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# GENDER AND LEADERSHIP IN THE CORPORATE BOARDROOM

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A diverse sample of male and female CEOs and Senior Vice Presidents (n=172) were compared on 22 leadership behaviors and leadership effectiveness using a 360-degree strategy. Gender differences in leadership behaviors were obtained from self, boss, peer, and direct report rater groups. Correlations between leadership behaviors and leadership effectiveness were found to vary by the gender of the executive being evaluated when bosses provided ratings. However, differential correlations were not found for ratings provided by direct reports. Findings are compared to results from previous studies of gender and organizational behavior. Study limitations and implications for individual and organizational development and performance appraisal are discussed.

In recent years, there has been extensive interest in the study of gender and leadership behavior. Eagly & Johnson (1990) reviewed 171 studies in a meta analysis of gender differences in leadership style, while Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani (1995) reviewed 86 studies of gender and leadership effectiveness. Since these reviews, interest in gender differences in both leadership behavior and effectiveness has remained high (e.g., Brewer, Socha, & Potter, 1996; Berdahl, 1996; Forsyth, Heiney, & Wright, 1997; Kabacoff, 1998a; Kolb, 1997; Lauterbach & Weiner, 1996; Maher, 1997; Payne & Cangemi, 1997; Moss & Kent, 1996; Pratch, 1996; Sakata, 1996).

Despite the large number of gender and leadership studies, most have suffered from methodological limitations that seriously impair their usefulness or generalizability. These limitations have included the use of small sample sizes, narrow definitions of leadership, reliance on self-report data or naïve observers, and use of subjects who are not in current leadership roles (e.g., laboratory and analog studies). In addition, many organizational studies focus on academic rather than business organizations.

In an attempt to address many of these limitations, Kabacoff (1998) conducted a large sample study of 900 male and 900 female managers matched for organization, management level, job function, and management experience. Using 360-degree data (N=17,491 completed assessments), extensive differences were obtained. These differences were stable across observer groups (self, boss, peer, direct report) and had significant implications for development.

Few empirical studies have examined the most senior levels of private industry and/or the relationship between a broad range of leadership behaviors and various measures of effectiveness. The current investigation was designed to extend previous studies by investigating possible gender differences in leadership behavior at the highest levels within organizations (i.e., Senior Vice President and CEO). Three primary questions were addressed. First, do male and female senior executives differ in their perceived leadership behaviors? Second, do male and female senior executives differ in their perceived effectiveness? Finally, is the relationship between perceptions of leadership behaviors and effectiveness the same for both men and women?

## Method

### Participants

Participants consisted of 13 male and 13 female CEOs and 73 male and 73 female Senior Vice Presidents completing 360-degree evaluations as part of leadership development programs in 88 North American companies. Male and female senior executives were matched on type of industry, years of management experience, and organizational level. Demographic characteristics for matching variables are

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presented in *Table 1*. The mean age for participants was 44.9 years ( $sd=6.8$ ), 94% were Caucasian, and 93.6% had attended 4 or more years of college.

A total of 215 boss evaluations, 622 peer evaluations, and 784 direct report evaluations were obtained on these 127 senior executives. This provided a median of 1 boss, 4 peer, and 4 direct report evaluations for each senior executive. The percentage of male observers was 81%, 67%, and 46% for bosses, peers, and direct reports respectively. The mean years of acquaintance was 6.0 for bosses, 4.8 for peers, and 4.3 for direct reports.

## **Instruments**

### **Leadership Behaviors**

Each senior executive completed the self version of the *Leadership Effectiveness Analysis* (LEA; Management Research Group, 1992), while bosses, peers, and direct reports completed the observer version. The LEA is a descriptive, behaviorally oriented instrument, providing scores on 22 dimensions of leadership behavior. The instrument has demonstrated high reliabilities, low inter-scale correlations, and excellent construct and criterion-rated validity in extensive large sample studies (Kabacoff, 1998). Brief descriptions of the 22 leadership dimensions assessed by the LEA are provided in *Appendix A*.

### **Leadership Effectiveness**

The observer version of the LEA also contains 20 graphically anchored rating scales assessing various aspects of leadership effectiveness. Brief descriptions of these scales and their content are provided in *Appendix B*. The 20 scales are summed to provide a measure of overall leadership effectiveness. The internal reliability of this measure (coefficient alpha) was 0.93 in the current investigation.

