

# **The queen bee: A myth? The effect of top-level female leadership on subordinate females**

Authors: Paulo Roberto Arvate, Gisele Walczak Galilea, Isabela Todescat

## **Abstract**

We investigate the effect of female leadership on gender differences in public and private organizations. Female leadership was constructed using a quasi-experiment involving mayoral elections, and our research used a sample of 8.3 million organizations distributed over 5600 Brazilian municipalities. Our main results show that when municipalities in which a woman was elected leader (treatment group) are compared with municipalities in which a male was elected leader (control group) there was an increase in the number of top and middle managers in public organizations. Two aspects contribute to the results: time and command/role model. The time effect is important because our results are obtained with reelected women – in their second term – and the command/role model (the queen bee phenomenon is either small, or non-existent) is important because of the institutional characteristics of public organizations: female leaders (mayor) have much asymmetrical power and decision-making discretion, i.e., she chooses the top managers. These top managers then choose middle managers influenced by female leadership (a role model). We obtained no results for private organizations. Our work contributes to the literature on leadership by addressing some specific issues: an empirical investigation with a causal effect between the variables (regression-discontinuity design – a non-parametric estimation), the importance of role models, and how the observed effects are time-dependent. Insofar as public organizations are concerned, the evidence from our large-scale study suggests that the queen bee phenomenon may be a myth; instead, of keeping subordinate women at bay, our results show that women leaders who are afforded much managerial discretion behave in a benevolent manner toward subordinate women. The term “Regal Leader” instead of “Queen Bee” is thus a more appropriate characterization of women in top positions of power.