

Woman put your head above ground level!

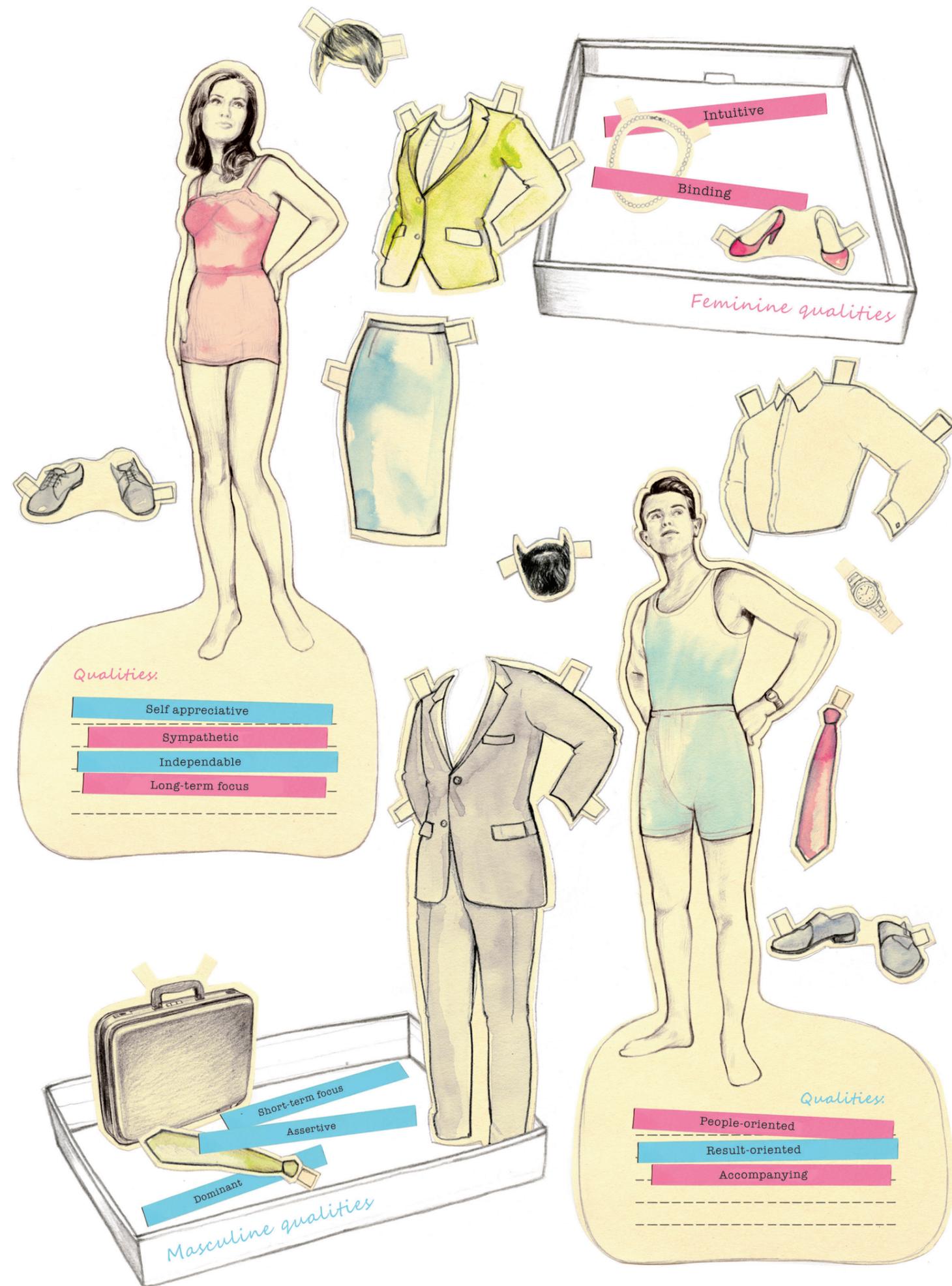
Women make contribute 66% to global GDP but earn 10% of the total income. If we look at leadership, only 7% of women are world leaders. In Europe it is only 1%. There is increasing discussion about whether or not to set quotas to get more women on top positions. However isn't this man-woman discussion actually totally pointless?! The best leader in the right place, that's what counts!