## **Design and Procedure**

Data were obtained by sampling from an extensive archive of 360-degree leadership evaluations maintained by an international human resource development firm. Evaluations were completed in the course of ongoing organizational development projects. A subject pair was selected if a match between a male and female senior executive (CEO or Senior Vice President) on type of industry, years of management experience, and management level could be found, and if complete 360-degree evaluations were available for both members of the pair. This process yielded 172 such male-female pairs and a total of 1,748 completed questionnaires (127 self and 1,621 observer evaluations). Peers and direct reports completed evaluations anonymously. Raw scale scores were used in all analyses.

Male and female executives were compared on the 23 leadership behaviors using four separate MANOVAs (boss, peer, direct report, self). Possible differential correlations were examined via moderated multivariate multiple regression analyses with gender of the person being rated as the moderator variable, effectiveness measures as dependent variables and leadership behaviors as predictor variables. Male and female executives were compared on boss, peer, and direct report ratings of overall effectiveness via one way ANOVAs. Stringent significance levels were adopted to limit alpha inflation.

## **Results**

### **Leadership Practices**

Gender differences in LEA self ratings were examined via a oneway MANOVA with the 22 leadership variables employed as dependent variables and gender as the independent variable. A significant MANOVA was followed by separate oneway ANOVAs for each dependent variable. The process was repeated for boss, peer, and direct report data. For observer data, mean ratings for each scale were employed as the dependent variables with boss, peer, and direct report data analyzed separately. The MANOVA/ANOVA strategy was adopted to reduce the alpha inflation expected from multiple significance tests (Stevens, 1976). In addition, an effect size (standardized mean difference) for each gender comparison

is provided. Effect sizes are important in judging the practical significance of results (Hedges & Olkin, 1985). Test statistics for significant differences are provided in *Table 2*.

#### *Self Ratings*

The MANOVA for self ratings was significant (Wilk's  $\Lambda=0.78$ ,  $F(22,149)=1.87$ ,  $p < 0.016$ ). Senior executive women rated themselves lower on Restraint, compared with senior executive men.

#### *Boss Ratings*

The MANOVA for boss ratings was significant (Wilk's  $\Lambda=0.73$ ,  $F(22,149)=2.57$ ,  $p < 0.0004$ ) and ANOVAs were significant for 5 leadership practices. Bosses rated female senior executives higher on Feedback, Dominant, and Control, and lower on Conservative and Restraint than male senior executives.

#### *Peer Ratings*

An analysis of peer ratings produced a significant MANOVA (Wilk's  $\Lambda=0.73$ ,  $F(22,140)=2.34$ ,  $p < 0.002$ ). Significant gender differences were found for 2 leadership practices. Peers rated female senior executives higher on Control and lower on Restraint than male senior executives.

#### *Direct Report Ratings*

Finally, the MANOVA for direct report ratings was significant (Wilk's  $\Lambda=0.70$ ,  $F(22,149)=2.13$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). Significant gender differences were obtained for 4 leadership practices. Direct reports rated female senior executives higher on Excitement and Production and lower on Conservative and Restraint than male senior executives.

### **Leadership Effectiveness**

Gender differences in observer ratings of leadership effectiveness were examined via three one way ANOVAs (one for each observer group). A significance level of 0.01 was adopted to control for alpha inflation. No significant mean differences on leadership effectiveness ratings were obtained for any of the three observer groups (boss, peers, direct reports). Results are presented in *Table 3*.

### **Relationships Between Leadership Behaviors and Leadership Effectiveness**

Differential correlations were examined via moderated multivariate multiple regression analyses with gender of the person being rated as the moderator variable, leadership behaviors as the predictor variables and leadership effectiveness as the predicted variable. As can be seen in *Table 4*, correlations between perceived leadership behaviors and effectiveness did not vary by gender rated when evaluations were completed by direct reports. However, one differential relationship was obtained from ratings completed by peers, and five differential relationships were obtained from ratings completed by bosses.

### **Discussion**

Several differences in leadership behaviors/styles were observed between male and female senior executives. All four rater groups (self, boss, peer, and direct reports) described male senior executives as more restrained in emotional expression. Direct reports described female senior executives as operating with a greater degree of energy, intensity and emotional expression, and having a greater capacity to keep others enthusiastic and involved. Both bosses and peers described female senior executives as more likely to set deadlines and monitor progress to ensure the completion of activities. In addition bosses describe female senior executives as more assertive and competitive in their approach to achieving goals, and more inclined to let others know directly what they think of them and how well they are meeting expectations. Bosses and direct reports described male senior executives as more traditional in their approach to prob-

lems, emphasizing the minimization of risk and learning from past experience. Finally, direct reports described female senior executives as setting higher expectations for performance for both themselves and others.

