WOMEN IN BUSINESS









ARE FEMALE LEADERS ANY DIFFERENT FROM MALE LEADERS?





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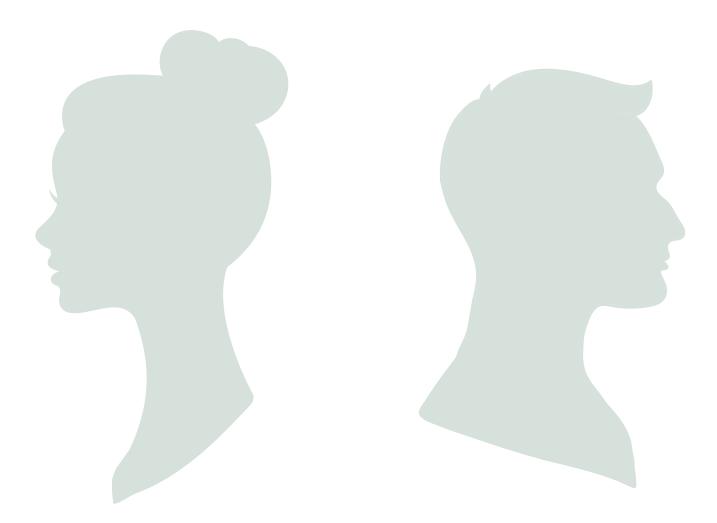
THE AUTHORS

Introduction

There is a growing interest in organisations to increase female representation at Board level, from both an equality/morality standpoint – providing equal opportunities for women to advance in organisations – as well as a business standpoint, with recent academic studies finding that organisations with gender-diverse boards perform better than other organisations¹. Despite a growing body of evidence showing the benefit of gender diversity at the senior level, women continue to be underrepresented in upper management. As of June 2018, only 29% of [FTSE 100] executive director positions are held by women². But why is this the case?

The metaphorical 'glass ceiling' still appears to be prevalent, with invisible yet very real barriers preventing women from reaching the upper echelons of management². Stereotypes that characterise differences in the personality as well as leadership qualities and capabilities of men and women also continue to dominate the workplace. Psychological studies consistently show gender biases in thinking around leadership, whether it is the 'think-manager, think-male' phenomenon (where typically 'masculine' characteristics are associated more with leadership³) to the newly noticed 'glass cliff' effect (when women are promoted to CEO positions of companies that are destined to fail⁴).

But are female leaders actually any different from male leaders? Often organisations will evaluate and select leaders based on whether someone fits a common assumption of what a leader should be like, whether it is their age, previous education or management style⁵. The problem is that men and women are evaluated against 'male-like' traits that are perceived to characterise a 'traditional leader'. As a result, women are prevented from reaching senior leadership positions because they are seen as not having the needed characteristics. But is this true? What does the evidence say compared to what is generally assumed?



¹ Noland, M., Moran, T., & Kotschwar, B. (2016). Is gender diversity profitable? Evidence from a global survey (Working Paper No. WP 16-3). Washington, D.C.: Peterson Institute for International Economics.

² Barreto, M., Ryan, M. K., Schmitt, M.T. (2009). The glass ceiling in the 21st century: Understanding barriers to gender equality. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

³ Braun, S., Stegmann, S., Hernandez Bark, A. S., Junker, N. M., & van Dick, R. (2017). Think manager—think male, think follower—think female: Gender bias in implicit followership theories. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 47(7), 377-388.

⁴ Ryan, M. K., Haslam, S. A., Morgenroth, T., Rink, F., Stoker, J., & Peters, K. (2016). Getting on top of the glass cliff: Reviewing a decade of evidence, explanations, and impact. The Leadership Quarterly, 27(3), 446-455. 446-455.

⁵ Junker; N. M., & van Dick, R. (2014). Implicit theories in organizational settings: A systematic review and research agenda of implicit leadership and followership theories. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(6), 1154-1173.

Background to the study

Thomas International wanted to apply psychological insight to find out what the evidence says about women in business and gender differences in senior leadership. The purpose was to use the results to help shape the narrative around diversity in the workplace and what organisations can do to improve equal opportunities for women.

To explore this further, there were three overarching research questions:

- → Does female and male leadership personality differ at the executive level?
- → Do female and male leaders have differing levels of emotional intelligence?
- → Are the behaviours associated with specific personality and emotional intelligence traits interpreted, recognised, and rewarded in the same way for women and men?

