

Webinar Summary Leadership in crisis: does gender matter?
3rd of June 2020 from 12:00 to 13:00 BST



We organised the webinar *Leadership in crisis: does gender matter?* at the beginning of June. The panelists talked about the characteristics shared by different examples of successful female leadership, explaining how an effective decision-making process in leadership is closely linked to innovation and diversity. Below, we summarise the key takeaways from this webinar and share some relevant articles on leadership written by one of the speakers, Avivah Wittenberg-Cox.

1. Characteristics of successful leadership:

Avivah Wittenberg-Cox shared examples of female leadership in crises and discussed what their effective responses have had in common. Based on her recent articles, Avivah pointed at truth, decisiveness, technology use, compassion, and highly skilled communication as some of the most important characteristics that have enabled some female leaders to take quick and assertive decisions, as well as to build and maintain trust. These attributes are often complemented by transparency and the ability of some female leaders to connect with their audience in an accessible and casual way.

Whilst some of these characteristics, such as decisiveness and the use of technology, have stereotypically been associated with male leadership, and others, such as communication skills and compassion, with female leaders, Avivah explained that having a good balance of all of these characteristics is essential for any good leader, regardless of their gender .

2. Systems and the decision-making process

Yumiko Murakami, Director of the OECD's Tokyo office, also highlighted the importance of systems in terms of the decision-making process. She explained that good leaders are often chosen as a reflection of the societies and systems they come from. The most successful are normally surrounded by a very well-balanced group of advisors, with specialisms including science, community concerns, and technology. These advisors provide a wide range of ideas and information that come together in the decision-making process, translating into effective policies.

Without an appropriate gender balance, contributions to the decision-making process may be limited to a much narrower group of people with more similar backgrounds and ideas. Effective and informed leadership requires broad advisory input that can be utilised in the decision-making process. Therefore, this might make us wonder whether in countries like Japan, with low female representation in politics, the gender imbalance might not adversely affect the decision-making process: only 10% of the

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members of the Japanese parliament (the 'Diet') are women, which is the lowest percentage in the OECD.

3. Links between leadership and innovation

Finally, both panelists highlighted that during the present crisis, innovation is definitely needed in leadership, given the rapidly changing nature of the ongoing pandemic. Traditional, firm direction-setting policies can work well when the solution to a problem is known beforehand and its solution is straightforward. But with these unprecedented challenges where solutions are not certain, we need innovation and effective leadership to manage the situation. In this case, gender and diversity are important factors to promote innovation and increase the effectiveness of leadership during times of crisis.

Avivah Wittenberg-Cox has published a range of articles on this and related subjects; please follow the links below to find out more.

- [What do countries with the best coronavirus responses have in common? Women Leaders](#)
- [8 \(more\) women leaders facing the coronavirus crisis](#)
- [Capitalism post-COVID: companies doing good to become great](#)
- [COVID-19: a stress test for couples](#)
- [コロナ対策に成功した国々、共通点は女性リーダーの存在](#) (in Japanese)

Reference OECD study:

- *Fast Forward to Gender Equality Mainstreaming, Implementation and Leadership* (Published on April 17, 2019)
[English](#) available
[Japanese](#) available