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Gender, Leadership, and Diversity Policies in the Workplace: A quantitative study of gender bias in the context of DEI

Francesca Manfucci

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Gender, Leadership, and Diversity Policies in the Workplace:

A quantitative study of gender bias in the context of DEI

by

Francesca Manfucci

Undergraduate Honors Thesis under the Direction of

Dr. Daniel Whitman

Rucks Department of Management

Submitted to the LSU Roger Hadfield Ogden Honors College

in partial fulfillment of the College Honors Program.

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Louisiana State University
& Agricultural and Mechanical College

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to attend Louisiana State University, a place and community full of resources, learning experiences, and amazing professionals that I was lucky to have encountered during these past four years.

Abstract

Gender gaps and inequalities across societal levels have been a topic of research and study by scholars and organizations around the world for decades. However, as of 2022, despite significant advances in education, political representation, and equality of rights, women remain underrepresented in most workplaces around the world at higher levels of management. In particular, there is a lack of women's participation at the board level and in the decision-making process. By building on a literature review of previous theories and studies on gender and diversity, we investigated how an individual's gender impacts perceived leadership and work competence, and the perceived success of a policy proposal, specifically in the context of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). We hypothesized that men who propose DEI initiatives will be seen as more competent compared to women, and that plans proposed by men will be perceived as more successful compared to when a woman proposes them. We tested our proposition on a sample of 64 participants in the United States and found that there was no significant difference when comparing the effects based on the gender of employee proposing the same DEI plan. Results, however, suggested that female ratings were slightly higher than the male ones. This study, with its limitations, introduces a new, modern context for studying gender differences in leadership and management, which should be further investigated by scholars to reflect changes that are happening in the workplace relative to DEI policies.

Keywords: gender, leadership, diversity

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Introduction

Defining Gender Gaps and Gender Inequality

The nature and causes of gender inequality are multifaceted, complex, and beyond a reduction to a few core factors. For this paper, our analysis will only address differences between two genders (male and female), not including the infinite of genders (or identities) existing today. There are multiple ways we can define gender and its related gender gap. The UNICEF's *Glossary of Terms and Concepts* report from November 2017 defines the term gender as “a social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women” (p. 2). A gender gap is instead defined as the “disproportionate difference between men and women and boys and girls, particularly as reflected in attainment of development goals, access to resources and levels of participation. A gender gap indicates gender inequality” (p. 4).

When defining these terms, we refer to differences between men and women as reflected at different societal levels, such as social, political, intellectual, cultural, and economic (Harris, 2017). In general, the inequalities that arise because of one's gender are often related to other gaps, which vary in dimensions like income, access to health or education, labor force participation, and political representation. A common example related to gender gaps across income levels is the difference between men and women when it comes to earning salaries, known as the pay, or wage gap. Because of this divide, women who have access to lower income can end up experiencing lower access to high-quality healthcare, higher living standards, and even higher quality of education. These inequalities disproportionately affect certain groups of people, depending on the intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, religion, class, ability, sexuality, and other identity markers. Over time, each one of these dimensions has systematically

led certain groups to have fewer opportunities to increase their status and to advance to higher levels of working roles and positions. These groups have been mostly identified as “minorities”, which refers to a “group that holds few positions of social power” (Schaefer, 1996, as cited in Hekman, et al., 2017, p. 771). Because of this, the societal effect is the creation of the so-called “glass ceiling”, also defined as “an invisible barrier” that prevents a given demographic group to rise above their current status (Johns, 2013).

While there have been few studies on whether women can be considered minorities today, their legal rights and status vary widely across countries as women still experience social inequalities relative to men in most societies. One area where gender gaps across these levels are significantly relevant as a field of study is in the workplace. In this space, the difference is marked not only related to the wage gap but in general to the level of representation that female leaders have at the board level and other senior management positions, including leadership positions in politics and governments. In the following section, we will focus on reviewing the current data we have on women’s representation across these positions.

Current State of Women in Leadership and Management

In general, compared to 30-40 years ago, women have increased their representation in politics and leadership, achieved more equal rights, and substantially increased their educational status while engaging in more diverse types of work opportunities. In the United States, women roughly constitute 50.8% of the entire population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) 2019 Databook on women in the labor force reported that in 2019 “women accounted for 51.8 percent of all workers employed in management, professional, and related occupations” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The increase in women’s participation in higher education in both developed and developing countries has proven to be one significant

factor in women's movement to higher levels of job roles. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2016, "45 percent of women ages 25 to 64 held a bachelor's degree and higher compared with 11 percent in 1970" (Table 1).

However, while societies have improved their social mores and reforms to empower women over time, gender gaps in the workplace keep being a persisting issue that seems to keep widening across societal levels. As far as political representation, as of 2022, there are only "26 women serving as Heads of State and/or Government in 24 countries" (UNWomen). In the United States, "145 (106D, 39R) women hold seats in Congress, comprising 27.1% of the 535 members; 24 women (24%) serve in the U.S. Senate, and 119 women (27.4%) serve in the U.S. House of Representatives" (Center for American Women and Politics, 2022).

