



Girls work in teams. Boys take it on themselves

Eighteen per cent of girls and nearly half of boys believe they are leaders.

New research on leadership in young boys and girls shows that gender differences are often established from a very young age. While the emphasis has sometimes been to try and change women to be like men in order for them to succeed at work, the research says we should be looking at how to bring female thinking and leadership into organisations. So how does leadership thinking and behaviour differ between the sexes?

Hilarie Owen, Executive Director of Renew, the Register of Executive and Non Executive Women, and founder of the Institute of Leadership, spent

two years talking to 5 - 18 year olds exploring leadership in young people. She found that children as young as 5 and 6 years said there was a difference between how girls and boys practice leadership. They said: "...Boys don't play with Barbie dolls....Girls become nurses and boys

fussy....Girls are too kind and loving. They need to be tougher..... Girls are weak and wimpish.....Girls are interested in make-up and how they look....."

The girls of the same age said: "Boys get into clubs.....Boys think of themselves.....They think of war and push their weight around....."

At age 10 -11 the youngsters said: "Boys are bossy.....Girls work in teams....Boys have physical strength.....Boys are only interested in winning....Girls stop and think.....Girls are more concerned with their appearance....Boys are action oriented....Girls have self doubt...In war men go straight in while girls think of the best way forward....."

This research helps us understand why women still have obstacles to overcome in their careers. There has been much emphasis on the external

'Do we want managers to all look and behave the same?'

become doctors....Boys want to be active and play at 'war' and girls want to talk and include everyone.."

At age 9 boys said: " Girls can be

issues such as organisational barriers, stereotyping and male chauvinism but we also have to understand internal barriers. When asked whether they considered themselves to be a leader, less than a fifth of girls said 'yes', compared to almost half of the boys.

The most consistent reason for not being a leader from the girls was: "I'm not bossy." Being a leader was perceived as a negative image for most young girls. However, this was also an issue for many boys but not because of self-image, rather their barrier was fear of responsibility and taking on work that was too hard.

Do these findings change with older children? The findings from age 11 to 18 remained consistent. Girls said: "Boys are tough, girls are usually soft... Boys want to start World War Three, girls like to play gently... Girls stick at things... Girls stop and think, boys just go straight into something... Boys want war, girls don't... Boys fight, girls try to reason... Girls try to make friends with the group they are leading, boys just get on with it... Girls work as a team, boys tend to take it on by themselves... Girls think more and are calmer... "

Boys said: "Boys like action, girls are more into their appearance... Boys are stronger than girls... Boys will get in a fight, girls use words... Boys follow one, girls decide in groups... Boys are braver... Boys are more direct, girls think more... Girls are less confident, boys are more competitive..."

In this older age group it wasn't unusual for boys to say they

'Boys fear responsibility and taking on hard work.'

preferred the female way of leadership but not one girl said she preferred the way boys lead. When the study included girls' private schools, it was found that, although the girls were more confident, the majority still did not consider themselves to be leaders. However, girls in private schools are far more

likely to believe that leadership can be learned.

Leadership for girls is more about relationships with those they lead, while boys perceive leadership as expressing themselves in a certain way. We see this throughout the workplace and the research has shown that we need organisations and leadership development that allows for gender differences. Do we want managers to all look and behave the same? In a fast changing, global world we need leadership diversity more than ever before. Where women are included in senior positions, their male colleagues say the women bring both fresh, new perspectives and passion. If women can express their leadership skills, it will improve their output and results, providing a competitive advantage. Isn't it about time we valued our differences rather than tried to diffuse them?

The research is available in full from either the Institute of Leadership or RENEW.
www.instituteofleadership.co.uk
or www.renewuk.com



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