

Perceived barriers to Female Leadership in the Innovative Enterprise

Clair Daly and Marie Fitzgibbon

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Three ways to break down the barriers to female leadership in innovation

Clair Daly and Marie Fitzgibbon set out a host of reasons why women are underrepresented in senior leadership – and some potential solutions

by Clair Daly and Marie Fitzgibbon | 31 August 2023



Agenda

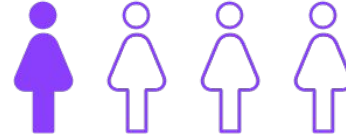
- Introduction
- Our current knowledge
- Research question
- Research methods
- Results
- Discussions and recommendations
- Conclusion

Introduction

- The number of women in middle management has increased in recent decades
- However, the number of women in Senior leadership positions remains remarkably low

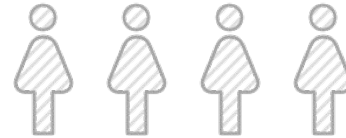
Fewer

women are in senior vice president, vice president, director, and manager roles



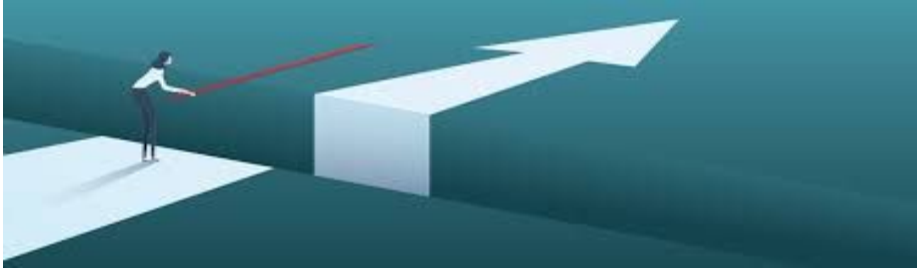
No change

in the number of women on boards and in the C-suite



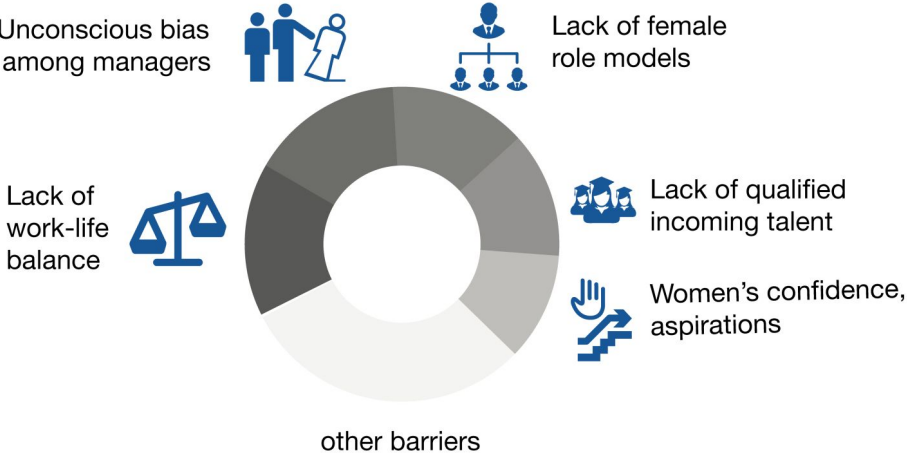
References

1. OAKLEY, J. G. 2000. Gender-Based Barriers to Senior Management Positions: Understanding the Scarcity of Female CEOs. *Journal of business ethics*, 27, 321-334.



- Several barriers prevent women from climbing the corporate ladder

Industries' barriers to hiring and promoting women



Source: Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum

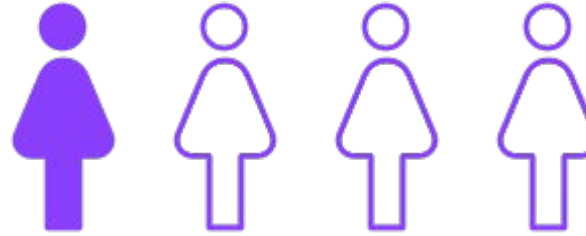
References

1. OAKLEY, J. G. 2000. Gender-Based Barriers to Senior Management Positions: Understanding the Scarcity of Female CEOs. *Journal of business ethics*, 27, 321-334.

- Innovation is at the core of our civilization
- While there are less women than men in senior leadership positions, there are even less opportunities for women in leading innovation
- Why is this?

Fewer

women are in senior vice president, vice president, director, and manager roles



Even **less** in innovative industries



References

1. EAGLY, A. H. 2007. Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage: Resolving the Contradictions. Psychology of women quarterly, 31, 1-12.

