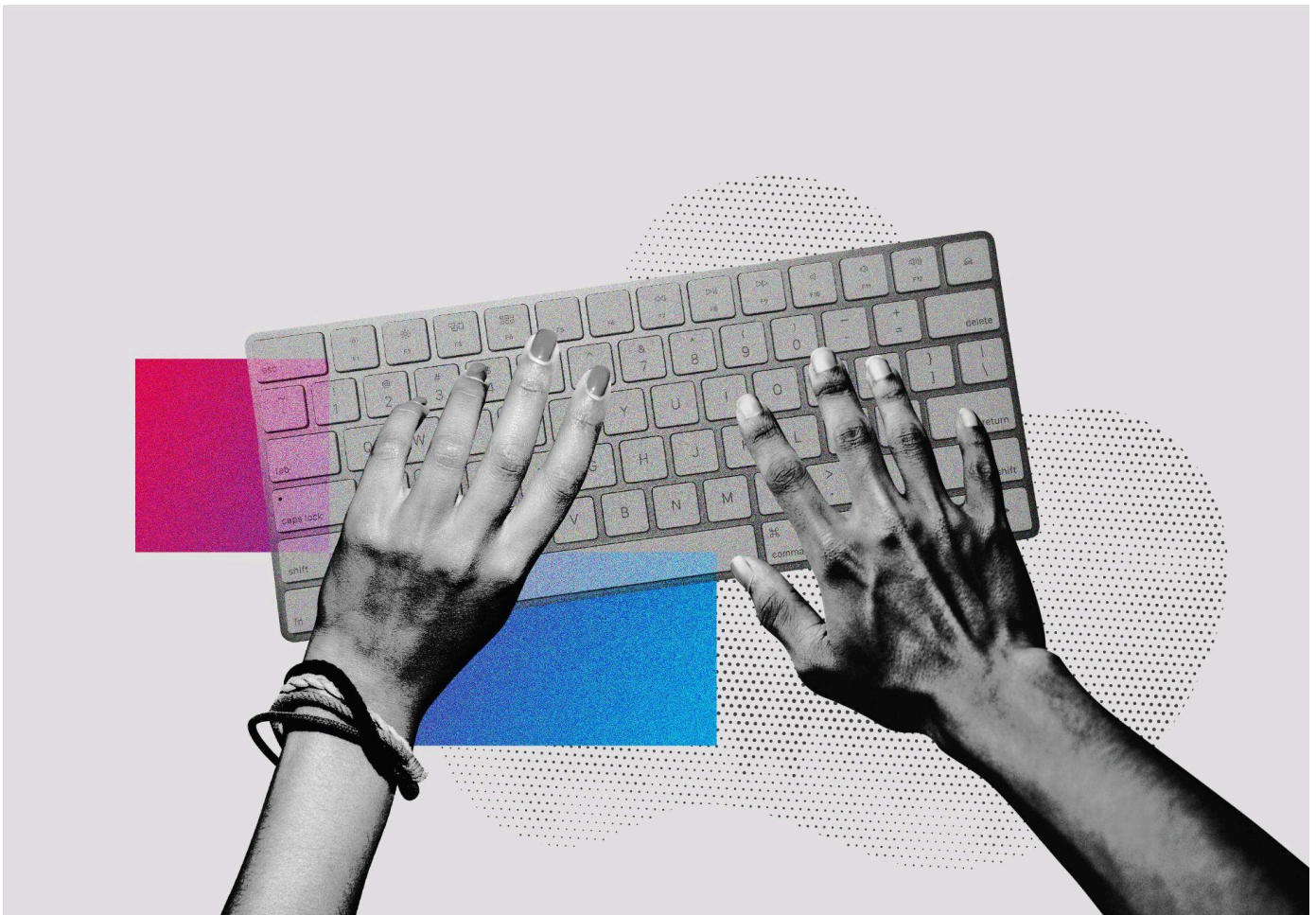




Gender Differences in Workplace Delegation

POLICY BRIEF



GENDER DIFFERENCES IN WORKPLACE DELEGATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study explores gender differences in managerial decision-making, specifically delegation behavior, and credit sharing, through an experimental lab design in Nairobi, Kenya.

A sample of 597 managers (315 women and 278 men) and 148 employees participated in a task delegation experiment where the managers were required to divide work tasks between themselves and an employee under time constraints. The results reveal that among participants who passed the attention checks, men tended to delegate significantly more tasks to employees, and their decisions were driven by an emphasis on efficiency and personal responsibility. Meanwhile, women delegated less and were more likely to consider employee well-being

and fairness in workload distribution as reasons to delegate. Men completed significantly more tasks than women, suggesting a higher output in task performance, though both genders held similar beliefs about their own and others' performance. The study also found that men give slightly more bonuses to employees than women, though this was not significant at $p=0.05$. These findings contribute to understanding how gender influences management practices. The insights gained can inform organizational strategies aimed at fostering more inclusive and effective leadership practices that accommodate diverse managerial styles.

