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White Paper:

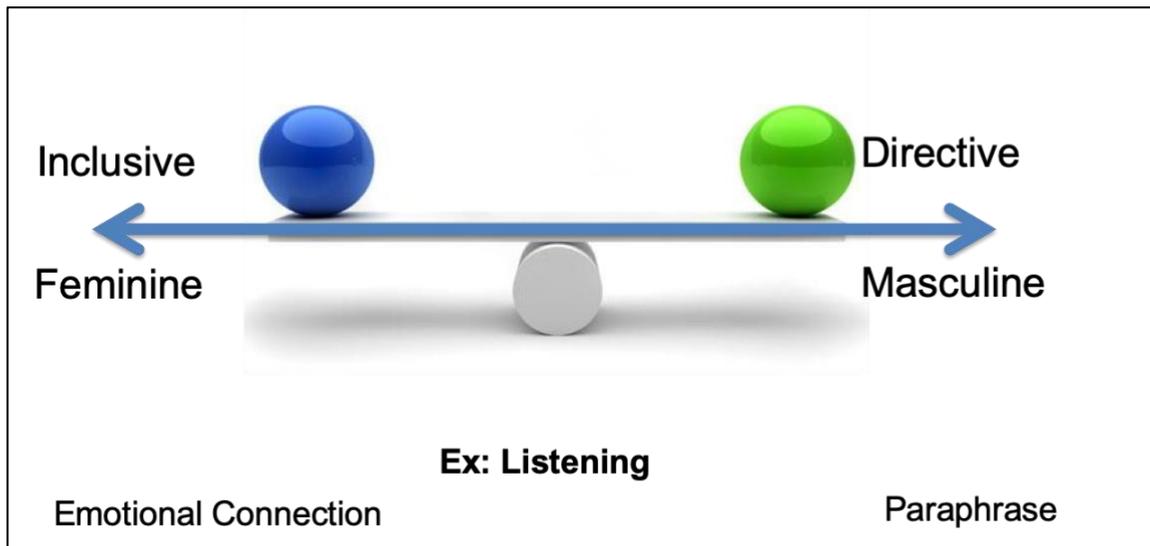
Great Leadership Transcends Gender

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For leaders to be effective, they need to be able to engage, motivate, and empower many different audiences. Great leaders can speak to a room of thousands and simultaneously speak directly to each person. Great leaders can modulate their behaviors to maximize their impact depending upon each circumstance. And, they can be male or female—great leadership transcends gender. If it transcends gender, then what are the traits of effective leadership no matter if a leader is male or female?

We undertook research to understand how gender and leadership behaviors play a role in how a leader is perceived and, thus, how effective he or she is. The research showed that the most effective leaders need to be fluid in how they respond and manifest their leadership abilities. We researched the effectiveness of a leader's ability along the spectrum of behavior from Inclusive to Directive. The Inclusive style is representative of traditionally feminine styles of leadership such as driving for consensus and avoiding conflict. Traditional masculine behaviors, such as driving decisions and quickly offering an opinion, represent the Directive behavioral style.

We identified that the most effective leaders are those who are able to switch back and forth between Inclusive and Directive styles of leadership. One of the objectives of labeling these behaviors Inclusive or Directive is to move past the stigma of masculine and feminine labels. When looking at leadership behavior through the continuum of Inclusive and Directive, we seek the possibility of there soon being a world where we can transcend the gender bias and stereotypes, and create a future where leadership is genderless.



Both Genders Get Labeled

Of course, both male and female leaders are labeled as poor leaders when they display behaviors that are not effective. What we have observed through leadership development and executive coaching, and confirmed through our research, is what happens when both genders exhibit behaviors that are viewed as extreme—too inclusive or directive on too many dimensions of leadership (e.g., strategic thinking, inspirational vision, self-confidence, conflict resolution, emotional control). These leaders undermine their success and ability to lead. For example, male and female leaders who are too Directive (or masculine) on too many dimensions of leadership, such as willingness to make tough decisions, drive for execution, and create tension in relationships, are labeled as a jerk for men and bossy for women.

Similarly, when male and female leaders are too Inclusive (or feminine) on too many dimensions of leadership, such as being consensus driven, too willing to listen, and eager to make everyone happy, he is labeled a pushover, and she is labeled a wallflower. Poor leadership is poor leadership no matter what gender. This behavioral continuum is important in understanding what actions undermine a leader and then identifying new attitudes and behaviors leaders can take to grow.

Truly effective leadership is transcendent of gender. This requires leaders to:

- Be aware of where they are on the behavioral continuum of directiveness and inclusivity;
- Vary their style and behavior to be better suited to the environment and situations where they find themselves; and
- Gain mastery in the skills/behaviors that are more effective.

Regardless of gender, effective leaders have balanced behaviors. That is, they are able to demonstrate all parts of the continuum between being Directive and Inclusive depending on what the situation calls for instead of being stuck on one end all the time.