Underrepresentation exists also in academia (science, engineering, and computing, also known as STEM), as these professions continue to be dominated by men. In these areas, a significant underrepresentation exists at the upper ranks: for example, 47% of U.S. medical students are females and yet only 12% are full professors in academic medicine. Progress toward gender equality in these fields is slow, and the number of women in STEM positions remains almost unchanged every year. As matter of fact, women's representation among different STEM occupational levels has not changed remarkably since 2016. In 2021, women were 74% of healthcare practitioners and technicians, compared with 75% in 2016. In 2021, women accounted for 25% of those working in computer occupations. Furthermore, "the share of women in this fast-growing occupation cluster declined from 2000 to 2016 and has remained stable since then" (Fry, R. et al., 2021). At the corporate level, in 2020 the number of women representing *Fortune's* list of CEOs in the 500 largest U.S. companies was 37, defined as an "all-time record" compared to the year before when they were only 33 (Hinchliffe, 2020). In 2020, in Canada

“men [continued] to hold over 90% of C-Level executive roles;” in Europe, “just one out of three managers in the EU [was] a woman” (Catalyst, 2021). The increase in numbers is often celebrated, but it should be taken as an alarming sign that States and organizations should do better when promoting more gender equality. Furthermore, the persistent nature of this inequality worldwide indicates that the assumptions underpinning gender inequality are often resistant to change. In the next section, we seek to understand the importance of the issue and hopefully outline some of the reasons why it is important to address it now.

Why the Problem Matters

Gender gaps have taken on increasing importance to governments, investors, and citizens of the world for a variety of reasons. Research has found that gender stereotypes can widen gender gaps and create conditions that offset economic development and growth for some societies, especially economically developing countries (Santos & Klasen, 2021). In these countries, education is also “gendered”, as fewer educational opportunities are being afforded to girls when compared to boys. The unequal access to education is in part heavily influenced by the societal context and the wealth someone grows up with. Encouraging women to gain a better education, and eventually promoting them to top positions that are at the heart of the decision-making process, would represent a change to the status quo dominated by male representatives in those countries and create economic and societal well-being for everyone else who still is in a less privileged position. On the contrary, if women are less educated and less represented than men in contexts like politics, STEM jobs, or C-suite positions due to the stigma of relying on male-dominated fields, there will not be enough women qualified to assume control and change the outcome, and that will create a much bigger gap. This stigma has changed considerably and varies across countries today as the overall global picture demonstrates that women exceed men

in completing more advanced levels of education. However, when discriminations are due to the cultural and social norms deeply ingrained in a culture and the stereotypes constrained around gender, then the issue has a different nature and becomes more difficult to address. This treatment may arise from distinctions regarding biology, psychology, or cultural norms prevalent in society, but while some of these distinctions are empirically grounded others appear to be socially constructed.

In general, when women are discouraged to pursue certain roles, it limits the pool of available applicants and talent that could instead benefit organizations. When stereotypes are used as the rationale for making decisions in the workplace, it can also create unequal opportunities in the hiring process. When it comes to hiring or promoting an employee to a managerial position, it should be based on work experience, leadership skills, and whether they are a good fit for the position independently of their gender. Sometimes, however, when there is a difference in gender between two candidates, society perceives men as better off because of certain “qualities” and attitudes that men are inherently thought to have compared to women, as it pertains to certain job roles. Overall, this leads to the conclusion that the reason why women are underrepresented “may not be their lack of competence or qualifications, but rather the presence of statistical discrimination” (Profeta, 2017, p. 35). Therefore, although qualified women are available, they are often not taken into consideration in the promotion and evaluation process.

When we think of gender gaps specifically in the workplace, the way companies and organizations decide to operate as part of their own organizational culture and strategy is focused on how we can better address the issue at stake. At the employment level, those in charge should understand what impacts and consequences this underrepresentation can have within their

organizations. Enacting policies to eliminate this disparity by bringing more women into the decision-making process, is one of the key elements to focus on. In general, concentrating our attention on promoting more women at board levels and C-level positions is important to break down gender barriers in the rest of the workforce (Froehlicher et al., 2021). A 2019 Deloitte Report edition named *Women in the boardroom: A global perspective report* found out that “companies with women CEOs have significantly more balanced boards than those led by men—33.5% women vs. 19.4%, respectively.” According to the report, this could break down stereotypes on women in leadership and encourage women to pursue their careers further, to seek for roles which they would have not otherwise considered and to ask for more raises and promotions. Other data from 2018 confirms that companies with at least a woman in the board chair were more likely to have a larger share of women board members (28.3%) compared to companies with men board chairs (17.1%) (Catalyst, 2021). Data on the gender debate has shown that there can be beneficial effects on organizations if more women are guaranteed access to the same level of authority and representation in the C-suite, and that having both men and women involved in decision-making can broaden perspectives, benefit the board’s decision process, and increase diversity and innovation (Rose, 2007).