Our current knowledge

i. Female vs Male leadership styles



References

1. SINES, J. O. 1995. Measuring sex stereotypes – a multinational stud. NEW YORK: Plenum Publ. Corp.

ii. The gender component of leading innovation

- Team leaders have a strong effect on team innovation
- Women tend to be dismissed or undermined as effective innovators due to concerns around their leadership style




References

1. ROSA, J. A., QUALLS, W. J. & FUENTES, C. 2008. Involving mind, body, and friends: Management that engenders creativity. *Journal of business research*, 61, 631-639.
2. ZURAIK, A., KELLY, L. & PERKINS, V. 2020. Gender differences in innovation: the role of ambidextrous leadership of the team leads. *Management decision*, 58, 1475-1495.

Our research question

What are the barriers to female leadership in the innovative enterprise?



Are these barriers related to traits of female leadership that have a perceived negative impact on team innovation?

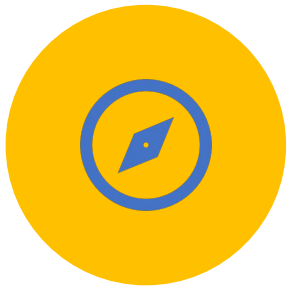
Research methods



Literature review



Quantitative &
Qualitative Methods

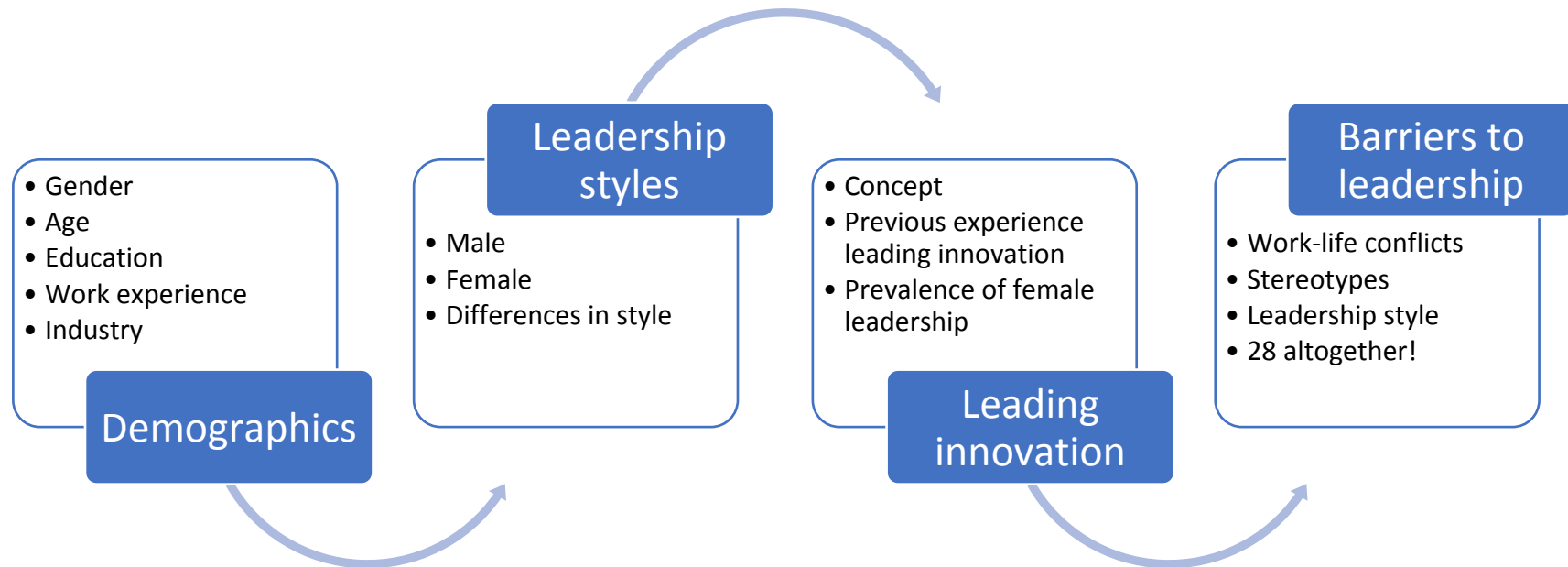


Survey



Interviews

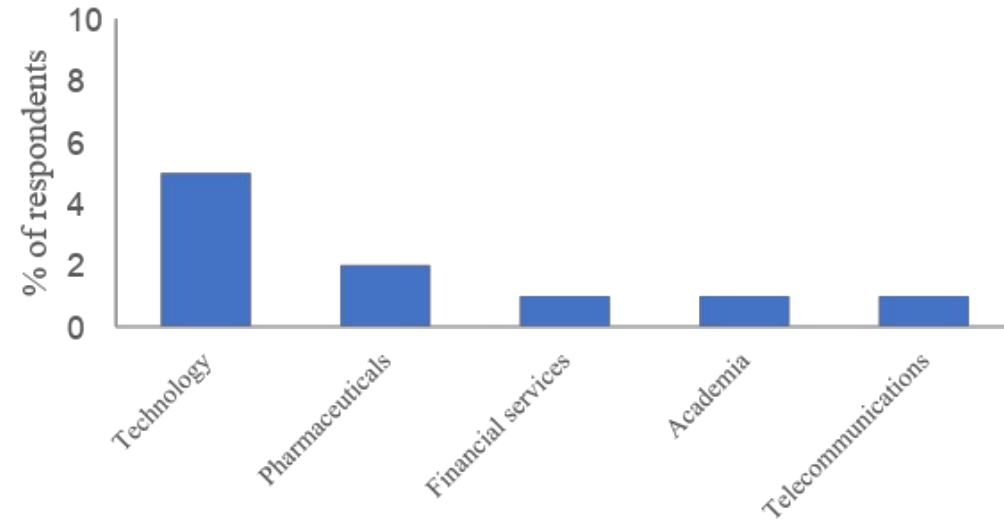
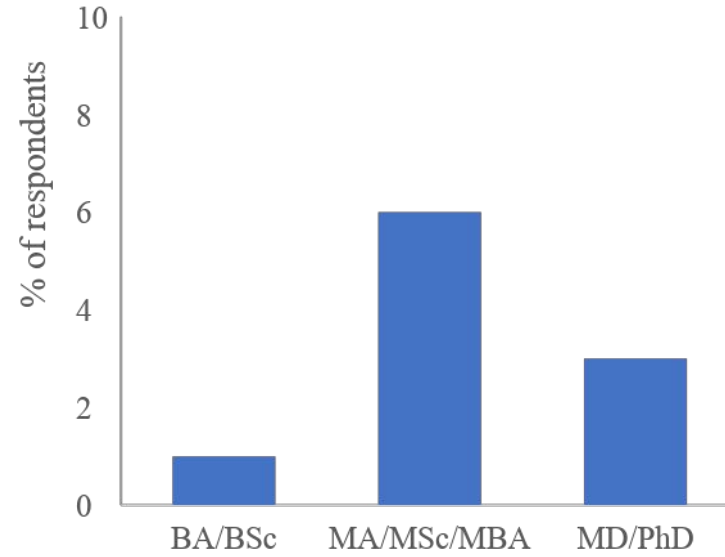
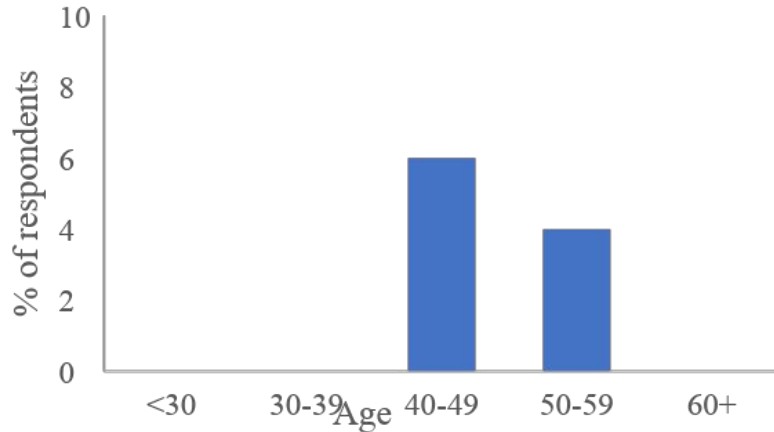
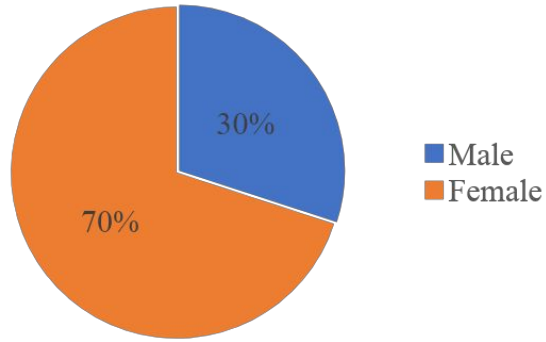
- Surveyed and interviewed **senior leaders** working in start-up, technology, telecommunications, research and development (R&D), and academia