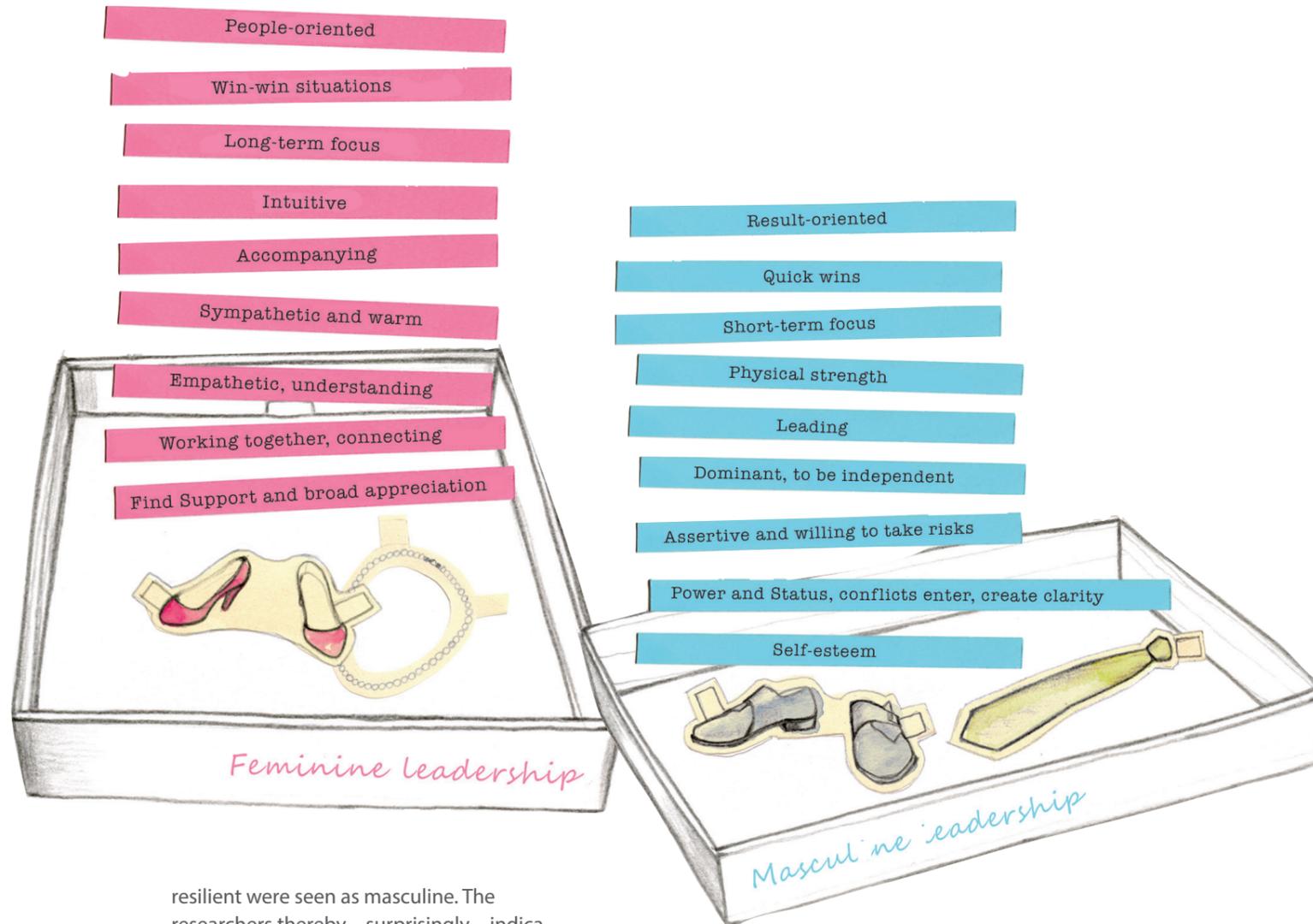
TEXT: MADELON BARENS EN RENATA BOLTENDAL VISUALS: MIREILLE SCHAAP

The ideal modern leader: a woman
WPP [World market leader in advertising and marketing services] recently carried out research on the characteristics of the modern leader. 16,000 people in thirteen countries in Asia, Europe, North and South America were presented 125 human qualities the question which are essential characteristics of those in the leadership of this time. This research [*The Athena Doctrine: How Women (And The Men Who Think Like Them) Will Rule The Future*, John Gerzema, 2012] resulted in a top 10 features of the ideal, modern leader: expressive, future plans, decidedly, reasonable, loyal, flexible, patient, resilient, intuitive and cooperative.

