

Access denied

Leadership Trust

Barriers to Leadership Development

A study into the root cause of why fewer women attend our leadership development programmes.



## Barriers to Leadership Development

**A survey designed to explore what leadership looks like in the workplace, and the lives of a wide range of individuals of different backgrounds, ages and genders.**

**After discovering that significantly more men than women attend our open programmes, we decided to explore further. We needed to understand how complicit we were in maintaining the status quo of female representation in decision-making positions.**

This article focuses on how individuals, regardless of gender, access leadership development programmes. This right to entry gives an insight into the root causes of why there are less women on our leadership development courses.

The information collected in the survey identified the top three processes that employers use to select those who will attend or be provided with leadership development:

- self-recommendation
- once employees reach a certain level within the business
- line manager recommendation

The first process of self-recommendation is interesting. There is a body of literature suggesting that women have lower levels of confidence. Therefore, if the policy of the company is that one has to ask to get, then chances are that men would ask, and women would not. This in turn would mean that men would receive the training required to move up the ladder, and not the women. The progression within the company would therefore become a self-fulfilling prophecy as those who have received leadership development would be a logical choice.

Addressing the other two processes would first require a form of organisational development. Indeed, if leadership development is provided upon reaching a position in the business or upon line manager recommendation, and that the result of this means that we have a 70/30 split on our courses, it means that this is a reflection of the gender split in the hierarchy, which would be consistent with overall numbers in board rooms.

**43% of our survey respondents reported that a lack of support from their line manager was a barrier to their leadership development.**

### What can we do to address this?

To start with, line managers can encourage employees to put themselves forward. However, 43.28% reported that a lack of line manager support was a barrier to their leadership development. Therefore some work needs to be done to educate line managers about the benefits of leadership development.

Leadership development providers also have a role in ensuring that those who would benefit from such training are aware of when and why one should start thinking about their continual professional development and what one would get from it, following the fact that 29.85% reported that they don't know what they need.

### Recommendations for Employers

- Ensure that your staff are aware that they need to self-recommend to get leadership development training, if that is the process in your organisation.
- Encourage/incentivise women to put themselves forward for formal leadership development training.
- Have an ongoing leadership development strategy. Stop linking leadership development with hierarchy. Don't wait until someone is in a position of authority before you give them leadership skills. Leadership is not about authority power.
- Ensure that a specific set of criteria exists for line-managers to follow when selecting which employees should receive training.