should Be Terminated?	Equal variances ass.	2.869	.091	-2.087	297	-.254	-.493	-.014
	Equal variances not ass.			-2.086	293.314	-.254	-.493	-.014
V4 – Did You Agree With Trump’s Decision?	Equal variances ass.	1.326	.250	-.175	297	-.031	-.382	.320
	Equal variances not ass.			-.175	295.784	-.031	-.382	.320
V5 – Focus Group Type	Equal variances ass.	6.077	.014*	-2.152	297	-.145	-.278	-.012
	Equal variances not ass.			-2.152	296.196	-.145	-.278	-.012
V6 – Task Type	Equal variances ass.	14.567	.000*	1.867	297	.060	-.003	.122
	Equal variances not ass.			1.870	269.100	.060	-.003	.122
V7 – Industry Type	Equal variances ass.	1.511	.220	-1.061	297	-.243	-.694	.208
	Equal variances not ass.			-1.061	294.258	-.243	-.694	.208

Note: $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$. Bold* denotes significance in the coefficients. ($N = 299$)

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4. LIMITATIONS

This study had two limitations. One key limitation of the study was the methodology; a convenience sampling method was used to recruit the focus groups' participants. The process enabled the selection of a small homogeneous group of participants comprised of industry professionals and MBA students. The results may or may not likely to be representative of the general population; the results should be taken with caution. A second key limitation was due to time constraints of the research and experiment design. There was a limited amount of time to conduct the research. With the exception of these two limitations, this study was an investigation of gender differences in management decision-making.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to investigate gender differences in the decision-making with terminations in *The Apprentice* with Donald Trump. The results of this study suggest that there are some significant findings in gender differences in with management decisions in *The Apprentice*. First, more males thought the project manager (PM) should be fired compared to females. In the focus groups, more females were more *neutral* compared to males. Furthermore, more females thought both the PM and a group member should be fired compared to males. Second, more males disagreed with Trump's termination decision compared to females; however, more females strongly disagreed with Trump's decisions compared to males. Furthermore, there were some differences and significance in terms of mean and standard deviation between gender groups; males had a slightly higher mean compared to females. Third, ethnicity did not prove to be a significant factor with the termination decisions. Lastly, the task type, industry type, and focus group type had some significance in terms of the gender differences.

The research contribution to the existing literature is twofold. First, this research contributes to the field by attempting a different approach by using a focus group and reality television as a methodology for measuring gender differences and management decisions. Second, this research addresses a gap in the previous research by using a focus group to examine management perceptions in termination decisions. However, a complication related to the interpretation of these results has been that many of the prior studies on gender differences did not use focus groups or a reality television show (*The Apprentice*) as a platform for studying management decisions.

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