Given the correlational nature of the current investigation, explanations for these gender differences are speculative. Differences in emotional restraint and expression may represent differences in socialization and/or differences in role expectations and appear to follow gender stereotypic lines. Differences in feedback style may reflect a greater interpersonal orientation on the part of senior female executives. Other gender differences may reflect a situation in which female senior executives need to excel to a greater degree to be successful in this venue.

The gender differences in leadership behaviors found in the current investigation were both smaller and fewer than those found in our previous large scale study of gender differences in leadership completed with a general population of leaders/managers (Kabacoff, 1998b). It may be that as one moves up the corporate ladder, the role requirements of senior positions limit the range of demonstrated behaviors. Additionally, it is likely that a selection process occurs that identifies individuals as candidates for senior positions that demonstrate a more specific and homogeneous repertoire of required behaviors.

The correlations between leadership behaviors and leadership effectiveness did not vary by the gender of the executive being rated when evaluations were provided by direct reports. However, peers perceived a stronger relationship between collecting and valuing the ideas and opinions of others and leadership effectiveness when the executive described was female rather than male. In addition, several notable differential correlations were obtained from ratings provided by bosses. Specifically, focusing on short-range, hands-on, practical strategies, and employing a forceful, assertive and competitive approach to achieving results were seen as positively related to leadership effectiveness for male senior executives, and disadvantageous for female senior executives. On the other hand, accommodating to the needs of others and demonstrating an active concern for other people was seen as positively related to leadership effectiveness for female senior executives, and disadvantageous for male senior executives. Finally, there was a strong positive relationship between seeking to exert influence by seeking out positions of authority and leadership effectiveness for male senior effectiveness and *no* such relationship for female senior executives.

Taken together, these findings suggest that male and female senior executives are seen as differing in some leadership behaviors and that, at least from the boss' perspective, different behaviors are differentially important for leadership effectiveness, depending on the gender of the leader. An examination of these differential correlations suggest a pronounced sex-role stereotyping along traditional lines on the part of these bosses.

Despite differences in rated behaviors and differential correlations between behaviors and effectiveness, no differences in perceived leadership *effectiveness* were obtained when comparing male and female senior executives through boss, peer, or direct report ratings. These findings are even more pronounced than those obtained in the Kabacoff (1998b) study and suggest that male and female senior executives are viewed as equally effective in their roles by others within the organization.

The gender differences described in this article suggest potential developmental opportunities for both individuals and organizations. Numerous authors (e.g., Chaffins, Forbes, Fugua, & Cangemi, 1995; Marlow, Marlow, & Aline, 1996; Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987; Peters, 1995) have described significant impediments for the organizational success and advancement of women. Current findings highlight the need for an open exploration of gender stereotyping at the most senior (board of directors, CEO) levels within organizations. They also reinforce the notion of multiple constituencies and the need for senior executives to understand the differing expectations that their boss, peers and direct reports bring to interactions.

## Final Comments

The current investigation had several strengths. The sample of individuals consisted of actual role incumbents engaged in leadership activities in a wide array of organizational settings. Data was gathered representing a number of perspectives (self, bosses, peers, and direct reports) and includes a constituency (peers) that is rarely studied. The specificity of variables measured by the LEA allows us to investigate differences in greater depth. Finally, the study design, which controls for organizational level, industry type and management experience, allows for more precise gender comparisons. It also had limitations. Data represents the perceptions of leadership practices, rather than structured behavioral observations. In addition, the gender of the rater was not explicitly addressed. Finally, a global measure of leadership

effectiveness was employed. The measurement of specific competencies may provide richer findings in future investigations.

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**Table 1.**  
**Variables Used to Match Male and Female Senior Executives**

<b>Demographic Variable</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Management Level</b>				
President/CEO	13	15.1	13	15.1
Senior or Exec Vice President	73	84.9	73	84.9
<b>Industry</b>				
Accounting/Banking/Finance	26	30.2	26	30.2
Business/Info Systems	1	1.2	1	1.2
Communications/Telecom	1	1.2	1	1.2
Consulting	7	8.1	7	8.1
Education	4	4.7	4	4.7
General Manufacturing	2	2.3	2	2.3
Health Care/Medical	23	26.7	23	26.7
Hospitality/Travel/Tourism	3	3.5	3	3.5
Insurance	3	3.5	3	3.5
Mining/Oil/Gas/Chemicals	1	1.2	1	1.2
Printing/Publishing/Advertising	1	1.2	1	1.2
Real Estate/Land Development	1	1.2	1	1.2
Social Services	2	3.5	2	3.5
Wholesale/Retail Trade	2	2.3	2	2.3
Other	8	9.3	8	9.3
<b>Years of Managerial Experience</b>				
< 5 Years	1	1.2	1	1.2
5 - 10 Years	28	32.6	28	32.6
11 - 15 Years	23	26.7	23	26.7
16+ Years	34	39.5	34	39.5