Other studies have shown that when highly qualified women are put in a decision-making position, this results in positive effects on the economic outcomes and performance of the industry (Profeta, 2017). Specifically, it can increase an organization’s financial performance, even if indirectly. Following a 2012 legislation to introduce a 40% quota for women among non-executive positions, a study analyzing the effects of corporate boards with women on firm value, financial performance, and ethical and social compliance suggested that “greater female representation on corporate boards can increase firm value indirectly [...] coming from stronger

compliance with ethical principles, something that is not captured by accounting-based financial performance” (Isidro & Sobral, 2014, p. 1). This contributes to the idea that appointing more women to board positions has positive valuation effects. Despite the beneficial effects of gender equality and diversity being displayed when we concentrate on decision-making positions, when we move from labor market participation to women’s representation in decision-making positions, the gender gaps are exacerbated. Even in countries in which women participate in the labor market in high numbers, only a minority make it to the highest positions (Profeta, 2017).

Literature Review

Following what has been reviewed about the current state of representation of women in leadership, management, and decision-making until now, we conclude that a contemporary gap remains despite the progress made. Although changes in the societal composition of the workforce have resulted in an increasing proportion of women in managerial positions, the stereotypes existing around gender and leadership roles are still very relevant today. These stereotypical expectations consequently feed into gender discrimination and prejudicial behavior, which undermine women’s representation at these levels until our most recent time. To better understand why this gap exists and how stereotypes work, we draw on the main theories and models on gender differences that have identified how expectations on leadership characteristics and social roles are made.

Stereotypes of Gender and Leadership Roles

Women experience the most discrimination as they are involved in managerial and leadership positions because they are perceived differently than men when evaluated on their ability to pursue these roles. Gender gaps are indeed caused by gender stereotypes, which strongly affect the way we see men and women in terms of their behaviors, attitudes, and ability

to perform. Research has identified gender stereotypes as being descriptive and prescriptive (Koenig, 2018). Descriptive stereotypes specify what characteristics men and women possess, while prescriptive stereotypes dictate our beliefs and norms about what behaviors are desirable or appropriate from men and women, or simply how they are expected to behave (Heilman, 2001). These norms of behavior and gender role prescriptions can be applied to work settings, specifically in areas of leadership and decision-making. Research tells us that our past experiences and beliefs can inform our expectations for how a leader should behave (Haller & Hogg, 2014) and that the prototypical or ideal leader stereotype tends to be defined by attributes that are primarily masculine and therefore associated with men. Violations of women's gender role prescriptions in work settings, indeed, are no exception (Heilman & Chen, 2005). This concept is well described by Eagly's Social Role Theory (1987) and Role Congruity Theory of prejudice toward female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which have then extended in other models like Lack of Fit Theory (Heilman, 1983). Together, these frameworks suggest that there is a misfit between gender role attributes and leader role attributes for women, while there is a greater fit for men when comparing male attributes to leader-like behavior. This leads to more male leadership emergence and more perceived effectiveness for men compared to women.

Role Congruity Theory was developed from Eagly's Social Role Theory (1987) and is one of the first theories that aim to explain differences in social role and gender role expectations. Social Role Theory argues that behavior is determined by social roles that depend on factors such as context, social position, and culture (Eagly, 1987). In addition to social roles, Eagly also includes gender roles, arguing that "widely shared gender stereotypes develop from the gender division of labor that characterizes a society" (Ridgeway, 2001, para.1). Its key principle is that differences and similarities arise primarily from the distribution of men and

women into societal roles, which also explains why these differences exist primarily in the workplace. Over time, because the gender-specific characteristics have resulted in being also associated with leader-specific expectations, this thinking has led to the creation of specific leader stereotypes, formed by those descriptive norms identified earlier, which define how leaders should generally behave (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). This makes the behavior of individuals occupying a certain social role predictable. Fueling this mismatch is the belief that predominantly communal qualities that people associate with women are inconsistent with the predominantly agentic qualities associated with men (Koenig et al., 2011). For example, women are thought to be more compassionate, relationship-oriented, and nurturing than men. These qualities are then described as “feminine” because of being ascribed more strongly to women. Men, on the other hand, are expected to be more competitive, assertive, and independent, and whose qualities are described as “masculine.”

Role Congruity Theory explains that stereotypes about gender then can feed into two types of prejudicial behavior, such as perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When members of a stereotyped group occupy a role that is at odds with their gender stereotype, that discrepancy negatively impacts our perceptions of that person (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Without even realizing it, we may psychologically categorize a woman as being unsuitable to lead (Haller & Hogg, 2014). In a few words, a female leader may be evaluated less favorably than a man simply because the “leader-like behavior” is better aligned with the male gender role than with female gender role expectations. These prejudices result in a woman being placed at a disadvantage instead of being merited by her conduct and qualities of performance at work (Allport, 1954).

