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Gender Parity in South African Organisations?
An Analysis of the Status of African Women**

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Can Transformational Leadership be used to Pursue Gender Parity in South African Organisations? An Analysis of the Status of African Women

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Abstract

This paper investigates how transformational leadership can be used to pursue gender parity in South African organisations. This is because many organisations have failed to help the government realise its Millennium Development goal in relation to gender parity. Black South African women are still underrepresented in senior managerial positions. Businesswomen's Association of South Africa (2012) state that only 3.6% of South African women account for Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions, 5.5 % for chairperson position, 17.1% for directorship and 21.4% for executive management positions. Therefore, this underrepresentation of women in leadership positions cuts across many sectors. Women are still underrepresented amidst a number of legislation which is put in place to advance their empowerment. Thus, for governments to achieve gender equity, stringent measures of legislation implementation are required. There are many interventions that government can consider to ensure that equity targets are achieved. One of such interventions could be a carrot and a stick method of addressing equity challenges. Nevertheless, this paper argues that transformational leadership could be adopted to pursue gender parity in organisations. The paper further argues that leadership plays an important role in women empowerment, as it sets the direction and tone for transformation in the organisations. A document analysis is employed in this paper as a research method to elucidate the phenomena. One of the major findings presented in this paper is that organisations lack commitment towards transforming the status of women; little is done to empower women. Therefore, this paper recommends that an agenda for transformation be set in South African organisations.

Keywords: empowerment, gender parity, equity, leadership and transformation

Introduction

Transformation in relation to gender parity has not yet been realised in many South African organisations. Women are still underrepresented in senior management positions. Businesswomen's Association of South Africa (2012) state that only 3.6% of South African women account for Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions, 5.5 % for chairperson position, 17.1% for directorship and 21.4% for executive management positions. The statistics of women in higher positions have not improved significantly over the years. Van der Gaag (2014) argues that even though work opportunities have improved for women over the years, but men are still in majority in top positions, both in government and in industry.

Underrepresentation of women in top managerial position is a global phenomenon. Egan (2015) agrees that women are in the minority in major companies across the globe, she further stated that, what is of concern is that the pipeline of future female CEOs in companies is alarmingly thin. Most women settle at the middle management positions with no prospects for the most senior positions in the companies. Bolton (2015) maintains that the reason women are not progressing significantly in the corporate environment is because women are channelled to occupy certain roles that will not take them into the C-suites. In some occasions some women close opportunities for themselves by refusing to take more responsibilities in companies. Nevertheless, when companies deny women opportunities to advance to the most senior positions, they are actually losing out on the skills that women would bring on their boards.

Governments and companies lose on the expertise of women who are in most instances able to develop powerful teams in the organisations. Reddy (2015) identified a number of advantages that women could bring into the workplaces; she stated them as; the ability to accomplish goals, empathy, intuition, emotional intelligence, passion, helpful nature and the ability to build solid workplace relationships. Denying women prominent positions in both government and industry with all the potential skills that women possess, has actually caused many governments to fail to realise their Millenium Development Goals. The question that remains is that; will governments achieve their Sustainable Development Goals relating to women empowerment if mechanisms are not put in place to transform the mind-sets of the society?

Realisation of Sustainable Development Goals requires partnership between the government and the private sector. The over-arching aim of the goals is to transform the world in 17 steps. One of the 17 goals in the steps is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (United Nations 2015). Therefore, if governments and companies do not put an extra effort in ensuring that women and girls are empowered, the United Nations will keep on developing goals that will not be achieved in the stipulated period. The goals that are meant to bring about transformation of the societies have to be driven by transformational leaders.

This paper argues that transformational leadership is one of the interventions that can be used to pursue gender parity in South Africa and in

other states that have similar attributes. South Africa successfully transformed itself from the apartheid era, and through the correct perspectives, it has the capacity to transform its organisations. However, this is not happening as expected, women are still underrepresented in many top managerial positions. There is a number of legislation put in place to support the empowerment of women in South Africa but few women have advanced to leadership roles. That being the case, many women, especially African women are left in the periphery. African women in this context refer to black South African women.

