

# Cheerful women are not associated with leadership qualities—but proud ones are

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Women are perceived as being more willing to lead if they show that they are proud of their personal performance. If, however, they give a cheerful impression, they are judged to have less willingness to leadership roles than men who display similar emotions. This is one of the initial findings of a long-term project in which economic researchers at Technical University Munich are investigating the selection and assessment of leaders.

To increase their share of leadership positions, [women](#) are expected to tick a range of boxes – usually demonstrating improved negotiation skills, networking strengths and the ability to develop a strategic career ladder. "But even these skills are not enough," maintains Professor Isabell Welpé of TUM's Chair for Strategy and Organization. "They ignore the fact that there are stereotypes that on a subconscious level play a decisive role in the assessment of high achievers. Leaders should be assertive, dominant and hard-lined; women are seen as mediators, friendly, social."

Economic researchers from TUM decided to investigate the mechanisms behind the selection and assessment of leaders in business and academia and ways to challenge stereotypes. They presented their initial findings at a symposium yesterday.

In a number of studies, researchers presented a variety of scenarios with (potential) leaders and their employees to randomly selected individuals. They then asked the [study participants](#) about their perceptions and

expectations.

It emerged that the same behavior exhibited by women and men in leadership positions is assessed in different ways. If employees were assigned a task in a certain scenario, the study participants expected better performance if a man had delegated the work.

In another scenario, managers varied the extent of decision-making power accompanying tasks delegated to employees. From the [viewpoint](#) of the employees, all study participants preferred leaders who allowed a greater [degree of freedom](#). Unlike the male study participants, however, the women made a distinction according to the bosses' gender: Female managers who did not delegate decision-making power were viewed less favorably than male bosses who behaved the same way.

"There is still the belief that men in leadership positions show more assertiveness towards their staff," comments Professor Welpel. "The surprising thing is that some female stereotypes are more reinforced in the minds of women themselves – for example their tendency to accept a dominant leadership style in men."

The researchers have also discovered possible ways for women to challenge the stereotypes:

Previous studies have shown that individuals who are seen as willing to lead do in fact have a greater chance of being appointed to a leadership position. This puts women at a disadvantage because they are, on average, perceived as being less interested in management roles. The TUM researchers wanted to find out how emotions play a role in this perception. The study participants saw scenarios in which men and women were either cheerful or proud of their personal performance, or else showing no emotion at all. Those who came across as proud were assessed as having greater leadership willingness. This effect was

significantly more pronounced in the case of the women in the study. "Women who looked cheerful were judged to less willing to lead," explains Welpé. "Pride, on the other hand, is positively associated with leadership qualities."

The researchers hope to develop training programs based on their findings. These will be aimed at helping companies and scientific organizations assess the potential and performance of men and women beyond the limitations of [stereotypes](#).

Provided by Technical University Munich

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