Central to the idea of how stereotypes work is also Lack of Fit Theory (Heilman, 1983) from which Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory extend. Heilman (1983) presented the Lack of Fit Model to explain how women's self-limiting behaviors and gender discrimination affects a person's attempt to move up the professional hierarchy. This model describes that "to the extent that a workplace role is inconsistent with the attributes ascribed to an individual, she or he would suffer from perceived lack of fit to the workplace role" (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 589). The "resulting incongruity forms the basis of negative expectations about women's performance, which thereby bias the processing of information and, consequently, facilitate discriminatory behavior" (Heilman & Caleo, 2018, p.726). Because of these existing social roles, women are expected to be representative of certain types of jobs rather than others, which defines the "lack of fit" for a particular position such as leadership roles. These roles are usually descriptive of certain attitudes and behaviors, resulting in the belief that such incongruity between men and women is inevitable in the workplace and for all types of social roles. These expectations are decisive in employment situations such as whether a woman or a man will be employed.

Women's Contribution to Diversity

The focus on diversity in the workplace has increased remarkably in the last couple of years. This has been useful to push governments and organizations to take action and introduce more diversity programs in the workplace. In the United States in particular but also around the world, recent social justice movements such as the 2020 events have aimed at addressing issues of systemic injustices within our system. This has also made a huge impact on the professional world. As more employees had the opportunity to speak up about their needs and discrimination issues, more executives and decision-makers found themselves forced to take action to improve

their policies, standards, and organizational cultures. The shift of the discourse from a focus on gender diversity toward diversity and inclusion more generally has been significant (Froehlicher, et al, 2021). This shift has also allowed for the creation of new professions related to implementing and addressing diversity policies in the workplace, allowing more groups to be hired across senior management and the board level. Because of this, women have also engaged in the opportunity to implement changes relative to gender disparities and other discriminating gaps.

More recent meta-analytic evidence has suggested that women tend to be rated as better leaders than men (Paustian-Underdahl, et al. 2014) and that women have outnumbered and outperformed their male counterparts (Hekman et al. 2017). This can be explained by a number of factors, and authors such as Eagly and Karau (2002) proposed that prejudice toward female leaders can vary depending on the leadership context. Relevant to today's focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, scholars are now beginning to focus on how diversity-valuing behavior can affect performance for men and women in the workplace. A study by Hekman et al. (2017) suggested that this can result in diminished performance evaluations for female leaders. The study highlights how women are usually discouraged from engaging in "diversity-valuing behavior," meaning that those who want to contribute to implementing diversity policies in the workplace are rated more poorly and "are systematically penalized with lower competence" (p.772). According to the study, "stereotyping white men who engage in diversity-valuing behavior is much more challenging than stereotyping non-whites and women because doing so would threaten one's beliefs about society and the status quo in which whites and men maintain the position as highly valued members of society" (p.774). Given its findings, the study concluded that "organizations seeking to advance the standing of minorities and women might

consider having a white male spokesperson for the diversity office” (p. 790). This is because according to the research, male leaders might benefit in terms of higher performance ratings for engaging in diversity-valuing behavior, as compared to male leaders who do not engage in it. These findings tell us that people may have a preference for having a man instead of a woman in a position of decision-making when it comes to valuing diversity in the workplace. It does so by taking specifically into account the relationship between leaders’ gender and race, diversity-valuing behavior, perceived competence, and performance ratings, and by testing the impact of a diversity-valuing hiring decision on perceptions of top managers’ performance and competence.

As the focus of our paper goes to analyze how women contribute to diversity in the workplace, we take the existing research and findings to identify whether gender affects perceived competence and success of a proposed DEI policy in a managerial work setting, hopefully providing a new interesting and present topic of study specifically in the context of diversity-valuing behavior in the workplace. By building on our review of existing theories on gender, and because of how we identified the way stereotypes operate in contexts of diversity-valuing behavior, we argue that judgments of an individual’s contributions to DEI will be affected by the gender of the individual who is engaging in this behavior. The goal of our study is to identify more simplistically if the correlation between gender and these outcomes exists and whether a significant difference exists between the two groups’ ratings for their case. Therefore, we ask the following research question: *When an employee proposes a new DEI policy in the workplace, how does their gender affect perceived work competence and perceived success of the policy proposal?*

The present study will contribute to the existing literature by providing a quantitative analysis of perceived bias of leader competence and perceived success of a diversity proposal.

We expect findings to adhere to the Role Congruity Theory of prejudice toward female leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002) that assumes women tend to be evaluated as less competent than men because of individuals' negative perceptions resulting from the incongruity of female gender with leader-like attributes. The lack of Fit Model (Heilman, 1983) also builds on our expectations by identifying a lack of fit for women leaders in this position. We propose two potential mechanisms that align with these theories.

First, displaying behavior that supports diversity, equity, and inclusion is likely to highlight a woman's identity and activate stereotypes about her, thereby lowering perceptions of her competence as a leader. Research has shown that certain characteristics, such as motherhood (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008) and physical attractiveness (Heilman & Stopeck, 1985), tend to amplify perceptions of women's femininity. We expect that diversity-valuing behavior may have a similar effect, given women's association with this type of behavior.

