

**THE IMPACT OF FEMALE MICROMANAGEMENT ON MALE WORKERS: A QUALITATIVE EMPIRICAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

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**Abstract**

The intention of this study was to investigate the impact of gender specific (female) micromanagement on male workers. The vast majority of the participants feel that they are being controlled; nothing they do is ever good enough; they no longer have the option to take initiative; there is no autonomy; they have little or no input for how to achieve organizational goals (Bobinski, 2009), and most importantly; they feel as though they are being emasculated. Hence, the core focus of this study is to afford its audience with a better understanding of the effects of micromanagement from a male's perspective, as oftentimes strong attitudes, leadership skills, and roles are associated more so with male leaders and managers (Breen & Hamel, 2007) as opposed to female managerial leads.

**Keywords:** Leadership; Non-Management; Micromanagement; Gender Studies

**Introduction**

The study's potential significance and relevance to the field of leadership and management in relation to gender roles is crucial. It allows organizations and their hierarchies to better understand what occurs and how employees (males) feel when subjected to micromanagement. For this reason, a phenomenological methodology was used to shed light upon the meanings of human experience, this effectively explored a range of human experiences within (Ehrich, 2005) various work disciplines and industries. Phenomenological explorations such as these have the potential to help us "understand the complexity of human experience and gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of participants' experiences" (Gibson & Hanes, 2003, p. 201).

**Research Problem**

Oftentimes, most workers female and male complain of experiencing tension, fear, and stress while at work do to overly controlling managers (micromanagers); however, the phenomena appears to be more so extensive when the micromanager is a woman. Hence, many individuals (in this case, men) do not know how to deal with the pressures they feel when they are scrutinized and even belittled by these types of managers (McDonough, 2005). Throughout the study, the male participants have expressed many complaints, some which are, but not limited to feeling self-conscious, distressed, and non-productive when under the watchful eye of a female micromanager.

**Purpose of the Study**

For the purpose of this study, a phenomenological approach was used to better understand and describe female micromanagement behaviors and its impact on male workers. Micromanagement is defined as "to control every part of a situation, project, etc., even including the small details, in

a way that may not be necessary and may not give enough responsibility to other employees.” (Cambridge University Press, 2012). Through the use of phenomenological research, the researcher was enabled to uncover patterns in the work lives of participants that lead to a better understanding of female micromanagement; what these male participants experienced, their thoughts, and how they believe they could have dealt with the female micromanager. Consequently, through the use of phenomenology the research purpose allowed participants to thoroughly describe their experiences of the phenomenon (female micromanagement).

Additionally, this type of research examined how the participants define micromanagement; their thoughts about micromanagement as a leadership style; their experience with micromanagement; why they believe females may ascertain the micromanager leadership style; and whether micromanagement is a benefit and or deterrent in the workplace (McDonough, 2005).

### **Method and Design**

This research incorporated the phenomenological research approach which is described as a proposed method to rediscover first experience (Langer, 1989). Consequently, the sole method of data collection was one-on-one interviewing. With interviewing the “lived experience” of each participant was noted and examined to gather the necessary data in which to answer the research questions. The researcher asked the following five fundamental questions:

1. How would you define micromanagement?
2. What are your thoughts about micromanagement as a leadership style?
3. Have you experienced and or are you presently being micromanaged by a female superior? If so, how does and or did it make you feel?
4. Why do you believe females may ascertain the micromanager leadership style?
5. Do you feel micromanagement is beneficial or a deterrent in the workplace, please elaborate.

The overall goal with interviewing participants that have experienced female micromanagement is to depict “a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity” (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997, p. 5). The interviews were recorded then transcribed and analyzed to deliver the overall essence of female micromanagement through themes, word repetition, and similarities and differences. Through these data analysis techniques the researcher was able to (1) discover themes and subthemes; (2) describe the core and peripheral elements of themes; (3) build hierarchies of themes; (4) apply and attach themes to actual text; and (5) Link themes into theoretical models (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) all of which demonstrated the impact of female micromanagement on these male worker’s. Throughout the study data was noted in the findings as it contributed to the scope of the study. The research questions were focused to express the lived experiences of male worker’s reactions to female micromanagement. The research questions were developed using phenomenological rooted questions “that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awakening further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced” (Moustakas, 2004, p. 59).