• Known barriers to leadership positions for females

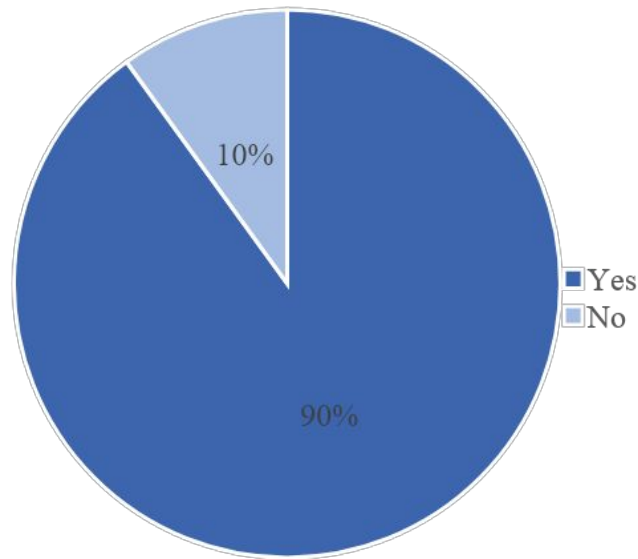
- Age
- Education
- Tradition
- Work-life balance
- Work-family conflict
- Glass ceiling effect
- Glass cliff effect
- Leadership labyrinth
- Queen bee syndrome
- Gender stereotypes
- Gender discrimination
- Gender gap
- Gender pay gap
- Gendered language i.e., lack usage of the 'Language of Leadership'
- Too humble
- A negative image of women in senior roles
- Lack of competitiveness
- Limited opportunities
- Culture
- Habitus or stereotypes
- Isolation
- Lack of executive sponsor
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of mentoring
- Lack of networking
- The 'Old Boy' network
- Leadership skills
- Other

Results - Demographics



Results – Leadership styles

- Do you think men and women lead differently?



- 90% males and females lead differently
 - '60% of the respondents thought female leaders to be 'nurturers'
- Male leaders 'tougher' 'edgier' 'transactional' and lead with a more 'directive style'

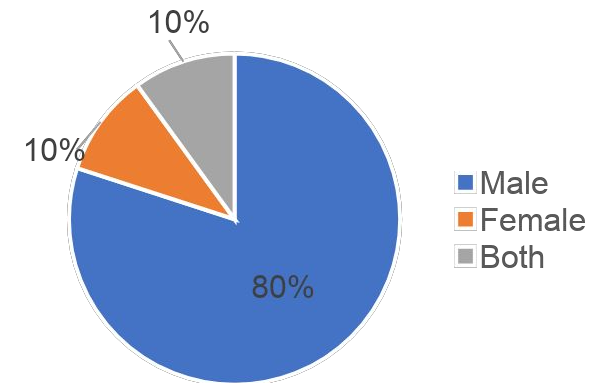
Results - Understanding of innovative leadership

Innovative leadership

'... requires a degree of flexibility, open mindedness ... work independently ... bring their own views and perspectives ... avoids a directorial style ... creating an environment where people can try things and not fear failure ... encourage experimentation in an environment of psychological safety'



Do leaders of innovative teams tend to be male or female?