**Table 2.**  
**Gender Differences in Leadership Practices**

Observer Group	Dimension	Gender Rated				F	p <sup>†</sup>	Effect Size
		Female (n=86)		Male (n=86)				
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Self	Restraint	18.3	10.9	24.0	9.9	11.97	***	-0.55
Boss	Feedback	24.3	7.9	19.1	7.0	20.98	***	0.70
	Dominant	24.0	9.3	19.9	9.0	8.41	**	0.45
	Control	27.2	7.9	24.3	7.0	6.76	*	0.39
	Conservative	20.1	7.0	23.6	7.2	10.50	**	-0.49
	Restraint	20.1	9.0	23.6	9.5	6.20	*	-0.38
Peers	Control	25.2	5.1	22.4	5.8	10.05	**	0.51
	Restraint	17.1	8.8	21.3	8.6	9.30	**	-0.48
Direct Reports	Excitement	20.4	7.6	16.9	7.7	8.94	**	0.46
	Production	24.9	6.2	21.6	6.3	11.22	***	0.53
	Conservative	21.0	5.1	23.1	4.7	8.07	**	-0.43
	Restraint	18.7	7.7	23.2	8.2	13.62	***	-0.57

† Significance of mean difference: \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001  
Note: only statistically significant results are reported in this table.

**Table 3.**  
**Gender Differences in Leadership Effectiveness**

Observer Group	Gender Rated				F	p <sup>†</sup>	Effect Size
	Female (n=86)		Male (n=86)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Boss	101.6	13.3	102.4	13.1	.14	ns	-.06
Peers	101.7	11.9	101.7	11.3	0	ns	.00
Direct Reports	102.2	11.2	100.8	10.8	.76	ns	.13

† Non-significant. p < .05

**Table 4.**  
**Correlations Between Leadership Behaviors and Effectiveness**

Observer Group	Boss		Peers		Direct Reports	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Leadership Behaviors</b>						
<b>Creating a Vision</b>						
Conservative	-.10	-.01	-.15	.04	.16	.07
Innovative	.30	.19	.24	-.05	.26	.20
Technical	.36	.09	.25	.24	.41	.34
Self	.04	-.06	-.27	-.13	-.17	-.19
Strategic	.40	.36	.37	.44	.46	.45
<b>Developing Followership</b>						
Persuasive	.33	.42	.36	.14	.25	.15
Outgoing	-.18	.17	-.03	-.01	-.12	-.06
Excitement	.35	.27	.26	.13	.11	.19
Restraint	-.06	.09	-.13	.16	.13	.09
<b>Implementing the Vision</b>						
Structuring	-.35	-.34	-.19	.00	-.27	-.19
Tactical	-.29	-.17	.11	-.11	-.04	.03
Communication	-.02	-.01	.24	.28	.11	.33
Delegation	.13	.07	-.04	.03	.13	.26
<b>Following Through</b>						
Control	.19	-.16	.20	.05	-.06	.07
Feedback	.08	-.18	.09	-.23	-.22	-.14
<b>Achieving Results</b>						
Management Focus	.44	.02	.18	-.02	-.01	.06
Dominant	.21	-.24	.02	-.30	-.25	-.27
Production	.21	.09	.14	.07	-.05	-.01
<b>Team Playing</b>						
Cooperation	-.20	.26	.09	.25	.28	.13
Consensual	-.13	.15	.01	.40	.32	.37
Authority (Deference to)	-.23	-.06	-.35	-.20	-.29	-.38
Empathy	-.15	.37	.02	.29	.27	.31

⋯ Correlations differ at the  $p < .005$  level

□ Correlations differ at the  $p < .01$  level

## Appendix A.

### Variables Measured by the Leadership Effectiveness Analysis

**Conservative:** Studying problems in light of past practices to ensure predictability, reinforce the status quo and minimize risk.

**Innovative:** Feeling comfortable in fast changing environments; being willing to take risks and to consider new and untested approaches.

**Technical:** Acquiring and maintaining in-depth knowledge in your field or area of focus; using your expertise and specialized knowledge to study issues and draw conclusions.

**Self :** Emphasizing the importance of making decisions independently; looking to yourself as the prime vehicle for decision-making.