To test these research questions, Thomas International ran a study, incorporating two psychometric assessments which measure personality: the High Potential Trait Indicator and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire.



What is the High Potential Trait Indicator?

The High Potential Trait Indicator (HPTI) helps identify leadership potential by exploring a person's personality traits and provides an insight into how suited they may be for a given job role or position. The HPTI measures six traits that have all been shown to significantly correlate with success and performance in senior leadership roles. Table 1 shows definitions for the six traits, as well as what behaviours are associated with high and low scores.

Table I. High Potential Trait Indicator traits and interpreting the scores.

TRAIT	DESCRIPTION	HIGH SCORES	LOW SCORES
CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	Measuring self-discipline,	Self-motivated	'Go with the flow'
	workplace organisation	Disciplined	Impulsive
	and impulse control	Determined	Less likely to plan ahead
ADJUSTMENT	The emotional reaction to stress, pressures and relationships	Even-tempered Confident Less emotional	Passionate Concerned Preoccupied by stress or pressure
CURIOSITY	The approach to innovation,	Innovative	Traditional
	change and new information	Open-minded	Suspicious of change
	and methods	Easily-distracted	Conventional
RISK APPROACH	How an individual deals	Confronts challenges	Avoids confrontation
	with challenging, difficult	Decisive	Risk-averse
	or threatening situations	Assertive	Apprehensive
AMBIGUITY ACCEPTANCE	The reaction to complexity, contradictory information and where outcomes are unclear	Values diversity Resourceful Adaptable	Needs clear instructions Prefers structure Methodical
COMPETITIVENESS	An individual's relative desire	Ambitious	Complacent
	to win, need for power and	Goal-orientated	Accommodative
	reaction to winning/losing	Driven	Collaborative

The HPTI has been designed based on an 'optimality' model; this model assumes that a person's personality traits can be considered 'optimal' based on the requirements of a particular job role or position, such as senior executive leadership. The HPTI was developed by Ian MacRae, MSc, and Adrian Furnham, PhD, at University College London, (UCL), in conjunction with High Potential Psychology Ltd.

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What is the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire?

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TElQue) is a scientific personality instrument that offers an accurate and objective way of measuring our understanding of ourselves and of other people, and our ability to use this knowledge to achieve our goals. It comprises four broad categories: Well-Being, Self-Control, Emotionality and Sociability that help summarise people's scores on 15 different facets (shown in Table 2).

Table 2. Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire facets and descriptions.

FACET	DESCRIPTION		
HAPPINESS	This scale measures pleasant emotional states and is primarily directed towards the present rather than past (e.g. life satisfaction) or the future (Optimism).		
OPTIMISM	This scale measures how forward-looking a person is and if the person views the glass half-full or half-empty.		
SELF-ESTEEM	This scale measures your overall evaluation of yourself.		
EMOTION REGULATION	This scale measures short, medium, and long-term control of your own feelings and emotional states.		
IMPULSE CONTROL	This scale measures dysfunctional (unhealthy) rather than functional (healthy) impulsiveness.		
STRESS MANAGEMENT	This scale measures how people handle pressure and stress and how effective they are in doing so.		
EMPATHY	This scale measures the extent to which you see the world from someone else's point of view.		
EMOTION PERCEPTION	This scale measures emotion perception in yourself as well as in others.		
EMOTION EXPRESSION	This scale measures the extent to which people are fluent at communicating their emotions to others.		
RELATIONSHIPS	This scale measures your personal relationship with partners, close friends, family and/or colleagues. It also measures how effective you are at starting and maintaining emotional bonds with others.		
EMOTION MANAGEMENT	This scale measures your perceived ability to manage other people's emotional states.		
ASSERTIVENESS	This scale measures how forthright and frank an individual is.		
SOCIAL AWARENESS	This scale measures social skills, how you perceive and adapt in certain situations.		
ADAPTABILITY	This scale measures how effective you are at adapting to new environments and how you deal with change.		
SELF-MOTIVATION	This scale measures the extent to which a person is driven by a need to produce work.		

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) was developed, and is continually updated, by K.V. Petrides, PhD at his London Psychometric Laboratory (www.psychometriclab.com), currently based at University College London (UCL).

