

# Does gender matter in leadership? The difference between male and female leaders

By [Dr Nomvuselelo Songelwa](#)

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The difference between male and female leaders has been debated for decades. The pandemic has put this issue firmly in the spotlight again. But the truth is that we're living in difficult times, which can make effective leadership difficult, whether you are a man or a woman.



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Women have been faced with leadership challenges for years, making the current landscape less daunting for them.

When I was positioning myself as a strong female leader years ago, I had to navigate the complexities and dynamics of a predominantly White and male leadership landscape. The most important challenge I faced was that the people who reported to me were reluctant to take guidance from a woman.

The result? I made myself out to be much firmer than I wanted to be. After all, if you wanted to succeed, you needed to focus on compliance, productivity, and targets. We were socialised and schooled to believe that for you to be a good leader, you need to tick a few boxes. You must punish and control; you must drive sales and profits. At the time, I wanted to make sure I upped my game, and I wanted people to respect me for my work ethic. The focus was never on people. People issues were considered 'soft' issues.

## Delicate balance between masculine, feminine traits

Luckily, the situation evolved and so did I. Instead of focusing solely on targets, I embraced my femininity in leadership and started focusing a lot more on people and on communication. Today, the workplace is trying to find a delicate balance between masculine and feminine traits. Leadership is no longer defined by gender. Good leaders draw from both feminine and masculine leadership traits. That is what sets them apart and makes them exceptional.

As visionary Sadhguru aptly says: “Rather than trying to fit a woman into a man’s world, we must create a society where the masculine and feminine have an equal role to play.”

Today, after collectively having lived through a pandemic, the focus for leadership is still on productivity of course, but also on leading with love, embracing empathy, being compassionate and celebrating diversity.

As a result, we’ve seen the introduction of wellness programmes at work. Wellness programmes used to be one-day events driven by HR. Coaching was only for C-level executives, while middle management was left to its own devices without clear leadership. Today, most organisations are implementing coaching programmes for everyone who wants to grow and evolve up the ladder. Coaching has become a necessity.



If you want to get ahead, don't take an arm and a leg

Lucia Mabasa, pinpoint one 7 Apr 2022



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## Leadership comes from within

The realisation has started to sink in that leadership can’t be defined by external knowledge; it comes from within. Whether you are dealing with conflict management, effective communication, or even driving sales, personal development coaching will help you lead your team through it. If you lead a team, you need to start by leading yourself and understanding who you are.

The truth is that men and women are struggling with the same issues and insecurities as leaders. It doesn’t matter whether you are a man or a woman. If you embrace your inner strengths, you will be a confident and assertive leader who is true to who they are.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Nomvuselelo Songelwa is the managing director of Skofnom as well as the author of *Life Lessons of a Cattle Herder: Reflections from the Boardroom*.

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