

Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

The role of qualifications and perceived riskiness on selection: Gendered implications for leadership

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This study investigates the role of perceived riskiness in senior leadership selection decisions. Specifically, hypotheses that perceived riskiness is a mediator between candidate qualifications and their selection as well as their salary offer, and that gender moderates those relationships, were examined through structural equation modeling and logistic regression. A sample of 253 individuals with prior experience in hiring and promotion decisions responded to an online survey where they read a fabricated job description and candidate profile summary of one of the following: a highly qualified female, a highly qualified male, a moderately qualified female, or a moderately qualified male. The results demonstrated a complementary mediating effect of perceived riskiness between a candidate's qualifications and their selection, and between a candidate's qualifications and their salary offer. In addition, gender moderates the path from qualifications to perceived riskiness in that highly qualified women were perceived as less risky for senior leadership than highly qualified men while moderately qualified women were seen as more risky for senior leadership than moderately qualified men. These findings identify a novel construct, perceived riskiness, in the selection decision making process when considering male and female candidates for senior leadership roles, potentially accounting for the slow ascent of women to the top of organizations.