

RCTCBC Women in Leadership: Myths and Barriers

Uncovering Our Strengths: confidence vs competence

In Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic's book "Why do so many incompetent men become leaders?", he talks about the qualities that get men hired but can also then be their downfall.

Evidence suggests that we are not great at distinguishing between *competence* (how good you are at something) and *confidence* (how good you *think* you are) when it comes to assessing leadership ability.

Confidence has two sides – internal confidence (how confident we feel) and external confidence (how confident we seem to others). On measures of internal confidence, there is little difference between men and women. On measures of external confidence, men are much more likely to be rated as appearing confident. There tends to be no correlation between how confident women feel and how confident others rate them to be.

The difference is not in how confident men and women are, but in how they are treated.

Behaving more like men doesn't help: we don't tolerate high confidence well in women (bossy, strident, shrill, pushy etc). Women need to demonstrate competence and warmth as well as confidence to be rated positively as leaders, whereas men only need to demonstrate confidence.

Where do women perform better?

Small but significant differences in EQ (emotional quotient) related to better:

1. Transformational leadership powered by the ability to create a clear vision, be a role model for change, turn a vision into an actionable plan, assign tasks, manage performance and set rewards and incentives
2. Personal effectiveness: the ability to navigate everyday challenges supported by self-control, resilience, influence and empathy.
3. Self-awareness: the ability to understand how our actions affect and are perceived by others

These qualities are often developed through the behaviour we experience as described in *The Authority Gap* by Mary Ann Sieghart. Despite evidence that diverse groups perform better and that companies with more women on the board are more profitable, women are still judged by different standards and are on the receiving end of micro-aggressions that significantly impact their ability to perform to their potential.

The way we behave as adults starts to be developed as children: boys get more teacher time in the classroom, boys are encouraged to take more risks, young boys bond by boasting about their achievements ("I scored 10 goals"), young girls bond by admitting vulnerability ("I'm no good at that...").

What actions can we take?

As individuals:

- Understand, recognise and try to challenge the unconscious biases that act on us all
- Raise our self-awareness through reflection and feedback. What are our strengths? What impact do we have on others?
- Articulate what motivates us: our purpose, our why
- Support our own resilience and wellbeing

For each other:

- Affirm what other women say, particularly when they make up less than half of a group
- Recognise hard work and preparation more than blagging
- Give plenty of (specific) positive feedback
- Challenge our own perceptions of each other and watch our language

As leaders and employers:

- Select candidates using competency-based evidence
- When chairing meetings, bring women in to speak first and call out men for interrupting or talking for too long

Reading suggestions

The Authority Gap – Mary Ann Sieghart

Work like a Woman – Mary Portas

Mindset – Carol Dweck