

A Study in Leadership

Women do it Better than Men



ZENGER | FOLKMAN

Strengths-based leadership development

Which gender supplies better leaders for organizations? Based on research conducted by Zenger Folkman, the authority in strengths-based leadership development, the answer is rather clear and quite shocking. As far as the 16 researched differentiating leadership competencies are concerned women excelled in a majority of areas.

Below is the research of a sample of 7,280 leaders who had their leadership effectiveness evaluated in 2011. 64% of our data set was male (4651) and 36% was female (2629). The data represents managers and executives who completed our Extraordinary Leader 360 assessment in 2011. Our clients tend to be progressive, successful companies that have a strong belief in leadership development. This is not a global random sample of leaders, but rather a sampling of male and female leaders from high performing companies. Perhaps the differences are more pronounced in this data because the organizations supported the development of their leaders. It is also interesting because 64% of the data comes from managers and executives in the United States, and the remainder from countries scattered all over the world. Many of the countries in the data showed the same trends between men and women.

Males tended to have a higher percent of leaders in top management and reports to top management positions.

Position	Male	Female
Top Management, Executive, Senior Team Members	78%	22%
Reports to Top Management, Supervises Middle Managers	67%	32%
Middle Manager	60%	39%
Supervisor, Front Line Manager, Foreman	61%	39%
Individual Contributor	45%	55%
Other	47%	53%

Overall Leadership Effectiveness by Gender by Position (*Percentile Scores)

Position	Male	Female
Top Management, Executive, Senior Team Members	52	61
Reports to Top Management, Supervises Middle Managers	47	53
Middle Manager	47	53
Supervisor, Front Line Manager, Foreman	52	51
Individual Contributor	51	52
Other	50	51

* Percentile scores were calculated by comparing the results of the 7,280 males and females to each other.

Overall Leadership Effectiveness by Gender by Function (Percentile Scores)

Of the 15 functions listed females were rated more positively in 12. Some of the largest gaps were in functions that tended to be male dominated such as sales, product development, legal, engineering, IT and research and development. The percentage of women leaders represented in these functions ranged from 13% to 33%.

Function	Male	Female
Sales	55.9	62.6
Marketing	45.7	52.4
Customer Service	52.4	50.6
Operations	50.4	53.8
HR, Training	48.7	50.6
General Management	49.6	55.0
Finance and Accounting	46.2	50.6
Product Development	42.0	49.0
Legal	54.7	59.4
Engineering	41.1	44.5
Information Technology	42.0	52.1
Research and Development	47.4	52.2
Facilities Management, Maintenance	49.8	37.8
Quality Management	48.5	49.5
Administrative, Clerical	48.8	43.2

Differences in Overall Leadership Effectiveness

On an overall leadership effectiveness index females were rated more positively than males. The overall leadership effectiveness index is a 49 item index. The 49 items were found to be the most differentiating items separating the best versus the worst leaders. The items are associated with 16 differentiating competencies. The overall index is the average rating from an aggregate of manager, peer, direct report and other ratings.

	Male	Female	T Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Overall Leadership Effectiveness (Average of 49 Leadership Items)	49	53	-6.17	0.00

Differences in Competencies

On 12 of 16 competencies, Females were rated more positively by the total of all respondents—manager, peers, direct reports and others. On average, 12.7 raters evaluated males, 13.1 raters evaluated females.

The bias of most people is that females would be better at nurturing competencies such as developing others and relationship building. While this is true the competencies with the largest differences between males and females were taking initiative, practicing self development, integrity/honesty, and driving for results.

	Male	Female	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Takes Initiative	48	56	-11.58	0.00
Practices Self-Development	48	55	-9.45	0.00
Displays High Integrity and Honesty	48	55	-9.28	0.00
Drives for Results	48	54	-8.84	0.00
Develops Others	48	54	-7.94	0.00
Inspires and Motivates Others	49	54	-7.53	0.00
Builds Relationships	49	54	-7.15	0.00
Collaboration and Teamwork	49	53	-6.14	0.00
Establishes Stretch Goals	49	53	-5.41	0.00
Champions Change	49	53	-4.48	0.00
Solves Problems and Analyzes Issues	50	52	-2.53	0.01
Communicates Powerfully and Prolifically	50	52	-2.47	0.01
Connects the Group to the Outside World	50	51	-0.78	0.43
Innovates	50	51	-0.76	0.45
Technical or Professional Expertise	50	51	-0.11	0.91
Develops Strategic Perspective	51	49	2.79	0.01

• *Males were rated more significantly positively on one competency (Develops Strategic Perspective).*

Survey items

For 36 of 49 items, females scored significantly more positive. Men scored significantly positive in only two survey items. The rest of the survey items were neutral.

Below is a small sample of some of the items:

	Male	Female	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
22. Follow through on commitments.	47	56	-12.00	0.00
3. Honor commitments and keep promises.	48	56	-11.79	0.00
23. Willingly goes above and beyond.	48	56	-11.66	0.00
13. Improves based on feedback from others.	48	55	-10.89	0.00
41. Has a clear perspective between the over-all picture and the details.	51	49	2.29	0.02
42. Has a perspective beyond the day-to-day.	52	48	5.43	0.00

What does this mean for women in the workplace? Well the implications of this research are quite profound. Jack Zenger, CEO and Co-founder of Zenger Folkman, stated: “It is a well-known fact that women are underrepresented at senior levels of management. Yet the data suggests that by adding more women the overall effectiveness of the leadership team would go up.” Organizations go outside to recruit effective leaders when in many cases they may well have internal people who could rise to fill the position that is vacant.

Joe Folkman, President of Zenger Folkman, noted that “while men excel in the technical and strategic arenas, women clearly have the advantage in the extremely important areas of people relationships and communication. They also surpass their male counterparts in driving for results. This we know is counterintuitive to many men.”