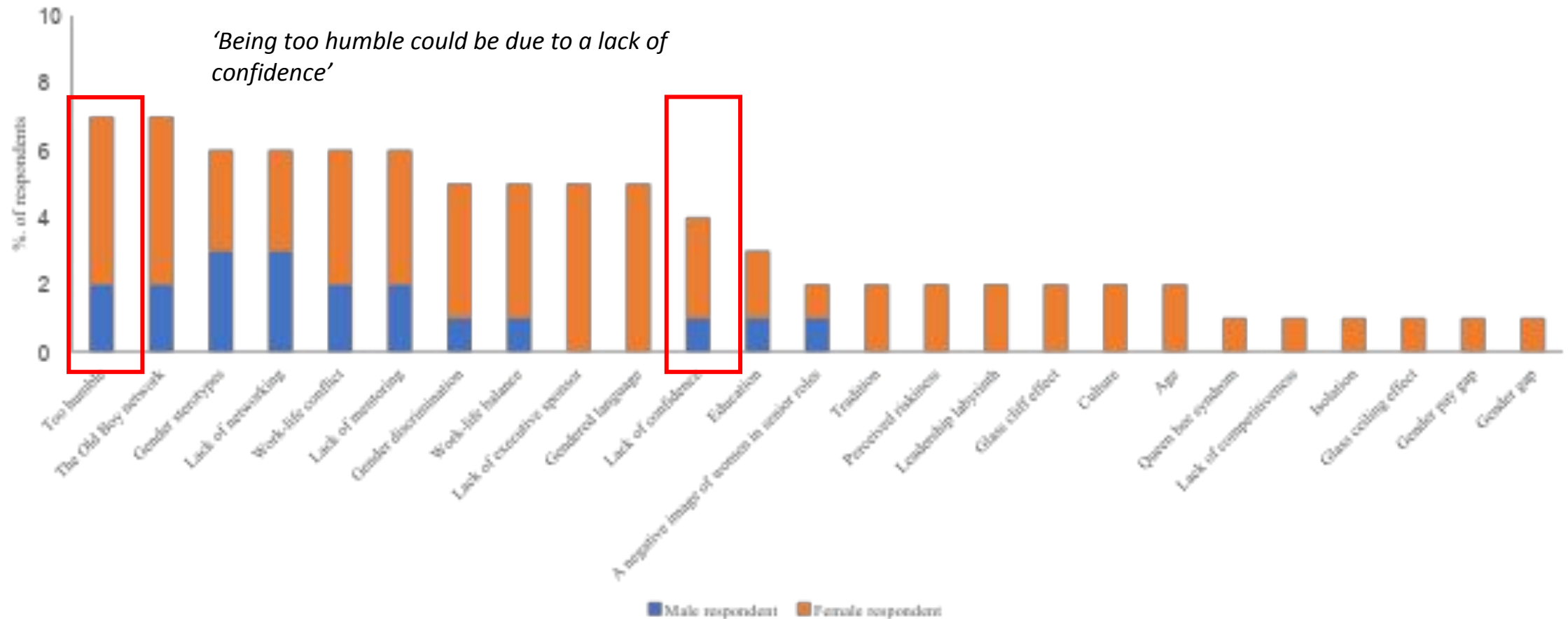
- 'Whilst most leaders [in pharma] are male, this is changing'
 - More females completing medical degrees
 - The company is making 'a conscious effort to diversify beyond Caucasian males'

'Males tend to be more successful in securing funding' mainly due to unconscious bias

- 'Start up world needs to catch up with the Corporate world'

Results - Barriers to female leadership in an innovative environment

Female leaders being **too humble or lacking confidence** and the **'Old Boy' network** are the main barrier to female leadership in the innovative enterprise



Discussion - Humility

- Being 'too humble' was identified most frequently amongst all respondents as a barrier to female leadership in innovation;
 - Leader humility is positively related to the employee creative process; however, **employee creativity can be inhibited where a leader is too ethical or humble**



References

1. YUAN, L., ZHANG, L. & TU, Y. 2018. When a leader is seen as too humble: A curvilinear mediation model linking leader humility to employee creative process engagement. *Leadership & organization development journal*, 39, 468-481. 2. DE VRIES, R. E. 2012. Personality predictors of leadership styles and the self-other agreement problem. *The Leadership quarterly*, 23, 809-821. 3. ZURAIK, A., KELLY, L. & PERKINS, V. 2020. Gender differences in innovation: the role of ambidextrous leadership of the team leads. *Management decision*, 58, 1475-1495

Discussion – Bias and balance

Other barriers noted aligned with the known barriers to female leadership in the corporate setting



- **Gendered language**

- Women use more questions whereas men tend to use directives

- **Lack of networking**

- Networking events can be designed specifically toward typical male interests
- Lack of confidence in female employees

- **Lack of mentoring**

- **The 'Old Boy' network**

- **Unconscious bias**

- **Gender stereotypes**

- **Gender discrimination**

- **Work-life balance and conflicts**

- Female counterparts are likely to 'be the one to make the compromise'
- Women in childbearing and child-raising years progress less than their male counterparts
 - Starting a family can be 'detrimental to one's career'
 - Supports are improving

Recommendations

- Women need to be **more aware** of perceived traits such as humbleness, gendered language and lack of networking
- Companies must employ a **systemic approach** to address unconscious bias
- Companies should **enable capable female leaders** reach their potential as senior executives



Conclusion

- The number of female senior leaders in innovation is lower than expected
- There are several **known barriers** to female leadership
- Specific **aspects of the feminine leadership style** may be the reason females struggle to reach senior positions in innovative teams
- This project is the **first to demonstrate that humbleness, likely due to a lack of confidence is the main barrier** to female leadership within the innovative enterprise