

# Executive Summary

## Gender Differences in Australian Leadership

Exploring personality and multi-rater assessment  
differences between female and male leaders in Australia

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# Executive summary

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Understanding the similarities and differences between female and male leaders has been growing as a topic of interest, especially as there has been an increased focus and effort to increase the representation of women in leadership roles.

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Insights into the similarities and differences between female and male leaders may have important implications when it comes to the selection and development of leadership talent, particularly when wanting to establish targeted interventions for particular groups such as women in leadership.

Our recent research aimed to contribute insights into this area by examining similarities and differences in the personality and multi-rater performance of female and male executives and managers in Australia, including by comparing top and bottom performing leaders.

## Key findings:

- **Significant differences were found in relation to day-to-day personality tendencies which may contribute to differences in leadership styles and the approaches adopted by female and male leaders.** Specifically, female leaders were relatively more likely to display tendencies associated with being reflective, willing to follow others, displaying tact, being pragmatic, and enjoying learning relative to their male counterparts. On the other hand, male leaders were relatively more likely to exhibit tendencies associated with being resilient, confident, driven, outgoing, forthright, and focused on the bigger picture relative to their female counterparts.
- **Significant differences were also found in relation to derailment tendencies which may contribute to differences in development needs and responses when in situations such as when under pressure or complacent.** Specifically, female leaders were relatively more likely to derail by being reluctant to change methods, take chances or independent action and seeming hesitant to voice strong or contrary opinions. On the other hand, male leaders were relatively more likely to derail by being overly confident, acting hastily, dominating social situations, overvaluing their independence, ignoring constructive criticism, seeming indifferent to others' feelings or concerns, and being cynical and prone to fault-finding.
- **There were also significant differences in relation to motivators and drivers which may contribute to differences in the types of work environments or cultures that they are likely to foster as a leader.** Specifically, female leaders were relatively more likely to embrace values associated with building relationships, helping others, and focusing on quality and style. On the other hand, male leaders were relatively more likely to embrace values associated with wanting to work on high-visibility projects, competition, getting ahead, being seen as influential, focusing on commercial matters, and engaging in objective, data-driven decision making.
- **When looking at differences in relation to performance on multi-rater assessments, female leaders tended to have significantly higher overall scores and to be rated higher across the majority of competencies being assessed.**

- **There were some similarities in the top rated strengths and opportunities to improve regardless of gender, speaking to common leadership strengths and development needs regardless of whether someone is a female or male leader.** In terms of strengths, these were working hard with a strong work ethic, being action-orientated and getting things done, and having a solid technical ability, experience and knowledge. In terms of opportunities to improve, these were stop taking on too much and spreading oneself too thin, delegating more, and challenging poor performance.
- **There were also some differences in ranked strengths when comparing female and male leaders. Female leaders tended to be rated relatively higher on the strengths of being empathetic and supportive, a strong role model and organised.** On the other hand, male leaders tended to be rated relatively higher on the strengths of being steady and calm under pressure and good at solving problems. Male executives also tended to be rated higher than female executives on being visionary and strategic and suggesting new and innovative ideas.
- **Additionally, there were some differences in the rankings of opportunities to improve when comparing female and male leaders.** The opportunity to look more at the bigger picture tended to be rated higher for female leaders while communicating better tended to be rated higher for male leaders. Male managers also tended to have relatively higher rankings on the opportunities to improve one's people and interpersonal skills and giving appropriate feedback.
- **When looking more closely at top performing versus bottom performing leaders, there were similarities in the strengths that tended to be rated higher for leaders in the top quartile, regardless of gender.** These were having strong leadership skills, strong communication skills, strong people skills, being a positive role model, setting clear goals and driving results, and motivating and inspiring others. Female leaders in the top quartile were also rated relatively higher on the strength of building effective relationships when compared to their bottom quartile counterparts. Additionally, male executives in the top quartile were rated relatively higher on being visionary and strategic when compared to their bottom quartile counterparts.
- **There were also similarities in opportunities to improve, regardless of gender, when comparing top and bottom performing leaders.** Specifically, the opportunities to improve for those in the top quartile tended to be around sharing more of themselves and their work and around increasing their voice and presence, while for those in the bottom quartile the opportunities tended to be around improving how they engaged and connected with others and managed themselves.
- **Top performing female leaders tended to be rated relatively higher on the opportunity to challenge poor performance while bottom performing female leaders tended to be rated relatively higher on listening more and letting others have their say.** For male leaders, those in the bottom quartile tended to be rated relatively higher on the opportunity of showing leadership on issues, with male managers in the bottom quartile also being rated relatively higher on the opportunity to be more action orientated and make things happen when compared to their top performing counterparts.
- **The implications associated with these similarities and differences between female and male leaders are explored in the white paper.** Recommendations are also provided for addressing some of the key development areas that were identified for female and male leaders in Australia.

### **About Peter Berry Consultancy (PBC)**

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PBC is the Australian distributor of Hogan Assessments and the authors of a range of diagnostics including the Hogan 360 suite, Agile suite, High Performing Team Assessment (HPTA), and co-authored the Hogan Safety Climate Survey.

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