This is not to suggest that bias does not exist. We have a general preference for male and female leaders to act a certain way. Research conducted by our company, [Skyline Group International, Inc.](#), found a significantly lower perception of effectiveness when women express the masculine behavior in 57 percent of the 28 leadership competencies studied. In comparison, men were perceived as significantly less effective when taking the feminine approach in 39 percent of the 28 competencies.

What's more, female peers may be the most critical of women who adopt Directive (or masculine) traits. For 43 percent of the competencies where women express the Directive version of the trait, only women rated other women as less effective. This effect seems to be decreasing by age bracket and generation. In other words, younger women are less critical of women who exhibit Directive behaviors than older women are. That means we are moving in the right direction.

The Leadership Continuum Among Leadership Competencies

Leadership traits are typically associated with either a Directive or Inclusive competency. But in reality, there is another dimension: a Directive and Inclusive *expression* that can be manifested for each leadership competency.

For example, the competency and skill set of listening is often seen as an Inclusive competency. And there is both an Inclusive and a Directive expression of listening. The Directive expression of listening is for content and clarity, which enable the leader to repeat back and paraphrase. The Inclusive expression of listening is to connect emotionally and reflect back the feeling the other person is experiencing.

According to our research, both men and women agreed that there are significant and recognizable behaviors that represent Inclusive versus Directive expression of 27 out of the 28 competencies included in the study. Our survey participants rated more than 70 percent of leadership competencies, both Directive and Inclusive expressions, as equally effective. Meaning, leaders would be more effective by just demonstrating these competencies, regardless of whether it was showing up as Inclusive or Directive. However, there were eight competencies that were more effective when expressed either in the Directive or Inclusive form regardless of gender.

Becoming a Balanced Leader

There is a now roadmap for both male and female leaders to be effective. Our study found that regardless of gender, two competencies are most effective when demonstrated in a Directive manner, and six competencies are most effective when expressed in an Inclusive manner.

The two competencies that are best used in a Directive manner are Inspirational Vision and Strategic Thinking. The research suggests that leaders need to be clear about the direction of the organization (Inspirational Vision), where it is headed, and how to get there (Strategic Direction). This does not suggest that leaders need to tell others how to do their job, but to be able to articulate the steps in the roadmap for how to get to the end goal.

Among the six Inclusive competencies, there are also themes that emerge. The first theme that emerges is being comfortable in yourself. They include:

- Emotional Control by sharing appropriate levels of emotions instead of being stoic;
- Self-Confidence by letting the work speak for itself as opposed to boasting; and
- Demonstrating Executive Presence through poise and authenticity instead of demanding respect.

This suggests that effective leaders should demonstrate a calm, present nature, be able to articulate how they feel, and show up in a way that is authentic, humble, and vulnerable.

The second theme is creating the space for conversation. Specifically, the Inclusive expression of Conflict Resolution is creating the space for dialogue and differences in

opinion instead of letting the best argument and the loudest voice win. The Inclusive expression of Creativity is represented by being the leader who puts forth an idea to let the team question it, explore alternatives, and provide their own ideas, which makes the end product even better. This suggests that to be more effective, leaders need to be able to create the space for there to be dialogue and exploration for conflict to be resolved and better ideas to emerge.

The last theme and competency where the Inclusive expression is more effective is Entrepreneurship. The inclusive expression of Entrepreneurship is about having backup plans and taking appropriate risk as opposed to focusing on the one big bet. This is in alignment with the Directive expression of Strategic Thinking, which is about thinking five steps ahead. This suggests that leaders not only need to provide direction as to where the team is going (Inspirational Vision) and how to get there (Strategic Thinking), but also to include backup plans (Entrepreneurship).

Therefore, the three main findings suggest that leaders need to:

- Be Directive when it comes to company objectives and how to get there;
- Be Inclusive by being authentic and sharing how they feel; and
- Be Inclusive by creating the space for there to be dialogue with their team.

For leaders and companies looking to support and develop their leaders and become more effective, the path to greater balance and thus effectiveness begins by first taking a 360 self-assessment to understand where you are on the continuum. Understanding whether you are being too Inclusive or too Directive is the first step. Then identify what competencies you need to refine to be more effective. After that, set goals to practice behaviors that are approximately Inclusive or Directive. Share what you are working on with peers, your manager, and others whose insight you value. Check in with them to get their feedback on the behaviors you are refining.

Leaders now have a road map for how to be balanced and situational in their approach. The future we have to look forward to is a world in which gender will not matter. What will matter—and matters now—is how a leader is able to move back and forth across the Inclusive and Directive continuum to demonstrate maximum effectiveness in leadership.

BIO: *Thuy Sindell is president of Skyline Group International, the leading provider of scalable leadership solutions with a foundation built upon decades of executive coaching with some of the most recognized companies in the world. Skyline is revolutionizing the leadership development industry with the C4X coaching platform. C4X is the only coaching solution that gives you the ability to develop all leaders consistently and systematically from onboarding to executive development. C4X combines a flexible and mobile technology platform (integrated assessment, personalized content, metrics, and coach management system) with the impact and connection of 1:1 coaching. Learn more at www.SkylineG.com and www.C4X.com.*