

How the Female Brain Empowers Women in the C-Suite

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More and more, professional women are moving up the ranks to the C-suite. Too bad, then, that they're encouraged to be the best men they can be once there or when en route. They're expected to show their power in ways that, based on modern neuroscience, are more intrinsically male than female. From a brain-based point of view, this is, at best, misguided. Why? Because organizations are losing out on a powerful win-win – a motivational win for women and, notably, a performance win for the business.

The neurobiological differences between the male and female brains are many and important. Yet most companies, especially the larger ones, are regrettably brain gender blind. As a result, they allow vast amounts of latent brain potential to go virtually untapped, particularly at the highest levels.

To be sure, brain gender isn't binary. Both our brain gender and brain survive-and-thrive patterning are uniquely personal aspects of who we are as individuals. However, understanding the subtleties of brain gender differences and how they manifest themselves at work can empower women in, or on their way to, the C-suite in all-new and authentic ways.

The differences between the male and female brains occur along three key dimensions: brain structure, neural connectivity, and brain chemistry. Today, cutting-edge research shows that the connectivity patterning in the female brain supports the bridge between analysis and intuition. This drives a more emergent and iterative approach to critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making. On the other hand, the hallmark of the neural patterning in the male brain is geared

to go from perception to coordinated action in a more singular, focused way.

Now, blend these neural patterning differences with the hormonal differences between men and women, and it becomes clear how power can be expressed so differently within organizational systems. Men carry much higher levels of testosterone than women. As a result, they possess a greater propensity to take power through competition. Women, on the other hand, produce higher levels of oxytocin – the bonding hormone. This makes collaboration and relationship building the most likely or natural route to taking their power.

All to say, happy brains perform best. And to be effective, leadership must also be authentic. Understanding gender-based differences in the brain, and then empowering and leveraging those differences, is a powerful win for women and organizations everywhere.

About the Author: *Kate Lanz is founder and CEO of mindbridge, a UK-based global coaching company specializing in the power of modern neuroscience and releasing latent brain potential at work. She is co-author of All the Brains in the Business: The Engendered Brain in the 21st Century Organisation (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Learn more at mindbridge.co.uk.*