### **Setting, Population, and Sample**

The theoretical and conceptual setting of the study illustrated mostly negative characteristics of female micromanagement in the workforce among male employees. Hence, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role that female micromanagement plays in the work lives of these male participants, to describe how employees identify, react to, and whether employees believe that micromanagement as a whole makes a difference in the workplace.

Accordingly, the population for this study consisted of 157 male employees between the ages of 18- 67, presently working in the following industries: Aerospace, Pharmaceutical, Computer, Retail, Telecommunications, Law Enforcement, Construction, Education, Petroleum, Automotive, Banking, Dentistry, Healthcare, Entertainment Industry, Food Products Manufacturing, Funeral Planning, Hotels and Tourism, Internet, Life Insurance, Law Firms, Music Production, Nursing, Real Estate, and Public Transportation whom have and or are being micromanaged by a female leader and or manager within an organizational environment (as defined and described by the researcher at the commencement of the study).

The intent of the study was to examine the impact of female micromanagement on male employees regardless of their age and industry of employment. The recruitment method chosen was an online recruitment medium. The use of e-mail communications and the creation of a website and blog in an immersive environment (Salmons, 2010) were used to recruit potential participants.

The sample frame for this study was open to any industry in which employs a large male non-managerial hierarchy in the greater Los Angeles County California area. For the sake of this study the industry was not of considerable importance, as the researcher's intention was to use a Heterogeneous typology which encompasses different experiences of the phenomena of interest (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedure**

The data collection was conducted by the researcher. The role of the researcher, as data collection instrument consisted of various key factors: establishing rapport with her participants, focusing on context, applying active listening communication skills; developing a dialogue, engaging in reflection; asking questions, and fostering trust. Through a qualitative study, the researcher as the instrument was allowed to enter into the phenomenological reduction right away (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2009). Furthermore, the sole data collection method for this study occurred through interviews. The interview questions were set forth in a logical manner extracted from framework envisioned by the researcher for the propose of this study, which included the research problem and questions.

The preferred method of data analysis for this study ensued through the use of Giorgi's phenomenological research method which has been categorized as "empirical phenomenological research in psychology" (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 31). With the use of Giorgi's analysis model the data (audiotapes and transcripts) were synthesized into characteristic themes, where ample

“reading between the lines” took place to go beyond explicit meanings. Each participants answers received individual textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions to provide insight into the “what” of the phenomenon and the “how” regarding the phenomenon experience. By categorizing the themes the researcher was able to analyze the perceptions and experiences of the studied subjects (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

### **Materials and Instruments**

The material and instruments used were audiotapes and the NVivo 12 software. NVivo 12 is software that supports qualitative research by allowing the researcher to collect, organize, and analyze interview content. The following steps were taken to ensure proper handling of data and analysis. The first step consisted of labeling of each interview audiotape as it occurred. The second step involved reviewing and transcribed the audiotapes by the researcher. The third step entailed that each transcription be reviewed a second time and compared with the audiotapes for accuracy, and last the themes were analyzed and compared to find commonalities through the use of NVivo 12. Consequently, these steps allowed the researcher to follow a strict method of data collection and data analysis, which was essential in obtaining thorough, reliable, and unbiased information from participants (Ehrich, 2005).

### **Findings**

A total of 53 male participants were interviewed for this study. There were five questions total and each participant was asked the same questions. The interviews began with a brief description of the study and overview of what micromanagement is. Then the specific questions were asked:

1. How would you define micromanagement?
2. What are your thoughts about micromanagement as a leadership style?
3. Have you experienced and or are you presently being micromanaged by a female superior? If so, how does and or did it make you feel?
4. Why do you believe females may ascertain the micromanager leadership style?
5. Do you feel micromanagement is beneficial or a deterrent in the workplace, please elaborate.

Interview results were grouped by question. Below are the node summaries from the participant interviews supporting the findings:

#### **Question Number 1 (Node A: definition of micromanagement).**

*How would you define micromanagement?* The purpose of the first question was to establish the participants’ definition of the term and to ensure their understanding and perception of the term. 90 percent of the male participants stated that micromanagement was a form of control whether it was implemented by a male and or female. 10 percent of the participants described micromanagement as “big brother, or in this case big sister” watching everything they do in the workplace.