Second, women who champion diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives may be seen as self-serving, an attribution that would be incongruent with stereotypes of what women should be like. Misconceptions exist about DEI in organizations, with many perceiving it as a zero-sum game — a bias that ultimately contributes to men's reluctance to “engage in gender equity conversations” (Roy et al., 2020). Specifically, some believe that attempts at equity benefit women and minorities while disadvantaging men and other dominant group members (Brown & Jacoby-Senghor, 2021; Norton & Sommers, 2011). Assuming that people hold this belief, they may perceive a woman who advocates for DEI as attempting to serve her own interests.

Furthermore, we build our argument on the latest study from Hekman et al. (2017), who found that female leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are penalized with worse performance ratings, whereas male leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are not

penalized for doing so. Ultimately, we seek to test whether the theories and studies just discussed are still relevant to today's political and social climate and changes in the workplace relevant to DEI. The following hypotheses are based on evaluating a leader's work competence and the perceived success of diversity policy:

H1. *Male leaders will be seen as more competent than female leaders when they propose diversity initiatives in the workplace.*

H2. *When male leaders propose a DEI plan, the plan proposed will be viewed as having a better chance of success than when a female leader proposes it.*

Methodology

Study Design

To test the hypotheses of the present study, an online experiment was conducted. The experiment used a between-subject design, with the gender of the leader being our single independent variable (*male or female employee*). The gender of the leader was manipulated, which resulted in two conditions: a female leader, named Julia, and a male leader named John. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two scenarios in which the only changing variable was the leader implementing the policy. Everything else was held constant.

Participants and Materials

76 participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Based on our search criteria, all participants resided in the United States and were over 18 years of age. The sample size was 44.64% ($n = 25$) *female*, 55.36% ($n = 31$) *male*, 0% ($n = 0$) *non-binary/third gender*, and 0% ($n = 0$) *prefer not to say*. Their mean age was 32.2 years ($SD = 7.23$). 22% ($n = 17$) of participants were employed full-time, 66% ($n = 50$) were employed part-time, and 12% ($n = 9$) were not working (see Appendix A). In total, 38 participants reviewed the scenario with John as

the employee proposing the policy, and 38 participants reviewed the scenario with Julia as the employee proposing the policy.

Procedure

The study was completed online through Qualtrics. Participants were shown a short and general introduction, which explained the aim of the study and provided the contact information of the researchers and director. Furthermore, a consent form was provided that explained that all data was anonymous and that participation in the study was voluntary. When not willing to sign the form, participants were thanked for their time and the experiment was concluded. When participants agreed to participate in the study, they were directed to the next page that briefly explained the procedure of the experiment. By stating “I agree to read and evaluate the employee and their DEI proposal,” participants were directed to begin the study and read the proposed scenario (see Appendix A).

We first provided some background information on the employee’s leadership position (*Managing Director*), informing of their recent hire, workplace setting (*local business consulting firm*), and information about the team under their supervision (*a team of 8 men and 2 women*). The name of the employee was displayed multiple times, both at the beginning of the sentence and later when presenting the DEI plan. Their gender was identified in sentences with pronouns such as “she” or “he” repeatedly. The DEI plan was divided into paragraphs, with the statement of purpose at the beginning, and then several bullet points describing what the program was going to be about and how it would be implemented in the workplace.

After asking participants to identify the topic of the proposed plan, we asked them to answer questions related to the *importance of DEI, leadership effectiveness* and *work competence* of the employee/leader proposing the plan, whether the employee would be *the right*

person to implement the policy, and their *perceived success* of the proposed plan in the future. Participants were asked a total of 7 questions related to the scenario that included manipulation checks and the dependent measures, as well as 3 more final questions about demographic information, such as age, gender, and employment status (see Appendix B).

Measures

Perceived work competence and *perceived success of the DEI policy* were the primary dependent measures. Both measures used a 5-point Likert scale. *Perceived work competence* was assessed through an item that asked, “After reading the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion proposal, I believe the employee who wrote the proposal is a very competent worker” (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Perceived success of the DEI policy was assessed by asking, “How successful do you think the plan will be?” (1 = not at all successful; very successful). Appendix B contains a list of all questions included in the survey.

Results

Manipulation and Attention Checks

After reading about the leader’s background and proposal, participants were asked two questions to assess their attention and their understanding of the manipulation. To check whether the gender of the leaders was manipulated successfully, participants were asked to recall the name of the employee in a multiple-choice question. Specifically, participants were asked, “What is the name of the employee who proposed the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan?”

In the condition of the female leader (Julia), 94% ($n = 36$) of participants correctly identified the leader’s name. In the male leader condition, 76% ($n = 28$) of participants correctly identified the leader's male. Another question was included to assess participants’ attention. This

question asked, “What was the topic of the proposed plan?” Of the participants who passed the manipulation check, 100% correctly answered the question regarding the topic of the proposed plan (see Appendix B). Thus, in total, 12 of the original 76 participants were removed from the analyses due to failing the manipulation and attention checks, leaving the final sample size as 64 participants.