**Strategic:** Taking a long-range, broad approach to problem solving and decision making through objective analysis, thinking ahead, and planning.

**Persuasive:** Building commitment by convincing others and winning them over to your point of view.

**Outgoing:** Acting in an extroverted, friendly and informal manner; showing a capacity to quickly establish free and easy interpersonal relationships.

**Excitement:** Operating with a good deal of energy, intensity, and emotional expression; having a capacity for keeping others enthusiastic and involved.

**Restraint:** Maintaining a low-key, understated and quiet interpersonal demeanor by working to control your emotional expression.

**Structuring:** Adopting a systematic and organized approach; preferring to work in a precise, methodical manner; developing and utilizing guidelines and procedures.

**Tactical:** Emphasizing the production of immediate results by focusing on short-range, hands-on, practical strategies.

**Communication:** Stating clearly what you want and expect from others; clearly expressing your

thoughts and ideas; maintaining a precise and constant flow of information.

**Delegation:** Enlisting the talents of others to help meet objectives by giving them important activities and sufficient autonomy to exercise their own judgment.

**Control:** Adopting an approach in which you take nothing for granted, set deadlines for certain actions and are persistent in monitoring the progress of activities to ensure that they are completed on schedule.

**Feedback:** Letting others know in a straightforward manner what you think of them, how well they have performed and if they have met your needs and expectations.

**Management Focus:** Seeking to exert influence by being in positions of authority, taking charge, and leading and directing the efforts of others.

**Dominant:** Pushing vigorously to achieve results through an approach which is forceful, assertive and competitive.

**Production:** Adopting a strong orientation toward achievement; holding high expectations for yourself and others; pushing yourself and others to achieve at high levels.

**Cooperation:** Accommodating the needs and interests of others by being willing to defer performance on your own objectives in order to assist colleagues with theirs.

**Consensual:** Valuing the ideas and opinions of others and collecting their input as part of your decision-making process.

**Authority:** Showing loyalty to the organization; respecting the opinions of people in authority, and using them as resources for information, direction and decisions.

**Empathy:** Demonstrating an active concern for people and their needs by forming close and supportive relationships with others.

## Appendix B. Effectiveness Rating Scales

Each rating scale is presented as a an anchored rating scale from 1 (low) to 7 (high). *Note:* anchor text, which vary for each dimension, are not provided here. An overall effectiveness scale is formed through simple summation.

**Business "smarts"** (i.e., has an instinct for making money, exploits business opportunities, is wily in business dealings).

**Financial understanding** (i.e., understands and can deal with financial issues such as budgeting, accounting, costs, P&L statements).

**Ability to see the big picture perspective** (i.e., has a strategic orientation, sees interconnections between his/her own and company's objectives, anticipates problems).

**Capacity for effective thinking** (i.e., learns rapidly, deals well with concepts, quickly gets to the heart of an issue, is incisive, etc.).

**Ability to make effective decisions.**

**Insight into how to use organizational resources** (i.e., is able to build alliances, is sophisticated about organizational dynamics, has many contacts).

**Sensitivity to other people's feelings** (i.e., shows concern, has insight, is helpful, avoids hurting others' feelings).

**Likableness** (i.e., easy, friendly, quick to smile, good-hearted).

**Willingness to listen** (i.e., understands quickly, acknowledges communication, goes out of his/her way to get others' views).

**Ability to work with diverse people** (i.e., people from different backgrounds, cultures, belief systems and/or life styles).

**Capacity to contribute to team performance** (i.e., is willing and able to act as a team player, complements the efforts of others).

**Ability to develop people** (i.e., allows room for mistakes, stimulates growth, challenges positively, delegates authority).

**Ability to get things done through people** (i.e., charges effectively, sets high standards, organizes efforts well).

**Effectiveness as an advocate for his/her people** (i.e., defends his/her people appropriately, sells their views to management, protects his/her people from arbitrary decisions).

**Capacity to get people enthusiastic and involved** (i.e., gets people on his/her side, is persuasive and inspiring).

**Credibility and ability to inspire confidence with peers and subordinates** (i.e. is trusted and respected, delivers on promises).

**Credibility with management - ability to inspire confidence with superiors** (i.e., communicates well, delivers on promises, thinks in similar ways).

**Ability to turn around difficult, perhaps even volatile leadership situations.**

**Overall effectiveness as a leader/manager** (i.e., total level of performance against expectations, total impact in role).

**Future potential** (i.e., has the ability to go beyond present level versus being topped out, is likely to be a major resource to the organization).