Previous Research on the Status of African Women in Relation to Gender Equity

An investigation was conducted by researchers from the University of Limpopo, South Africa. The purpose of the research was to investigate the status of African women representation in top management positions since the legislation of Employment Equity Act, no 55 of 1998. The research applied the t-test of difference in mean growth of progression to top positions before and after the implementation of the Employment Equity Act. One of the major findings was that African women were likely to be promoted in the companies that do business with government; their progression to higher positions was not across all the sectors in the country. The article recommended that there should be a continuous monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Employment Equity Act because companies that are not directly doing business with the government are likely not to implement Employment Equity Act. Some companies would rather pay a fine than to incorporate the previously disadvantaged individuals into their businesses (Kanjere and Ngwakwe 2016).

The problem of overlooking certain legislation is exacerbated by a number of international accords and legislation on women empowerment that have not been properly implemented and monitored. However, new bills and legislations are added to the existing ones with little progress on improving the status of African women in the workplaces. The following acts were passed in parliament to safeguard the interest of women in the workplaces; Employment Equity Act, no 55 of 1998, Commission on Gender Equality Act of 1996, Skills Development Act of 1998, Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act no. 4 of 2000. However, gender gap amongst all the women as opposed to men in higher positions is at 75%.

Another study was conducted by the researchers from the University of Johannesburg, in South Africa. The purpose of the study was to investigate the gender-pay gap. The study discovered that the gender-pay gap in South Africa still persists and that women would never catch up with their male counterparts in as far as remuneration parity is concerned. The reasons put forward were that most employers still benefit unduly from the apartheid system that undervalued the skills of women (Bosch 2015).

Legislative Framework on Women Empowerment in South Africa

South African government has initiated a number of legislation that is meant to redress the past social injustices against the previously disadvantaged individuals, and that included women. Employers are urged to take initiatives to promote in promoting equal opportunities for previously disadvantaged individuals by eliminating unfair discrimination. They are further encouraged to develop relevant policies that are aligned with the national polices and to promote fairness. However, many organisations remain untransformed even though there are policies in the workplaces that speak directly to the issues of affirmative action and women empowerment. Xingwane (2012) observed that even though women are to a certain extent empowered, in the sense that they now have access to opportunities, rights and services that were a dream some years back, they still bear a burden of the challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Therefore, the government of South Africa has put some of the following policies to address outstanding issues relating to women empowerment;

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa played an important role in transforming the status of women in the country. Chapter 2 of the Constitution enshrines the rights which affirm the democratic values of the society. The Bill of Rights in the Constitution emphasises equality before the law and equal benefit. Thus equality before the law made it possible for women to enjoy the freedom that the country afforded. The laws of the country protect women against unfair discrimination. Furthermore, the Constitution emphasises that human dignity of individuals has to be respected. It is through the Constitution that other laws promoting empowerment of women are anchored. Nevertheless, Khan (2013) dispute that women are treated equally before the law. She states that in most countries, women fail to find justice, they are denied the very essence of the rule of law-that we are all equal and equally protected by the law. Nevertheless, South Africa has developed the following laws to protect the interests of women in the work places;

Employment Equity Act, no 55 of 1998

Employment Equity Act, no. 55 of 1998 echoes the spirit of equity and non-discrimination against women, which is enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa. The Act sets the tone to advance equity in the workplaces by proposing that equal opportunities and fair treatment in employment has to be achieved through the elimination of unfair treatment of women. The Act also propagates that affirmative action measures has to be put in place to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups in the past.

The Act strives to achieve and ensure that there is equitable representation of women in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce. Even though much has been done in promoting women in the work places since the inception of the Act, much still has to be done. South African Government News Agency (2015) agrees that great strides in relation to women empowerment have been made, however, organisations such as Commission on Gender Equality are of the opinion that much still has to be achieved as acts of discrimination against women are prevalent across the society.