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Results of the study

The 'Women in Business' study came in two parts: the first looked at senior leadership, analysing whether female and male senior leaders differ in terms of the personality traits and levels of emotional intelligence they possess. The second part looked at the trends in data from Thomas International, to understand how personality and emotional intelligence supports the promotion of female and male employees to senior leadership.

Study 1: Senior Leadership

137 senior female leaders from the UK, Netherlands and Australia were assessed for the study. All were in some form of senior leadership position, ranging from Director to CEO/President of their organisation. The study also looked specifically for leaders in small-medium sized enterprises (100+ people) and larger. Once the data was collected, a randomised but demographically, hierarchically, and organisationally matched male senior leadership sample was generated from existing Thomas International data.

High Potential Personality

For the HPTI, two types of analysis were run:

- 1. Do female and male leaders have significantly different overall scores on the six traits?
- 2. Do female and male leaders differ in their likelihood of falling within the optimal banding for leadership for each of the traits.

The first part of the HPTI analysis revealed <u>no differences</u> between female and male leaders for **Conscientiousness**, **Risk Approach**, **Ambiguity Acceptance** and **Competitiveness**, but small differences were seen for **Adjustment** and **Curiosity**. Male leaders were seen to have slightly <u>higher</u> **Adjustment** scores than female leaders. Additionally, female leaders were seen to have <u>slightly higher</u> **Curiosity** scores than male leaders.

However, the second part of the HPTI analysis revealed that, despite these small differences, female and male leaders were statistically as likely to have optimal levels of all HPTI traits. Female and male leaders, therefore, were equally as likely to possess the personality traits associated with being a successful senior leader.

C Female and male leaders, therefore, were equally as likely to possess the personality traits associated with being a successful senior leader.



HIGH POTENTIAL PERSONALITY HPTI



FEMALE VS MALE SCORES

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Emotional Intelligence

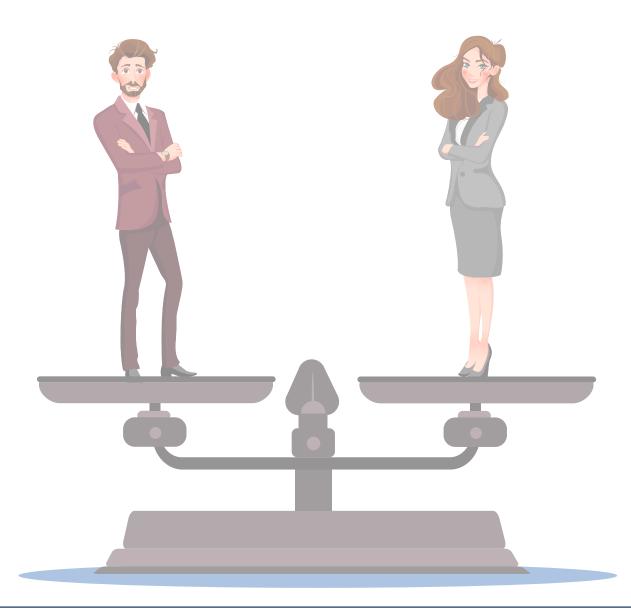
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For the TEIQue, the data was analysed to examine whether female and male leaders differed significantly in their levels of emotional intelligence. There were two key differences that emerged.

Firstly, female senior leaders were seen to have significantly <u>lower</u> levels of **Self-Control** traits, namely **Emotion Regulation, Impulse Control**, and **Stress Management**. Secondly, female leaders were seen to have significantly <u>higher</u> levels of **Emotion Management** and **Emotion Perception**.

In addition to the differences that were noticed, there were several traits that showed <u>no statistical difference</u> between female and male leaders, despite assumptions surrounding them. For instance, female and male leaders <u>did not differ</u> on *Empathy, Assertiveness* or *Self-Motivation*.

