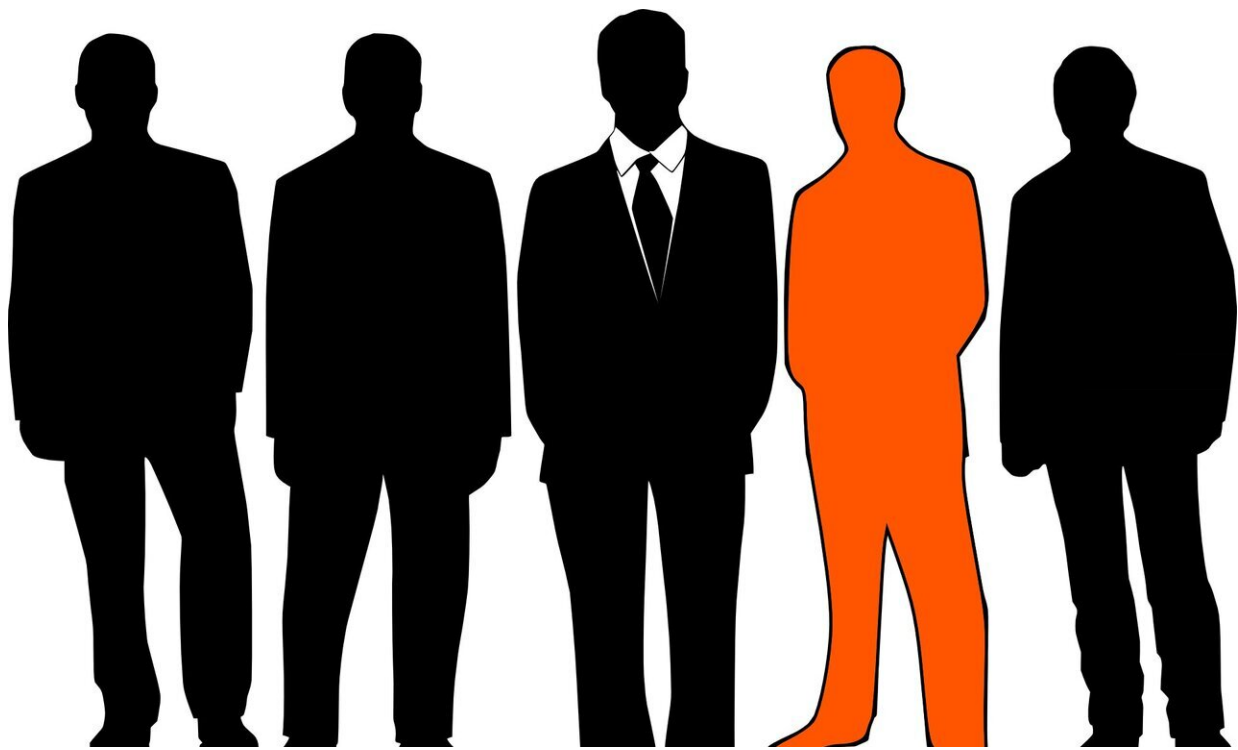


New study shows that men receive more actionable feedback than women in the workplace

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Published in the Harvard Business Review, the research explored differences in the developmental feedback received by men and women.

Developmental [feedback](#)—provided informally or through official management processes—is one of employees' few explicit opportunities to learn about how they should change and develop as a leader, and as such it plays a major role in paving the way to [leadership](#).

The research was co-authored by Dr. Elena Doldor, Associate Professor in Organisational Behaviour and Co-Director of the Centre for Research in Equality and Diversity at Queen Mary's School of Business and Management.

Using computerized [text analysis](#), the authors examined comments provided anonymously to 146 mid-career leaders, by more than 1,000 of peers and leaders while taking part in a leadership development program.

Key differences in framing advice

The researchers found four key differences in how advice was framed for female leaders and for male leaders:

- Vision: men were encouraged to focus on 'the big picture' and on setting a vision; [women](#) were encouraged to focus on operational delivery and narrow expertise
- Political skills: men were encouraged to pro-actively leverage workplace politics; women were encouraged to cope with politics and 'toughen up'
- Asserting leadership: men were encouraged to claim their space in pursuing leadership ambitions, women were advised to be cooperative and get along with their team
- Confidence: men were advised to develop confidence in specific skill sets, whilst women were described as inherently lacking confidence and told to be generically more confident.
- The findings show that feedback provided to women was therefore less actionable and less useful for leadership

progression than feedback given to men.

Mitigating bias

According to the researchers, this subtle bias can be mitigated through deliberate action. To make developmental feedback more gender-inclusive, managers must scrutinize the messages they communicate in that feedback. By refocusing developmental conversations in the four key areas of bias outlined, managers can begin to overcome their unconscious biases and more effectively support the leadership development of both men and women.

Dr. Elena Doldor said: "Visionary and political skills are essential for progression into senior leadership. If women are not encouraged to develop these skills as much as men are, it is unsurprising that we end up with uneven representation in leadership ranks.

"Similarly, it isn't particularly helpful to simply tell women to 'be more confident.' When we demystify the notion of confidence and relate it to specific skill sets, the advice becomes much more actionable."

More information: Research: Men Get More Actionable Feedback Than Women. [hbr.org/2021/02/research-men-g ... -feedback-than-women](https://hbr.org/2021/02/research-men-g...-feedback-than-women)

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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