Commission on Gender Equality Act, no 39 of 1996

Commission on Gender Equality Act number 39 of 1996 was instituted to provide for the composition, powers, functions and functioning of the Commission on Gender Equality, and to provide for matters connected therewith. The Commission draws its mandate from the constitution of the country as chapter 9 institution; chapter 9 institutions are established so that they can defend democracy in South Africa. Thus, the aim of Commission on Gender is to pursue a free society that is based on non-discrimination and oppression of women. The Commission on Gender Equality promotes gender equality, advise parliament or other legislatures with matters relating to gender equality and status of women. Its activities also include research, public education, policy development, legislative initiatives, effective monitoring and litigation. The Commission lobby effectively to correct the past injustices on women abuse and discrimination (Insession, 2014).

The Commission has managed to register success in that it has held several gender transforming hearings across the country and has also produced reports that influenced policy; one of such reports was on women and children abuse. Hannan (2006) states that the Commission on Gender Equality was established as a policy-making organisation and it therefore does not have the powers to investigate cases or to take measures to ensure compliance with equality standards between men and women.

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act no. 4 of 2004

The act facilitated the establishment of Equality Courts that were mandated to tackle issues pertaining to discrimination, hate speech or harassment. The act made it possible to forbid any form of inequality based on gender, race, pregnancy, disability, religion, culture, sexual orientation HIV/AIDS status or marital status. This is because many reforms in South Africa were left to the decision makers who enjoyed the status quo. These form of courts equipped women with the power to reclaim their rights.

The aim of the act is to eradicate all the social and economic inequalities that were perpetrated by patriarchy, apartheid and colonialism. Khulumani

Support Group (2017) identified the widows as the most vulnerable groups of discrimination. In their website they stated that more often than not, widows are evicted out of their husbands' properties, lose the custody of their children to the men's families and also deprived of the rights to inherit their late husband's property or land. Such issues and many more are the ones that are handled by the equality courts. Equality courts also ensure that the women's rights in the work places are not violated and that women are given equal opportunities for development as their male counterparts.

Skills Development Act no. 97 of 1998

Most women were underpaid because they lacked required skills stipulated by the employers. They were as well not promotable. Thus, the Skills Development Act was promulgated to give all South Africans equal opportunities in the work places and to ensure that they are competent in different areas. Despite all the efforts by the government to upskill workers; South Africa still experiences a great shortage of critical skills. Marock (2010) observed that shortage of skills has become a core issue on economic growth, service delivery, social development and productivity.

Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill

The bill was put into place to address the prevalent acts of discrimination against women in the workplaces. A number of women are still struggling to get recognition in the area of their expertise and are thus side-lined when they are due for promotions. Therefore, the bill was put into place to eradicate discrimination and favouritism towards men in employment ratios. Women are still discriminated against in the workplaces in favour of men. Men in the same positions as women still earn more than their female counterparts. Therefore, the bill advocates that business owners and employers who do not comply with the bill be fined or criminally prosecuted. This calls for the carrot and a stick type of an approach.

The bill was however, highly criticised for duplicating some of the current legislation such as the Commission on Gender Equality Act (1996), the Skills Development Act (1998), the Employment Equity Act (1998) and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000). Mail and Guardian (2014) stated that the bill does not bring anything new in relation to the current legislation.

Literature Review

The current South African legislation propagates empowerment of women as opposed to the past legislation that perpetrated racial and gender

discrimination in the old South Africa. The South African History Online (2016) agrees that in the old dispensation, South African black women were for many years considered to be the second-class citizens. They were disadvantaged in a number of ways, firstly because of their race and secondly because of their gender. Laws in place were also discriminating against women. It is only after the adoption of democracy that the status of African women changed in South Africa. The South African Online History (2016) further states that women were previously given the status of a minor, thus they were excluded from participating actively in the economy and in acquiring land. Thobejane (2015) argues that the defeat of racial oppression did not automatically translate into egalitarian, anti-sexist society.

To this day, many African women are still economically disadvantaged; they form a larger proportion of unemployed adults in the country. Those that are employed, the majority of them occupy the lower levels in the employment ranks, and they also tend to be in the low paying jobs. In a number of sectors, women still earn less than their male counterparts who might have the same qualifications and experience. Thobejane (2015) also agrees that women continue to be discriminated against in the workplace, and that they earn 28% less than their male counterparts.