T-test

A *t-test* was used to compare the means of the two groups for each scenario. We used this statistical test for our hypothesis testing to determine whether gender has an effect on the sample of interest and their responses and whether there is a significant difference. As a type of inferential statistic, we assume our dependent variables (*competence, perceived success of proposal*) fit a normal distribution. When we assume a normal distribution exists, we can identify the probability of a particular outcome. The accepted alpha level, or level of significance, used was $p < .05$. After we collected our data, we calculated a test statistic. We then compared our test statistic with a critical value found on a table to see if our results fall within the acceptable level of probability. The exact probability of obtaining that test statistic with the number of subjects was automatically provided by our computer programs.

Findings

Perceived work competence. An inspection of the two conditions (see Figure 1) reveals that perceived worker competence was about the same for women ($M = 4.22, SD = .79$) and men ($M = 4.10, SD = .73$). Thus, contrary to Hypothesis 1, results of an independent samples t-test suggest that there was no significant difference between the perceived work competence of the male and female leader, $t(62) = 0.59, p = .56$.

Perceived success of the DEI policy. An inspection of the two conditions (see Figure 2) reveals that the perceived success of the DEI proposal was about the same for women ($M = 4.22$, $SD = .79$) and men ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .73$). An independent samples t-test indicated that there was no significant difference between the perceived success of the DEI policy when the person proposing it was a man or woman, $t(62) = .97$, $p = .33$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

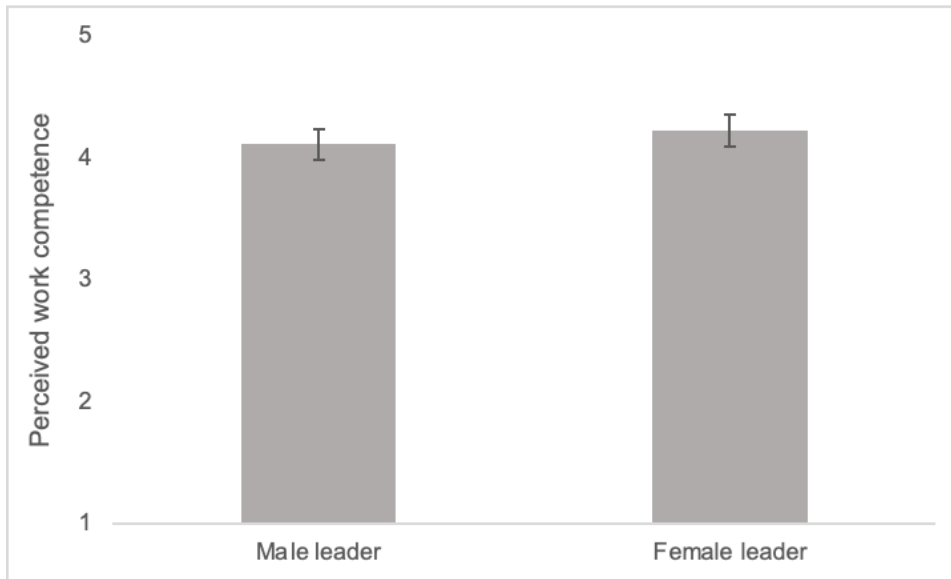


Figure 1: Graphical representation of the differences between gender for perceived work competence

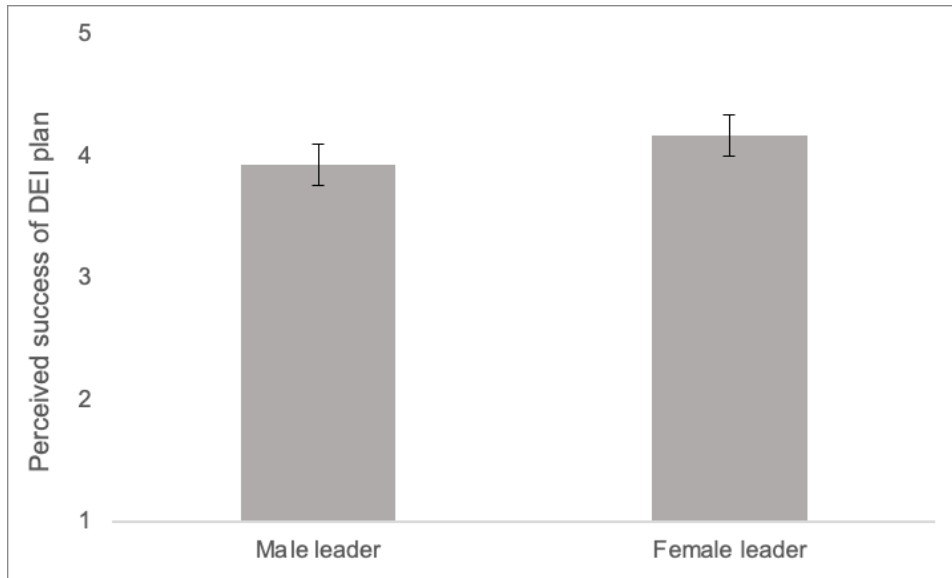


Figure 2: Graphical representation of the differences between gender for perceived success of the DEI plan

