

THE DOUBLE-BIND DILEMMA FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Damned if you do, doomed if you don't.
Too soft. Too tough. Never just right.



GENDER STEREOTYPES CREATE A NO-WIN SITUATION FOR WOMEN LEADERS

STEREOTYPE



Men Take Charge

- Strong
- Decisive
- Assertive

DOUBLE-BIND

When women **take charge**, they are viewed as competent leaders—but disliked.



Women Take Care

- Nurturing
- Emotional
- Communicative

When women **take care**, they are liked—but viewed as less competent leaders.

RESULT

Women leaders are seen as competent or likeable, but rarely both.



THE "THINK LEADER, THINK MALE" MINDSET CREATES AN INVISIBLE BARRIER FOR WOMEN

Women spend additional time during work hours:

Proving they are competent leaders, again and again.

Monitoring, and compensating for, stereotypical perceptions of them as leaders.



Women leaders are held to a higher standard for competency and often reap smaller rewards than men.



Women leaders work twice as hard as men for the same recognition.

RESULT

It's time to redefine what it means to be a leader to increase opportunities for women at all levels, in all professions, and in all walks of life.

GENDER STEREOTYPES CAN HARM MEN EMPLOYEES TOO

Catalyst research found that masculine traits can become the default expectation for the behavior of all employees. When men feel high pressure to act in line with masculine stereotypes as the only way to be successful at work, more than two-thirds experienced low psychological well being.¹



STRATEGIES FOR DISMANTLING THE DOUBLE-BIND



Interrupt bias. Speak up if you notice colleagues using words that reinforce negative gender stereotypes. Phrases such as "she is abrasive," "she's so emotional," or "she talks too much" can undermine a woman's perceived competence and ability to lead.



Use the same standards for people of all genders when formally evaluating employees. Challenge your thinking by reversing the gender of the person you're evaluating to see if it makes a difference in your language and assessment.



Be a visible champion. Promote the accomplishments of women and actively advocate for their development and advancement. You will serve as a powerful role model for others to do the same.

Sources:

The double-bind dilemma for women in leadership: *Damned if you do, doomed if you don't: Report.* (2007). Catalyst; *Flexible masculinities at work: Infographic.* (2023). Catalyst.

1. [Flexible masculinities at work: Infographic.](#) (2023). Catalyst.