#### **Question Number 2: (Node B: micromanagement as a leadership style).**

*What are your thoughts about micromanagement as a leadership style?*

60 percent of the male participants stated that micromanagement as a leadership style was used a form of control whether it was implemented by a male and or female. 25 percent of the

participants described micromanagement leadership as a way of taking away their ownership of their work. 15 percent of the participants defined micromanagement leadership as a power, assuming responsibility, and control mechanism.

**Question Number 3: (Node C: experience being micromanaged by a female superior).**

*Have you experienced and or are you presently being micromanaged by a female superior. If so, how does and or did it make you feel?*

76 percent of the participants concurred that they have experienced female micromanagement in the workplace, at some point in their careers. All of these males stated that they felt pressured, belittled, and ostracized. Six percent stated that they are presently working under the watchful eye of a female micromanager and this makes them feel insecure, controlled, and as though nothing they do is ever good enough. Meanwhile, 18 percent stated that they no longer have the option to take initiative, there is no autonomy, they have little or no input for how to achieve organizational objectives (Bobinski, 2009), and most importantly; they feel as though they are being emasculated.

**Question Number 4: (Node D: establishing a micromanagement leadership style).**

*Why do you believe females may ascertain the micromanager leadership style?*

80 percent of the participants stated that they believed that females ascertain a micromanagement style because it makes them feel in control and equal to men. 10 percent of the participants stated that they believe females establish this leadership style to be kept “in the loop” on everything they do, regardless if the projects are minor or challenging. The last 10 percent believe that it is a matter of control and perfectionism, if one does not do the work correctly; the female micromanager will take it upon herself to correct the issue and take credit for it.

**Question Number 5: (Node E: micromanagement: beneficial or a deterrent).**

*Do you feel micromanagement is beneficial or a deterrent in the workplace, please elaborate.*

20 percent of the participants believe that micromanagement is beneficial, as it affords the employee and the manager with less errors and stellar productivity. Meanwhile, 80 percent of the participants believe that micromanagement is a deterrent, as it implements continuous monitoring and assessment every step of the way. These participants agreed that this behavior adversely affects manager–employee communication, creativity, productivity, problem-solving, flexibility, trust, feedback, openness, and organizational growth and goal attainment.

One particular trend emerged: males employees listed “control and insecurity” as the core drivers for females to ascertain a micromanagement leadership style. Hence, the overall consensus of whether or not female micromanagement motivated, influenced their ability to perform their job functions, and or influence their feelings of being controlled; of not being good enough; loss of initiative and autonomy; and feeling as though they are being emasculated.

**Conclusion**

According to White (2010) reasons for female micromanagement may arise from a manager’s concern for details, increased performance pressure, her own insecurity, or as a tool to exercise her superiority over male counterparts. The consensus of the males interviewed showed that female micromanagers create standards that a male employee is unable to meet and then feels

justified to control the employee. In addition, an employee may leave voluntarily because of his belief that it is a stressful workplace (Fracaro, 2007). Additional reasons for female micromanaging could be that a manager is convinced that no one can do a job better than she can, managers surround themselves with “yes” people who fail to challenge or criticize the manager’s actions or inactions, or that the manager is closed-minded to new approaches or ideas to solve difficult problems. Collectively, the effects of female micromanagement may have a huge short- and long-term negative impact on male employees, their effectiveness as a manager, and on an organization’s goal.

Subsequently, there is a reason why the concept of (female) micromanagement is universally viewed as a bad thing. It can be suffocating. It can inhibit growth, both for the male employee or the project. It can be demotivating. It can reduce innovation. And it can prevent employees from taking ownership of their work or the outcome. Micromanaged employees can feel trapped. They can feel unappreciated. They can feel untrusted. All of these things can and will cause male employees to feel less connected to their work and to the organization (The Beacon, 2009). The net result is that these workers will not be motivated to innovate, produce quality work, and feel confidence in the work that they do, due to the control factor.

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