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

These findings have important theoretical implications. While there are many studies documenting how gender affects work competence and leadership perceptions in the workplace by highlighting the causes of women's discrimination and underrepresentation, the present study offers new insights into the expectations individuals have for female and male leaders specifically in diversity-valuing behavior contexts. The goal of the present study was to examine the influence of gender on participants' evaluations of perceived work competence for female and male leaders, and the perceived success of a DEI proposal. Based on relevant theories such as Social Role Theory, Role Congruity Theory, and Lack of Fit Model, (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983) it was argued that women tend to be evaluated as less competent than men because of individuals' negative perceptions resulting from the incongruity of female

gender with leader-like attributes. However, we also took into consideration other findings that state that female leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are penalized with worse performance ratings compared to male leaders who engage in it (Hekman, et al., 2017), partly because of the attribution of self-serving bias that women may have when they are seen engaging in this type of behavior. Although contrarily to our hypothesis there was no significant difference between men's and women's ratings of perceived competence and success of the proposal, women's performance ratings ended up being slightly higher compared to men for both tested measures, as reflected by comparing the two groups' statistical means. This tells us that, by using a larger sample size, we could have potentially found a more significance difference in seeing that female leaders are actually favored positively when engaging in DEI than men are. Our findings, perhaps, inform existing literature that diversity-valuing behavior is attributed as being closer to females' gender attributes and roles than male leaders' attributes. Uncovering this mechanism is a novel contribution, as previous research has focused on examining how lower performance ratings might result from female leader's perceived incongruity with the leadership role. In our case, we find relevant the context of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as an important moderator to our results, and we think that this can be used as a basis for more studies to come and look at past theories in a more modern light while organizations keep changing and shaping this new context.

Limitations

Like all research, our study has some limitations. We identified some factors and potential causes that explain why our results did not support our hypotheses. By looking at the study design, the scenario we provided to participants with the employee's personal background and description of their proposed DEI plan lacks some important information. Using a more

detailed description of employee as a leader, perhaps mentioning their past performance, and/or other attributes and characteristics of their attitude and behavior could have made participants as more capable to make judgements on the leader's performance. Perhaps, mentioning female or male leader-like attributes that we have already defined from previous research, could have provided with different and maybe more significant results and differences. The scenario that was used and the questions asked also focused on DEI as the main focus of the study, which could have taken away the attention of the participants when thinking about the leader's competence and effectiveness. Indeed, through the manipulation check, few sampling had to be removed relative to their responses on who was the employee that implemented the policy. Perhaps, inserting a more detailed description of the leader's role attributes and traits as a male or female employee could have changed the perception of participants. A relative small sample size collected also influenced our results, as we recognize that to find more significant differences, a larger sample size could have been collected.

Moderators and Future Research

Despite the limitations, we find relevant for the scope of our project to analyze the importance of some moderators in our study that can provide input for future research. The introduction of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as a new leadership context proves to be a factor in influencing the way women are perceived and rated in work and leadership competence in the workplace. In our study, the first question we asked after participants reviewed their given scenario, was to rate the important of DEI in the workplace. While our findings revealed that most participants agree that DEI is important in the workplace, differences in these responses can moderate the way men and women will be seen as leaders when implementing these types of policies. The same can apply to the work context and setting we provided when describing our

scenario. In our study, we only chose to use one independent variable (gender), and hold everything else constant. However, studies with multiple factorial designs can provide more context and case scenarios and ultimately increase the variability of results. For example, we mentioned how Julia and John were both managing a team of “8 men and 2 women” (see Appendix A). Perhaps, this can be too seen as a moderator and a future study can test whether there would be a difference if the team or board was made of more women than men, or of just one gender, in the same context of DEI. Same applies to the industry, whether it would be a male-dominated field like engineering, technology, or professions that are more associated with women than men (e.g., child care). Another important moderator to consider is the gender of the participants that rated our study. As also mentioned in our results, our study had a total sample size of 25 female participants and 31 male participants. A change in this number, perhaps, could report differences in the way individual men and women rate another man and woman in a leadership position.

Conclusion

Our study brings important conclusions, revealing that despite its limitations, women may be indeed rated more favorably in terms of leadership competence and performance when they are in the context of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Considering that most of our participants rated DEI policies as important to have in the workplace, the fact that women were rated slightly higher and more favorably than men can tell us that diversity-valuing behavior may perhaps be associated as more suitable for women than men in a leadership context. However, this also brings up an important issue that lots of workplaces around the world are facing today, which is the fact that men are now being less involved when it comes to engage in diversity valuing behavior or they see themselves as neutral when it comes to make judgements. In fact,

according to McKinsey and Company's annual report of *Women in the Workplace 2021*, women leaders "are doing more than men in similar positions in supporting the people on their teams" and also "spend more time than men on DEI work that falls outside their formal job responsibilities, such as supporting employee resource groups and recruiting employees from underrepresented groups" (Burns, et al., 2021). This is interesting to see as our study demonstrates it. Perhaps, organizations should shift the discourse to recognize women for their abilities, experience, and skills rather than branding them as "diversity trophies." (Froehlicher, et al. 2021). On the other side, companies and organizations around the world need to find a way to have more men involved in diversity-valuing behavior and make them aware that they can also be apart in the changing and decision-making process. Perhaps, this will further help eliminating bias associated with a certain role or position that makes us believe only either men or women are suited for.

