

## Do Women Perform Better than Men?

Psst! Have you heard those rumours claiming that women are the best project managers?

It seems there may be some truth to the scuttlebutt. New data examining the impact of gender on project performance, taken from a U.S. survey of experienced project managers, reveals that female PMs significantly outperform their male counterparts in several key areas.

In the survey data, for example, female PMs report abandoning fewer projects and delivering far more projects that perform well or better than expected. They also deliver substantially better results related to delivering projects on budget and on schedule.

On the other hand, male PMs' reports show that they more frequently over-deliver on scope and benefits while female PMs report delivering all and only the benefits expected.

It's important to note that there was no consistent difference in the size of the projects assigned to males and females (65 weeks' mean duration) according to the survey.

"This means that any difference in performance cannot easily be written off as "women get given easier projects", says Dr. Chris Sauer, a professor with the Said Business School at Oxford University in the U.K. He undertook the survey research with Drs. Blaize Reich and Andrew Gemino of the Segal Graduate School of Business in Vancouver, Canada. Indeed, says Sauer, "the higher average person-month resource effort for female-led projects could be argued to be the most significant indicator of project difficulty, and therefore women not only do better but do so with the tougher projects."

Still, he notes, the differences are not all one way. "The advantage males exhibit in securing business benefits may be more economically significant for their clients than females' lower variances on cost and schedule."

Of course, it's not politically correct to discuss gender differences. But now that the Project Management Perspectives research group has raised the issue, "it is as if this is something the project management community has been subconsciously aware of all along but never talked about."

Anecdotal evidence, for example, seems to support the view that women make better PMs. IBM's award-winning North American project trouble-shooter is female – Sharon Hartung. And Sauer says that whenever his research group discusses gender differences in project outcomes with practitioners, male PMs readily accept the proposition that

females may perform better than males. "Almost none argue to the contrary," notes Sauer. "And the women naturally choose not to contradict!"

The research group offers several recommendations based on their survey results:

- If you are looking for better all-round project performance against budget, schedule and scope, then appointing an experienced female project manager increases the probability of a good or better outcome.
- If minimizing variance against budget and/or schedule is important, then appointing an experienced female increases the probability of achieving this goal.
- If maximizing business benefits is more important than considerations of budget and schedule, then appointing an experienced male increases the probability that you will achieve more than was asked for.

*PMPerspectives.org is a website which connects project managers and sponsors with project management researchers. Our mission is to understand and improve project management practices. The research team comprises Dr. Blaize Horner Reich and Dr. Andrew Gemino from Simon Fraser University, Canada and Dr. Chris Sauer from Oxford University, UK.*

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