CC Nearly all emotional intelligence traits showed <u>no statistical difference</u> between female and male leaders. _{NN}



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TEIQUE



FEMALE VS MALE SCORES

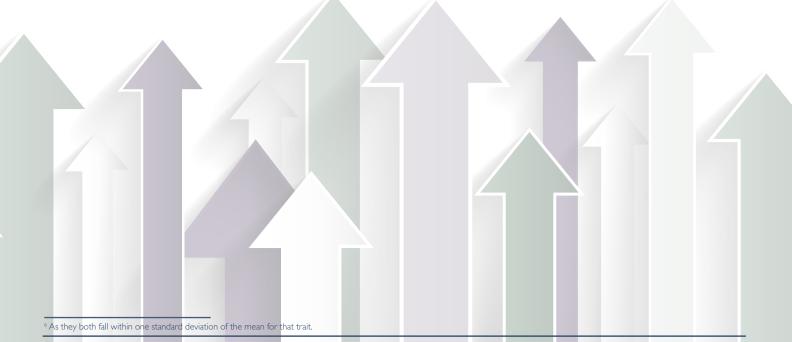
What do these results mean?

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Why are the HPTI and TEIQue results important? Firstly, these results provide evidence that debunk a lot of prevailing myths around female leadership and what leaders need to succeed. This study found that female leaders are no more, and need not have, higher levels of empathy than their male counterparts. Secondly, female senior leaders displayed similar levels of traits that are stereotypically viewed as 'masculine', namely **Risk Approach, Competitiveness** and **Assertiveness**. Thirdly, where female and male senior leaders were seen to differ on the HPTI, the results were small, and men and women were as likely to show optimal levels of leadership potential.

Finally, some differences were seen in terms of emotional intelligence between female and male senior leaders. Female leaders were more likely to be effective in both noticing changes in other peoples' emotions **[Emotion Perception]** as well as influencing other people **[Emotion Management]**. Additionally, female leaders make quicker decisions **[Impulse Control]** as well as appearing passionate but less composed under pressure **[Emotion Regulation]**. By contrast, male leaders were less likely to want to notice or get caught up in dealing with changes in people's emotions, but were more likely to be composed and calm under pressure, try to remain in control and plan for all eventualities. However, despite differences being noticed from a statistical standpoint, the magnitude of these do not appear to be enough to mean that differences would be noticed in behaviours. For instance, the biggest noted difference was in **Impulse Control** (male leaders having the 51st percentile on average; female leaders having the 33rd). Both of these percentiles would be considered similar to the majority⁶, so would not elicit any noticeable or meaningful differences in behaviour.

C These results provide evidence that debunk a lot of prevailing myths around female leadership and what leaders need to succeed.



Study 2: Predicting Senior Leadership & who needs what to succeed?

Anonymised data was analysed from Thomas International, where candidates had completed an optional research questionnaire providing information on demographics, industry, job role and seniority. The analysis looked at how high potential personality and emotional intelligence helped male and female employees reach a position of senior management.

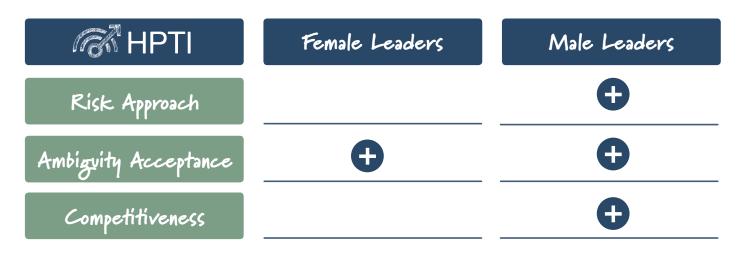
Table 3. Breakdown of female and male leaders analysed, per assessment for study 2.

Assessment	Female Leaders	Male Leaders	Total Employees
GR HPTI	188	558	2,335
	1,194	2,773	18,180

High Potential Personality

The analysis found that male employees were more likely to be a senior leader if they had higher levels of **Risk Approach, Ambiguity Acceptance** and **Competitiveness**. What this indicates is that men are more likely to be promoted to a position of senior leadership if they are more proactive in dealing with challenges head-on, are capable of dealing with conflicting information, and are more ambitious and achievement-orientated. However, only **Ambiguity Acceptance** was shown to be advantageous for female employees.

Table 4. How HPTI traits helps male and female employees get promoted.



What does this mean?

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When we look at the results of the second study (exploring which traits predicted leadership) with the first (exploring differences in male and female senior leader personality), there is clear evidence that shows women are disadvantaged when it comes to being promoted to senior leadership as organisations are not evaluating female leadership candidates to the same standards as their male counterparts.