Companies, their executives, and employees will be ultimately the ones responsible to establish which organizational culture they want to implement, and this is often affected by each individual's bias in the decision-making process. Science-based research and organization's practices are often a mismatch because there is a lack of willingness to apply certain policies and educate those who contribute to the overall organizational culture. As far as resolving the issue of women's underrepresentation in leadership, while increasing the proportion of women on the board is important, further steps can also be taken to improve gender equality in the overall workforce. Companies need to hire and promote more women into senior management positions, including high and middle management. This not only presents opportunities for companies to bring more innovation and talent but it will in turn ensure that these women can have the adequate skill sets and required experience to be eventually appointed as board members,

enabling companies to reach their quotas and align with the increasing number of regulations around the percentage of women on corporate boards. Consequently, “investing in women's talent early on [can diminish] regulatory risks down the line” (Froehlicher, et al., 2021). Having more women in leadership will also diminish the biases and negative stereotypes around women’s ability to lead, hopefully addressing issues around unequal pay and gender pay gaps. The opportunities that gender equality can bring to the workforce will enable companies to differentiate themselves from their peers in a competitive environment.

Finally, we hope that this research and analysis can lead more scholars to explore different and more modern context of study such as DEI in the workplace, and that this creates room for new hypothesis and theories by building on our errors and limitations, but taking it overall as a good input and insight.

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Appendix A

Survey Transcript

Participants were presented with a background scenario followed by some questions. Blocks 2.1 and 2.2 were manipulated with the name of the employee, which identifies their gender as our single factorial and independent variable.

Block 1: Consent Form

This study concerns how people respond to workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. During this study you will be asked to read a short scenario and a profile of an employee trying to implement a new DEI policy. After reading the person's background description and his/her proposal, you will be asked to answer some questions concerning your thoughts and attitudes toward this person and their DEI proposal.

Block 2: Randomizer

Block 2.1 Female

Julia was recently hired as a Management Director in a local business consulting firm. Her responsibilities include managing a team of 8 men and 2 women. After a couple of months working there, she noticed that no one in the company has ever been responsible for updating diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in the workplace. At the next board meeting with all of the company's leadership present, she proposes his own new program. The proposal's plan and roadmap include the following:

Julia's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan

Statement of Purpose and Best Practices: This proposed plan was developed to embody the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as align with the strategic objectives of our department. This work is necessary to improve outcomes for employees,

communities, stakeholders, and customers by addressing inequities at a systemic level.

Upon implementation, the program will:

- Design policies, practices, and strategies that result in fair and equitable opportunities for everyone.
- Improve understanding and mutual respect among employees and customers.
- Maintain a safe workplace from gender discrimination.
- Boost employee morale, professional development, and retention.
- Encourage multiple perspectives to ensure creative problem solving.
- Build a recruiting program that employs a diverse workforce with diverse backgrounds, eliminates bias in candidate's evaluations, and examines gender pay gaps.

Block 2.2: Male

John was recently hired as a Management Director in a local business consulting firm.

His responsibilities include managing a team of 8 men and 2 women. After a couple of months working there, he noticed that no one in the company has ever been responsible for updating diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in the workplace. At the next board meeting with all of the company's leadership present, he proposes his own new program.

The proposal's plan and roadmap include the following:

John's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan

Statement of Purpose and Best Practices: This proposed plan was developed to embody the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as align with the strategic objectives of our department. This work is necessary to improve outcomes for employees,

communities, stakeholders, and customers by addressing inequities at a systemic level.

Upon implementation, the program will:

- Design policies, practices, and strategies that result in fair and equitable opportunities for everyone.
- Improve understanding and mutual respect among employees and customers.
- Maintain a safe workplace from gender discrimination.
- Boost employee morale, professional development, and retention.
- Encourage multiple perspectives to ensure creative problem solving.
- Build a recruiting program that employs a diverse workforce with diverse backgrounds, eliminates bias in candidate's evaluations, and examines gender pay gaps.

Appendix B

Survey Questions

Block 3: DVs

Q.1 What was the topic of the proposed plan?

Q.2 Based on what you read about the proposed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan, how important do you think it is for a company to have such program in the workplace?

Q.3 After reading the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion proposal, I believe the employee who proposed it would be a very effective leader.

Q.4 After reading the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion proposal, I believe the employee who wrote the proposal is a very competent worker.

Q.5 The person in the scenario is the right person to propose the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion program.

Q.6 How successful do you think the plan will be?

Q.7 What is the name of the employee who proposed the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan?

Block 4: Demographic Information

Q.1. What is your age?

Q.2. Which gender do you identify the most with?

Q.3. What is your current employment status?