



THE DOUBLE-BIND DILEMMA FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don't

The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don't is part of a Catalyst series examining barriers to women's advancement. Sponsored by IBM Corporation, this report highlights responses to questions asked in two previous Catalyst studies, [Women "Take Care," Men "Take Charge:" Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed](#) and [Different Cultures, Similar Perceptions: Stereotyping of Western European Business Leaders](#). The Double-Bind report explores the contours of the misleading beliefs and provides examples and anecdotes through in-depth interviews with working women.

Gender stereotypes can create several predicaments for women leaders. Because they are often evaluated against a "masculine" standard of leadership, women are left with limited and unfavorable options, no matter how they behave and perform as leaders. The study focuses specifically on three predicaments, all of which put women in a double bind and can potentially undermine their leadership.

Predicament 1: Extreme Perceptions Too Soft, Too Tough, and Never Just Right

When women act in ways that are consistent with gender stereotypes, they are viewed as less competent leaders. When women act in ways that are inconsistent with such stereotypes, they are considered unfeminine.

Predicament 2: The High Competence Threshold

Women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than male leaders. Respondents' comments revealed that women leaders are subjected to higher competency standards. On top of doing their job, women must prove that they can lead over and over again and constantly manage stereotypical expectations.

Predicament 3: Competent but Disliked

Women leaders are perceived as competent or liked, but rarely both. Respondents' comments revealed that when women behave in ways that are traditionally valued for men leaders (e.g., assertively), they are viewed as more competent. However, they are also perceived as not as effective interpersonally as women who adopt a more stereotypically feminine style.

Catalyst's distinctive blend of research and strategic consulting expertise provide unique perspectives about making change and managing it successfully. Additionally, member and non-member organizations that would like help getting unstuck can take advantage of the [Catalyst Speakers Bureau](#) (fees may apply), whereby our researchers, consultants, and executives create presentations tailored to an organization's needs.

Stay connected with Catalyst on [Catalyzing](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#) to be the first to hear about our latest research reports, get links to relevant articles, take part in topical discussions, watch videos, network, and share stories with other members.

About Catalyst

Founded in 1962, Catalyst is the leading nonprofit membership organization working globally with businesses and the professions to build inclusive workplaces and expand opportunities for women and business. With offices in the United States, Canada, and Europe, and more than 400 preeminent corporations as members, Catalyst is the trusted resource for research, information, and advice about women at work. Catalyst annually honors exemplary organizational initiatives that promote women's advancement with the Catalyst Award.

