

Diversity is an important and ubiquitous aspect of life within modern organizations. Management Research Group® has been studying gender and leadership within organizations globally for more than 15 years. Some of the more important findings for North America are described below.

GENDER AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

In a large scale study, a diverse sample of male and female managers (n = 1,800) matched for organization, management level, job function, and management experience were compared on 22 common leadership behaviors. Outcome measures were assessed using a 360-degree strategy in which each manager was evaluated by self, boss, peers, and direct reports. This strategy resulted in the completion of 17,491 assessment questionnaires. Numerous gender differences were described by both the individuals and their observers. The results are summarized in Table 1.

In general, women tended to be rated higher on leadership scales measuring a strong orientation toward achieving results, getting the work done, being transparent and clear, and building supportive relationships with others.

In contrast, men tended to score higher on scales assessing an orientation towards thinking, strategic planning, persuading, delegating and being more reserved in expression.

GENDER AND PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCY

In addition to studying behavior, we can study the perceptions observers have of a leader's competency area. In a recently completed study, a large matched sample of male and female managers were rated by their bosses on a wide range of organizational competencies. Male and female leaders were selected to represent a wide range of management levels, industries, and functional areas and were matched on management level, job function, and age. In total, 2,718 male and 2,718 female managers were included in the study. Of 22 competency areas studied, women were rated higher on 12, men were rated higher on 3, and no differences were found on 7 (see Table 2).

Key:

- males > females
- ✦ females > males

Leadership Practice	Rater Group			
	Self	Boss	Peers	Direct Reports
Creating a Vision				
Conservative	■	■	■	■
Innovative	■	■	■	■
Technical		■		
Self			■	
Strategic	■	■	■	■
Developing Followership				
Persuasive	■		■	■
Outgoing				■
Excitement	✦	✦	✦	✦
Restraint	■	■	■	■
Implementing the Vision				
Structuring	✦		✦	
Tactical		■	■	
Communication	✦	✦	✦	✦
Delegation		■	■	■
Following Through				
Control	✦	✦	✦	✦
Feedback	✦	✦	✦	✦
Achieving Results				
Management Focus			✦	✦
Dominant	✦	✦	✦	✦
Production	✦	✦	✦	✦
Team Playing				
Cooperation		■	■	■
Consensual				
Authority				
Empathy	✦	✦	✦	✦

Table 1. Gender Differences in Leadership Behavior

Table 2. Boss competency ratings for men and women

Women Rated Higher	Men Rated Higher	No Difference
Credibility with management Future potential Learn quickly Effective decisions Open communicator Turn around Insight Sensitivity Get people involved Develop people Work with diverse people Accomplish tasks through people	Business aptitude Financial understanding Big picture perspective	Effective thinking Credibility with peers and direct reports Effectively use resources Willingness to listen Customer relations Team performance Overall effectiveness

Although women scored higher than men on 12 out of 22 competencies, the three competencies where they scored lower - business aptitude, financial understanding, and strategic thinking - are often seen as critical for advancement.

APPLYING THE RESEARCH INSIGHTS:

Gender differences in leadership highlight the value the both men and women bring to the leadership role. The results suggest that focusing on the development and enhancement of specific leadership practices may be beneficial.

For women leaders, consider focusing time and effort on strategic and innovative thinking, being persuasive, delegating and the selective use of restraint. This is likely to have a positive impact on such leadership competencies as *Business Aptitude, Financial Understanding, Ability to see the Big Picture, Effective Thinking and Decision Making, Ability to Turn Around Difficult Situations, Effective Utilization of Organizational Resources, and Credibility/Inspires Confidence with More Senior Colleagues.*

For male leaders, consider focusing developmental efforts on enhancing communication, becoming more transparent, more disciplined in execution, building more effective relationships with others and investing more energy in leading others. This can have a positive impact on such leadership competencies as *Capacity to Get People Enthused and Involved, Credibility/Inspires confidence with Peers and Direct Reports, Ability to Build Relationships with Customers, Ability to Develop People, and Insight into People.*

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