Furthermore, women in South Africa still have to fight against violence, abuse and high levels of sexual harassments and rape. These and many other factors, serve as barriers for women to advance in the economic sector.

When African women are compared with other women of different races, they lag behind in terms of education and training, qualifications and work experience. They however face the slightly different form of discrimination as compared to what other women experience. Nevertheless, some companies discriminate against pregnant women or married women. If a pregnant woman attends an interview, there is a high chance of such a woman not getting the job, especially when the pregnancy is at the advanced stage.

Discriminatory activities against women warrant a different corps of leadership in South African organisations. Therefore, this paper argues that transformation is necessary in the workplaces, and that it has to be achieved through transformational leadership because when women are in leadership positions they are likely to pursue liberation for other women.

Chen (2015) argues that gender equality serves as an important component of effective economic and human development strategy. Global challenges need integrated leadership, they cannot be solved by one sect of leaders. Hence, it is imperative that women be given an opportunity to contribute towards the solutions which can make a difference in mankind. Women add value to the organizations because they are multi-tasked and perceive the world differently from their male counterparts. European Commission (2010) states that women are problem solvers and excellent in multi-tasking. Women also bring an element of diversity which is much needed in organizations that need to operate beyond the narrow confines of traditional labour force and leadership.

Mfeketo (2009) consent that women are more likely than men to take up women issues in their organizations. For example, women in South African

parliament “ have played an active role in mobilising women’s rights and have ensured the passage of several key pieces of legislation aimed at protecting women’s rights, such as the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (Act No 92 of 1996), the Domestic Violence Act (Act No 116 of 1998), the Maintenance Act (Act No 99 of 1998), the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act (Act No 120 of 1998) and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act) Amendment Act (Act No 32 of 2007), to cite but a few examples” (Mfeketo 2009). Thus, these legislations and many other paved ways for the recognition of women’s rights and implementation thereof.

Gabara (2014) reports that women in leadership positions should act as conduit of the up-liftment of other women by creating opportunities and initiatives for them to further the cause of gender parity. Therefore, many women at the leadership positions are also able to serve as role models to the aspirant young women. “Women play an important role in the development process; contributing to development efforts, especially in the face of scientific and practical challenges” (Global Network for Rights and Development 2014). This shows that women have an important role to play in transforming the workplaces as well.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is one form of leadership that can be considered to pursue gender equity in organisations. This is because the style has a potential to empower the workforce to achieve beyond expectations. The leadership style is also ideal for dealing with the deep rooted problems in the organisations as it propagates complete change in different spheres of the organisation including the attitude and beliefs of the workforce. Waddell, Cummings and Worley (2011) added that transformational change in organisations includes reshaping the organisation’s design elements and culture. Therefore, change in the organisations has to be led by the leaders that are also prepared to change.

One of the reasons why organisations delay in achieving their gender equity targets is because organisations are not committed to change, and that some leaders that are expected to change the outlook of the organisations are also resistant to change. Waddell, Cummings and Worley (2011) argue that transformational change is the prerogative of the senior executive and line managers, who are responsible for strategy and operations of the organisation. Myers, Hulks and Wiggins (2012) pointed out that many organisations that expect their senior management team to drive the change process, do not expect the process to exclude the participation of the employees. Employees are the most important component of every organisation and should therefore be involved in every change process.

Therefore, modern organisation need transformational leaders that are prepared to personally change the way they perceive women and the way in which they have to empower such women colleagues. Some organisations

perceive women empowerment as an exercise for compliance with the legislation and not with the human values and recognition of expertise. Transformational leaders are capable of identifying talent and nurture it.

Most transformational leaders are described as being charismatic, enthusiastic, optimistic, visionary and passionate about their work. They know how to engage and interact with their subordinates; hence they display an excellent skill of changing the long-held perceptions and belief systems. Transformational leaders mobilise people towards changing the status quo and adopt a common vision that will benefit the organisation. Cossin (2013) observed that transformational leaders are capable of articulating the organisation's common purpose and the impact that each and every action has on the group and even beyond.