What the evidence suggests is that, despite men and women having similar levels of personality traits and emotional intelligence, the way that their associated behaviours are interpreted are different.

Looking at high potential personality, female and male leaders had similar levels of **Risk Approach** and **Competitiveness**, yet having these traits was only beneficial to male leadership candidates. It indicates that men who display these traits are seen as more competent or displaying what is needed to be a leader, whereas women who have these traits do not receive the same positive evaluation. A consistent example of this bias is that male leaders who score lower on **Adjustment** are seen as 'passionate' or 'really caring about their work', whereas female leaders with similar personalities are seen as 'overly emotional' or 'not able to maintain composure'.

C There is clear evidence that shows women are disadvantaged when it comes to being promoted to senior leadership. IN

Emotional Intelligence

The analysis found that both male and female employees were more likely to be a senior leader if they are able to influence others *[Emotion Management]*, can take charge and be direct in certain social situations *[Assertiveness]*, but are passionate and make quick decisions *[Impulse Control]*.

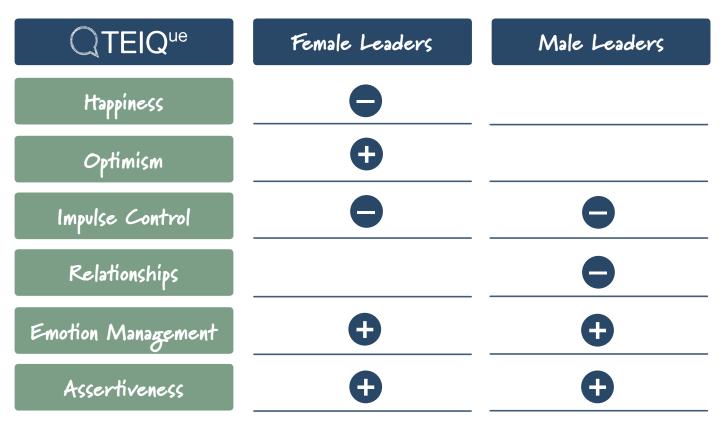
There were differences for how certain traits influenced leadership emergence. For instance, male employees were more likely to be in a senior leadership position if they had a pragmatic approach to relationships at work rather than trying to be everyone's friend **[lower Relationships]**. By contrast, female employees were more likely to be in a senior leadership position if they were more serious than 'happy-go-lucky' **[lower Happiness]** but tending to view upcoming challenges as positive opportunities **[higher Optimism]**.

What does this mean?

Additionally, looking at emotional intelligence, women are expected to be more serious at work if they are to be seen as 'leadership material'. It appears that women who have higher levels of *Happiness* are seen as not serious enough and too flighty to 'have what it takes'. Moreover, women who are more optimistic and tend to view upcoming challenges as positive opportunities are more likely to be in a position of senior leadership. It suggests that women are penalised if they are seen to focus on the potential negatives of future projects, being seen as overly pessimistic.

Whilst these same standards are not applied to men, it also appears that men are expected to have a highly pragmatic view to workplace relationships and benefit from having a close group of key relationships that they rely on. By contrast, the evidence suggests that men who appear too focused on being a friend to others are not viewed as independent enough to become a leader:

Table 5. How Emotional Intelligence helps male and female employees get promoted.



What explains the results from study 1 & 2?

Interestingly, by combining the results from the two studies, it would suggest that there should be more female leaders than there currently are. The other traits that are associated with being a senior leader – <u>higher</u> **Assertiveness**, **Emotion Management**, **Ambiguity Acceptance** and <u>lower</u> **Impulse Control** – female leaders either score the same or have trait levels that are more closely aligned with what is needed to be promoted. By contrast, men are two and half times more likely to be a senior leader purely based on their age and education.

The predominant reason why underrepresented groups are overlooked for workplace opportunities is because of unconscious biases. These are the views and thoughts that people hold about others, and which affect daily decision making and behaviour. Unconscious biases are influenced by background and personal experience and, according to research, everyone is biased – even though most people don't believe they are.

Research has shown that gender role congruency biases – that is, judging men and women based on how society expects or thinks that they should act based on their gender – means that women can be biased against other women when considering them for positions of senior leadership. Other subconscious mental processes that people have create shortcuts that can override natural ingroup-outgroup biases. If females grow up in a society that is predominantly male dominated, then those females will learn to associate leadership with being male – also known as the 'think-manager, think-male' phenomenon. For instance, both male and female employees are bias in thinking that leaders should tend to be defined by more 'masculine' characteristics⁷.

