

Study: Women leaders perceived as effective as male counterparts

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When it comes to being perceived as effective leaders, women are rated as highly as men, and sometimes higher - a finding that speaks to society's changing gender roles and the need for a different management style in today's globalized workplace, according to a meta-analysis published by the American Psychological Association.

"When all leadership contexts are considered, men and [women](#) do not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness," said lead researcher Samantha C. Paustian-Underdahl, PhD, of Florida International University. "As more women have entered into and succeeded in leadership positions, it is likely that people's stereotypes associating leadership with masculinity have been dissolving slowly over time."

While men tend to rate themselves as significantly more effective than women rate themselves, when ratings by others were examined, women came out ahead on perceptions of effectiveness, according to the study, published in APA's *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

Paustian-Underdahl and her colleagues expanded on "role congruity theory," which postulates that there is greater prejudice toward women as leaders because the stereotypical woman isn't seen as possessing leadership qualities. "Women are typically described and expected to be more communal, relations-oriented and nurturing than men, whereas men are believed and expected to be more agentic, assertive and independent than women," they wrote. The researchers expanded upon the theory by applying it to both [men and women](#), arguing that "As

organizations have become fast-paced, globalized environments, some organizational scholars have proposed that a more feminine style of [leadership](#) is needed to emphasize the participative and open communication needed for success."

The researchers analyzed 99 data sets from 58 journal publications, 30 unpublished dissertations or theses, 5 books and 6 other sources (e.g., white papers, unpublished data). Sample sizes ranged from 10 to 60,470 leaders. The mean sample size was 1,011 and the average age of leaders (across the 40 samples in which age was reported) was 39. The studies were published between 1962 and 2011. Eighty-six percent of the samples reported data from studies conducted in the United States or Canada.

When looking only at ratings submitted by others (as opposed to self-ratings), women were seen as more effective leaders than men in middle management, business and education organizations, according to the study. Additionally, women were seen as more effective when they held senior-level management positions. The researchers theorize that some of this effect could be due to a "double standard of competence," meaning some people presume that women leaders have to be extra competent to get into top positions.

"These findings are surprising given that men on average continue to be paid more and advance into higher managerial levels than women," said Paustian-Underdahl. "Future research needs to examine why women are seen as equally (or more) effective leaders than men, yet are not being rewarded in the same ways."

More information: "Gender and Perceptions of Leadership Effectiveness: A Meta-Analysis of Contextual Moderators," Samantha C. Paustian-Underdahl, PhD, Florida International University; Lisa Slattery Walker, PhD and David J. Woehr, PhD, University of North

Carolina at Charlotte, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, online April 28, 2014.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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