Transformational leadership is anchored on the following principles;

Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leaders are not afraid of change and are therefore constantly challenging the status quo. They bring about creativity in every individual. Roe (2014) argues that transformational leaders encourage and reward creativity and innovation. He further stated an example wherein a leader states and delivers on a no blame policy by trying out the new ideas with his team as well.

Individualised Consideration

Transformational leaders are able to understand the dynamics operating within certain individuals and they know how to deal with such. For example, there are some women who have the potential of being in leadership positions but may need to be mentored or coached, therefore, transformational leaders could be in the position to see that and make the necessary arrangements. Cossin (2013) assert that transformational leaders strive to understand employees' abilities, skills and needs and they can then decide to offer them coaching and mentoring to overcome such weaknesses.

Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leaders know how to mobilise the workforce behind a particular vision. Transformational leaders are thus capable of helping people see a bigger picture. Roe (2014) confirms that transformational leaders are capable of communicating a compelling vision of the future and ensure that all the individuals are involved in its realisation.

Idealised Influence

Influence is the key word that describes transformational leadership. It is through influence that individuals within the organisation are capable of

embracing the vision of the leader. Therefore, if leaders within the organisations could passionately drive and influence their stakeholders about the significance and benefits of empowering women, a different story could be told about women in decision-making roles and positions. The problem is that, those in the top positions do not want to relinquish power.

Perseverance through Conflict

When males are requested to relinquish certain powerful responsibilities in favour of their female counterparts, conflict is likely to occur. Change if not well conducted can lead to conflict. Therefore, transformational leaders are aware of conflict that is inherent in any situation that warrant change, and are equipped to resolve such conflicts.

Different Ways in which Transformational Leadership can be used to Pursue Gender Parity

The pursue of gender parity in organisations has to start with the board of directors. As long as many boards are comfortable with male executives, little can be done to bring about transformation, no amount of legislation can change circumstances in companies if transformation is not driven from within. Companies will have to first realise the need to tap into the expertise that is brought about by women leaders. Eagly (2007) maintains that women are increasingly praised for having excellent leadership skills. Women are also applauded for displaying the skills that are associated with effectiveness and meticulous to detail.

Women should therefore be given space to exercise their leadership roles. True transformational leaders in organisations will support and encourage emerging women leaders to find their foot in the organisation. South African organisations have to transform so that they can benefit from the expertise that is brought about by diverse workforce, especially women. Porter (2015) consent that evidence from various sources argue that women generally come more easily to the critical leadership skills needed in this new, post-heroic model of leadership where communication, emotional intelligence, collaboration, negotiation, entrepreneurship, and coaching and mentoring are necessary. Organisations should organise and formalise mentoring relationships for women. Transformational leaders should take it upon themselves to dispel the myths that males make better leaders than women. Hence, more people still ascribe to the notion of a great leader whereas current literature defines leadership in terms of coaching and teaching as opposed to a highly authoritative person.

Strategies for Developing Aspirant Female Leaders

There are different strategies that can be put in place to develop aspirant female leaders, because “empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities” (UN-Women 2015). Therefore, the following strategies can be considered for empowering aspirant female leaders;

360-Degree Feedback and Coaching

Three- hundred -and -sixtydegree feedback can serve as an essential strategy to groom potential females for leadership positions. Carmichael, Collins, Emsell and Haydon (2011) state that 360 egree feedback is sometimes referred to as a multi-rater or multi-source feedback. It allows the potential female leaders to receive feedback on a range of leadership and managerial skills from different stakeholders. Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw and Oosthuizen (2007) maintain that feedback is essential tool of motivation irrespective of whether an employee performs well or not. It gives the employees an opportunity to improve on their strengths and to work hard on turning around their weaknesses.