The reason we hold these biases is evolutionary; by putting people in categories we can simplify the world around us. We categorise people that we perceive as being 'like us' in 'ingroups', and those who we perceive as being 'different' to us in 'outgroups'. Subconsciously, people feel more comfortable in their ingroups, and therefore are naturally motivated to maintain the status quo and help the 'ingroup' maintain its position of power⁸.

In organisations, the majority ingroup has typically been white males, and women have struggled to get a foothold in senior leadership teams – referred to earlier as the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon. This explains a large amount of why opportunities are provided to members of the male ingroup they feel more comfortable with, for example, labelling a female who is equally suitable for a senior role as 'overly emotional' but labelling a man as 'passionate'. Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that the lack of female representation at the senior level creates a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'⁹, where underrepresentation can negatively influence the ambitions of junior women at work¹⁰.

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Men are two and half times more likely to be a senior leader purely based on their age and education.

⁷ Ryan, M. K., Haslam, S. A., Hersby, M. D., & Bongiorno, R. (2011). Think crisis–think female: The glass cliff and contextual variation in the think manager–think male stereotype. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96(3), 470 – 519.

⁸ Hogg, M.A. (2001). A social identity theory of leadership. Personality and social psychology review, 5(3), 184-200.

Oakley, J. G. (2000). Gender-based barriers to senior management positions: Understanding the scarcity of female CEOs. Journal of business ethics, 27(4), 321-334.
 Jones, T. M., Fanson, K.V., Lanfear, R., Symonds, M. R., & Higgie, M. (2014). Gender differences in conference presentations: a consequence of self-selection?. Peerl, 2, e627.

What contributes more: what you are or who you are?

The most significant result was not about what types of personality predicted senior leadership but was **to what extent does** *personality contribute to helping men and women reach senior leadership.*

Overall, our analysis showed that we could explain **more than a third (35%)** of why men and women were promoted to a senior leadership position just by their demographics and personality. What these results highlight is the importance of personality in predicting who has the potential to become a senior leader. This was regardless of previous job experience, tenure or any job-related metric.

However, these factors were not equal for men and women. We found that **25% of men were promoted to a senior leader position because of their age and highest level of education**. Their personality and emotional intelligence only explained 10% of why they were selected. The opposite was seen for female employees; only 10% of why they were promoted to senior leadership was due to age and education, whereas 25% of the reason was due to their personality and emotional intelligence.

What these results indicate is a difference in the standards and characteristics for how male and female employees are judged when it comes to picking senior leaders. The results indicate that the traditional privileges that are afforded to men are not available to women. Women are not benefited for the simple notion of having a good education or being older, but men are rewarded for their status, experience, education and age. However, personality plays a far bigger role in explaining which women are promoted. Women appear to be scrutinised more as to whether they exhibit specific personality traits, benefiting women who can navigate through complex information and who are serious, optimistic, quick in decision-making, inspiring and assertive. By contrast, it appears that men are selected more based on, not on who they are, but the legacy they have accrued (namely their age and education).

CC The results indicate that the traditional privileges that are afforded to men are not available to women.

What are the actions and implications for organisations?

For organisations, this study highlights the need to improve gender diversity in the workplace, particularly at the senior level, and how they identify and select the leaders.

The results indicate that the standards and characteristics for how male and female employees are judged is different. This means it is vital that decision-makers gain a clear understanding of the criteria that candidates should be evaluated against and on which a decision should be based. Identifying these criteria prior to candidates applying is also beneficial, so there is no potential for hiring managers to be influenced by unconscious bias and to choose criteria that the candidates from their 'ingroup' perform better against. The results also indicate that these factors can count differently for men and women, so if an educational qualification is not identified as a key predictor of success for the role, men shouldn't have the upper hand in meeting the criteria if they happen to have a better background.

Once the criteria are determined, candidates should be evaluated against these using methods that are free of potential unconscious bias. **The study confirms the efficacy of psychometric assessments as objective predictors of success, including roles at senior leadership level**. Men and women are as likely to have the personality and emotional intelligence associated with leadership potential, though bias means that these associated behaviours are interpreted differently. Using psychometric assessments removes the need for interviewers to subjectively evaluate behaviours, and instead provides objective information that indicates a candidate's suitability. Additionally, psychometrics give the ability to make objective, fair and unbiased recruitment and promotion decisions.

