

MRG® RESEARCH REPORT

Leadership and Gender

The Way Women Lead, the Way Men Lead, and How They are Different But Equally Effective

The results of one of the largest controlled studies of gender differences and leadership ever conducted

By Robert Kabacoff and Helen Peters

For the last twenty years, there has been a lively debate on the differences and similarities of leadership style between men and women. Much of information in the business press is anecdotal in nature, and many of the more scientific studies suffer from methodological limitations. This study included 900 male and 900 female managers matched on organization, management level, job function, and management experience. All 1,800 managers were measured on leadership behavior and leadership effectiveness on a 360-degree basis (by bosses, peers, and direct reports).

MEN AND WOMEN APPROACH THE LEADERSHIP ROLE IN DIFFERENT WAYS:

Although there are a great many similarities in the way men and women lead, there are also distinct differences as reported by all observer groups in this study. The key differences in behavior between men and women revolve around two major dimensions of the leadership role:

- **Task vs. Strategy:** Women are more oriented toward setting high standards of performance, organizing work, and pushing for results. Men score higher on scales measuring strategic planning, openness to new ideas, and risk taking.
- **Expressiveness vs. Restraint:** Women are seen as operating with more energy, intensity, and enthusiasm, and they create



enthusiasm in others. Men are more low-key and less apt to express emotions. They are more effective in selling ideas and building commitment, appearing to be more thoughtful and objective.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS:

The 1,800 managers were measured on three aspects of effectiveness:

- **Overall Effectiveness:** bosses saw men and women as equally effective on this dimension. Peers and direct reports saw women as slightly more effective.
- **Business Skills:** bosses and peers view men as being more effective in the business realm. Direct reports rated men and women equally effective.
- **People Skills:** bosses, peers, and direct reports all rated women higher on this measure of effectiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no one right way to lead, and leadership effectiveness can be attained in a number of ways. All leaders have development needs, and require support and coaching to be their best.

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