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief shares findings from a lab study by the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics and outlines key policy recommendations.

Delegation is a key practice in organizations, allowing managers to reduce workload, enhance decision-making speed and quality, and empower employees by granting them autonomy (Becker & Murphy, 1992; Miles et al., 1978; Chen & Aryee, 2007; Yukl & Fu, 1999). It improves team coordination, efficiency, and overall productivity (Gallup, 2014; Becker & Murphy, 1992; Miles et al., 1978).

While workplace gender dynamics have been extensively studied in areas like leadership, pay gaps, and promotions, there is limited research on how gender influences delegation (Akinola et al., 2018). Sociocultural factors and biases may shape delegation behaviors differently for male and female managers, but empirical evidence remains scarce (Akinola et al., 2018).

Recent data indicates a pronounced disparity in promotional rates between men and women, suggesting potential underlying mechanisms at play. Delegation, especially of promotable tasks, could be a significant contributor to this gap. By understanding gender-specific delegation behaviors, we can elucidate the pathways that either facilitate or hinder career advancements.

Unveiling gender-based variations in delegation can provide organizations with the knowledge to craft policies that promote equitable practices.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Design

This study explored gender differences in managerial decision making, especially focusing on delegation behaviour and credit sharing through an experimental lab design conducted in Nairobi, Kenya. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What underlying characteristics correlate with delegation?
2. Do delegation decisions vary based on the type of task?
3. Does the amount of credit taken for delegated tasks differ by gender?



Methodology

- **Sample:** 597 managers (315 women, 278 men) and 148 employees participated
- **Experiment:** Managers had to divide work tasks between themselves and an employee under time constraints
- **Analysis:** The study examined delegation tendencies, reasons for delegation, and credit-sharing behaviours

Demographic Information

- **Language:** Able to read and comprehend English.
- **Location:** Reside in Nairobi.
- **Age:** Between 25 and 50 years old.
- **Education:** At least secondary level education
- **Experience:** At least 2 years of work experience.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Overall

The study finds that in the sample population, men generally manage more people than women, and while both men and women report similar levels of willingness to take risks, men tend to exhibit higher risk-seeking behavior in practice. Men also show slightly higher levels of altruism, though both genders share similar beliefs about the importance of delegation for efficiency and employee learning. Women, however, express more concern about the impact of delegation on their ability to manage time effectively.

Finding 1: Delegation by gender

Men delegated significantly more tasks than women ($p=0.04$), among participants who passed the attention checks. This suggests that attentiveness may reveal deeper disparities in delegation behavior.

Finding 2: Fairness in delegation

Men talked about prioritizing efficiency and personal responsibility, while women talked about employee well-being and fairness in workload distribution. The qualitative findings provide further insight into these differences. Both men and women emphasize fairness and equality in delegation, but men tend to focus on numerical fairness, while women prioritize workload distribution to avoid overburdening employees. In terms of leadership, men view their role as leading from the front and shouldering more responsibility, while women see leadership as creating a balanced work environment that supports both themselves and their employees. Overall, these gender-based differences in decision-making and leadership styles offer valuable insights for developing more inclusive management practices.

Finding 3: Performance Beliefs

Both genders held similar beliefs about their own and others' performance.

LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals key gender differences in how managers delegate tasks and give credit to employees. **Men tend to delegate more**, prioritizing efficiency, quick task completion, and maintaining personal responsibility. In contrast, women focus on balancing workload fairly, ensuring employees are not overburdened, and fostering a supportive work environment.

Recognizing these patterns can help organizations develop leadership programs that support different management styles, promoting both efficiency and employee welfare. By applying these insights, workplaces can encourage fairer delegation and credit-sharing practices, creating an environment where both male and female managers thrive while empowering their teams. Below are some recommendations:

1. Gender-Sensitive Evaluation Metrics

Delegation has communal (e.g., relational) and agentic (e.g., assertive) properties, and due to the gender differences found, evaluation metrics should be revised to recognize delegation effectiveness and team development, ensuring fair assessments of managerial capabilities.

2. Managerial Training on Gender Bias

Since men delegate more and women consider fairness and well-being, training managers on unconscious biases in delegation and credit-giving can help create balanced leadership approaches that do not disadvantage either gender. Implement training programs on effective delegation, communication, to equip managers with the necessary skills.

3. Mentorship

Offer mentorship and role modeling initiatives to support women in leadership and address concerns about time management.

4. Feedback Mechanisms

Implement feedback mechanisms where employees can report delegation experiences, helping identify and address biases in credit distribution.

5. Automatic Work Allocation Models

Use automatic work allocation models that uses algorithms and data to assign tasks without the use of manual intervention by the manager.

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