Nel and Werner (2011) suggest that feedback can be received from all those around the employee in the organisation, such as her supervisors, subordinates peers and external customers. Thus, for a feedback to yield the desired results, it has to be followed by a good coaching session. Coaching sessions will clarify performance expectations and generate performance roadmap to a potential leader. It will also prepare the potential leader for future challenges.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a unique and powerful tool that can be employed to develop potential female leaders and it is being used in many organisations across the globe. It gives mentees an opportunity to search for role models that they can emulate and it also afford the mentors an opportunity to accelerate the growth path of mentees. However, in some organisations mentors and mentees are being paired without the one searching for the other; furthermore, mentoring can either be formal or informal. Abbott, Goosen and Coetzee (2010) agree that mentoring is more beneficial if it occurs within formal structures. Ofowe and Agbontaen-Eghafona (2011) describe mentoring as a system of passing knowledge from the more experienced mentor to the less experienced mentees, so that mentees can be supported and given direction of their growth path.

Mentoring gives a mentee an opportunity to sharpen her skills and competencies within an observed space, which in the process enhances the confidence of a mentee. It also increases the network pool of the mentee and assist a mentee to understand her role in the organization in line with the

earmarked position. Female leaders can thus adopt mentoring strategy to address gender parities in the organizations by preparing their mentees for bigger challenges, opportunities arise for promotions. Ofowe and Agbontaen-Eghafona (2011) contend that there are benefits for both the mentors and mentees in a mentoring relationship; they therefore presented the following benefits:

Benefits for Mentors

- Mentors are likely to get a fulfilling experience when their mentees succeed in their careers.
- Mentors are obliged to keep on improving in their work as they are being emulated
- Mentoring afford the mentors an opportunity of building trust relationships which can be beneficial to them as well.
- Mentors can also improve on their mentoring abilities when mentoring others.
- They also get to delegate some of their tasks to their mentees.

Benefits for Mentees

- Mentees will gain confidence in their work, knowing that they have the support system.
- They will work hard to achieve their aspirations because they will be ascertained that they are in a right direction
- They will also be more disciplined and focused because they have a role model to emulate
- They will not be afraid of making mistakes because there will be someone to help them correct their mistakes and also affirm them when they excel in their duties.
- They will in-turn mentor others in future by reflecting on how they were mentored.

Peer Learning and Networking

Peer learning is another way of inducting aspirant leaders into higher positions. Thus, organizations should encourage and where possible create space for peer learning and networking. If well implemented and structured peer learning can yield the desired results. Peer learning afford the participants an opportunity to guide their learning process, share expertise and build networking forums. During the sessions, participants can also share innovations and examples of best practices in problem solving or in any other area of their interest. Kanter (2015) provide a structure for building a successful peer learning and networking activities as stated below;

- The substance of the peer learning experience should be of immediate or future use in the participants' work.

- The participants need a substantial amount of common ground in relation to the topic—whether it is their size, issue area, location, or other factors, they have to share enough that their commonalities are easily visible to one another.
- The group needs to quickly build trust, so that participants are comfortable learning alongside one another and seek out their peers for direct input. For many groups, meeting in-person is key, particularly in the early stages.
- The participants' motivation is essential, so it works well for everyone involved.
- It should be clear to all involved that the learning process will be exploratory and emergent rather than tightly structured and directive.

Peer learning and networking are of interest in many organisations as they promote effectiveness and collaboration. Abrams (2015) is of the opinion that organizational networking systems have additional sources of information which can contribute to the development of reputation among their members.

Conclusion

Women empowerment is a phenomenon that will take time to achieve if the organisations are not committed to change. In South Africa like in many other countries, governments are engaged in developing legislation that is meant to propel the empowerment of women, but little has been achieved so far. Hence it is not surprising to discover that most countries, in fact none of the developing countries have managed to realise the Millennium Development Goals that related to women empowerment. The question that remains is; will governments achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 if drastic changes do not take place in relation to the way women are affirmed in the workplaces and in society.

To respond to such type of a question warrant that governments perceive women empowerment as an urgent matter. It is therefore imperative for governments, especially for South African government, to set an agenda for transformation in all the organisations, rather than to duplicate the legislation which is sparsely implemented. Organisations have developed a way of not fully implementing certain legislation because the law enforcement in South Africa lacks capacity to monitor a number of adherences to the law.

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