Organisations can also take several other steps to promote workplace diversity, for example, by ensuring there is diverse representation on interview panels. Organisations that have made it mandatory for interview panels to have females or representation from ethnic minorities have increased the odds for minority groups to progress through the interview process. A further example of initiatives that employers can put in place to promote gender diversity is to ensure that shortlists contain at least one woman.



Using psychometrics to identify talent can also help encourage more female employees to apply for promotions and ask for pay rises. It appears that high potential female employees are less likely to ask for pay rises or apply for promotions within their organisation because, as these results show, there is an inherent bias in how certain behaviours expressed by female employees are interpreted and rewarded. As a result, they feel less inclined to apply, despite being as capable and displaying very similar personality and emotional intelligence profiles to their male counterparts. Additionally, when these findings have been investigated, male employees were seen to apply for a role when they had 80% of the required skills, whereas women decide not to apply because they believe that they were missing 20% of what was required¹¹¹². By basing talent decisions on unbiased psychometrics, more high potential female employees will feel they will be interpreted and evaluated fairly.

¹¹ Mohr, T. S. (2014). Why women don't apply for jobs unless they're 100% qualified. Harvard Business Review, 25.

¹² Clegg, A. (2017). Unconscious bias hinders diversity recruitment. Financial Times, retrieved Sept. 11 2018: https://www.ft.com/content/b6065b00-d340-11e6-b06b-680c49b4b4c0

Conclusion

Women are still largely underrepresented at senior level, with only 29% of senior positions in the UK being held by women. These numbers are lower elsewhere in the world, with only 20% of Dutch companies having female representation at senior level, and just 11 of the top 200 companies in Australia having female CEOs. There appear to be pervasive unconscious biases against women that are holding them back from succeeding. However, the results of this study provide clear evidence that male and female senior leaders are no different, with near identical levels of the personality and emotional traits that predict success as men, but the way that these traits are interpreted, recognised and rewarded shows that when female employees display similar behaviours to men, they are perceived negatively due to conscious and unconscious biases held by others. Organisations that want to build greater diversity, both in terms of their talent pipeline and senior leaders, should build psychometrics into their evaluation and recruitment process to reduce any unconscious bias.

Our study revealed answers to several key questions around gender diversity in leadership:

ARE FEMALE AND MALE LEADERS DIFFERENT? - NO.

→ There were no meaningful differences found between women and men on personality and on emotional intelligence. Women were as likely as men to display optimal levels of personality linked to leadership success.

DO FEMALE LEADERS NEED TO BE EMPATHETIC TO BE SUCCESSFUL? - NO.

-> Our evidence showed no differences in empathy between female and male senior leaders. Despite stereotypes that female leaders need to adopt more caring, compassionate or emotional approaches to leadership, these stereotypes do not match reality.

DO MALE LEADERS NEED TO BE ASSERTIVE AND ALOOF? - NO.

→ There is no evidence to support the stereotype that male leaders need to be aloof, ruthless, and 'cold'. Female and male senior leaders were found to be as empathetic, competitive, assertive and valuing of relationships as each other.

ARE BEHAVIOURS RECOGNISED AND REWARDED EQUALLY? - NO.

-> There is evidence to suggest that some traits are seen as good if a man expresses them, but they are perceived as a hinderance if a woman expresses them. Additionally, 25% of why men are promoted to senior leadership positions is explained by their age and education. For female leaders, personality and emotional intelligence explains the same amount, showing the different standards for how male and female employees are judged.

CAN PSYCHOMETRICS PROVIDE A NON-BIASED INSIGHT TO IDENTIFYING LEADERSHIP? - YES.

-> The evidence shows that men and women are as likely to have the personality and emotional intelligence associated with leadership potential. Using psychometrics provides an objective, grounded method for evaluating a candidate that is free of potential bias.

¹⁴ https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/asx-200-has-just-11-female-ceos-and-41-have-no-executive-women-leaders-20170906-gyc2om.html

* Notes

Contact us to find out more about how we can support your organisation with diversity and inclusivity across recruitment, development and leadership.





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