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Another reason why we need more female leaders:

The effect of a leader's gender on workers' willingness to contribute *

Abstract:

In a controlled laboratory experiment we investigate how the gender of a group leader affects the willingness of group members to contribute. Participants are randomly assigned into groups of three and a leader is chosen based on performance on a general knowledge quiz. In the baseline condition, participants have no knowledge of each other's gender, while in the treatment condition, we implicitly disclose the gender of both the leader and the group members within each group. We find that men are more likely to contribute their ideas when paired with a female leader. The willingness of women to contribute does not depend on the gender of the leader. However, women only report the highest willingness to contribute when they are almost certain they get it right when paired with a female leader, indicating a desire to not let a female leader down. Female leaders in turn seem to understand the differences in reported willingness and make their choices based on reported willingness and gender, whereas male leaders only chose depending on reported willingness. These findings provide valuable insights for policy-makers seeking to justify diversity.

* Joint work with Yangfei Lin (Zhejiang University)