An equally large second group of the same 125 qualifications was presented the question whether it is male, female or neither that would qualify as such. As many as eight of the qualifications of the top 10 were classified by the majority as female part. Only the properties decidedly and

“The best leader is the leader that adapt his/her style to suit the needs of the moment”





resilient were seen as masculine. The researchers thereby – surprisingly - indicated that empathy and vulnerability - both rated as more feminine qualities - are essential for innovation. Many companies and organizations heavily rely on these features to survive in today's market. Empathy is simply to be able to put yourself in others' needs. And vulnerability is a feature that should not be missed when it comes to dare to make mistakes and recognize when implementing new developments. Both were mentioned in research as the great need for innovation requires certain "feminine" leadership.

Once more the differences

For centuries women were subordinate to men and in some cultures that still is the case. That is why men and women have developed themselves differently over the years.

Women function optimally in a community where caring, modesty and frugality are well developed. For example, this is reflected in the way women are often present: they rarely talk about their qualities, but especi-

ally about their negatives. Women present themselves vulnerable more easily and are basically always willing to learn. When results have been achieved, the honor is often attributed to others, or the performance is made smaller, as if this is anything but special.

Men on the other hand are expected to be there - and if necessary - even die in the interests of the group. Their qualities are reflected in decisiveness and results. When they present themselves, they will convincingly explain their strengths. Men have the ability to not doubt himself. And when another does, it doesn't interest them. The result is paramount and is anyway achieved. Male leadership has brought us to where we are today. All of our primary needs are met. There is more of everything than we need and because of engineering our possibilities are almost unlimited.

And let's not forget in this equation that women do not walk the road to the top for a long time. We don't have so many female role models yet. Where generations of men are engaged in building successful careers, mothers, daughters and granddaughters only do this since less than forty years.

The most valued leader: a man

It is clear, we owe much to male leadership. But we also know the other side of the dominance of male leadership. The focus is often mainly on short-term profit and the inherent need to grow continuously. In the triad of People-Planet-Profit is excessively filled the P of Profit at the expense of the other two, namely the mankind and it's environment. There is enough food on earth to feed everybody and yet people die daily of starvation. Forests are cut down and the seas are fished out. And all to raise the targets in the short term. The excessive self-esteem at the top - the take- and bonus culture - is a form of leadership which is beaten by male. Men often show themselves more confident and appreciate themselves therefore more than women.

Really crazy. When we purely look at the P of Profit, then organizations with women in leadership positions are 48% more profitable than those that stick to male leaders. Therein lies not the cause of the shortage of women at the top. What would it be? One of the main causes can be found in insufficient appreciation of female capital. A publication of Kim Elsesser and Janet Lever [Human Relations, 2011] shows that 54% of employees have no sex preference when it comes to their supervisor. Of the remaining 46%, almost three-quarters has a preference for a male supervisor. That means that women appreciate male leaders more than leaders of their own sex. We see this undervaluation of female leadership also when women leaders get out of their traditional roles and properties such as compassionate and caring. Women who are ambitious, individualistic and competitive, are quickly labelled as 'bitch'. It seems that many women at the top have adapted to the current male



culture, just to get there. But do they use their full potential?

In short, although research shows that the ideal modern leader is a woman, the ideal leader still seems to be male based on our imaging and practice. We together create the glass ceiling or the sticky floor that sets the position of male leaders safe and makes it virtually impossible for women to reach the top. The glass ceiling is often created by the organization itself, for example by offering no scope for flexible working. The sticky floor is often create by women themselves by the attitude: no time, I have to take care for children, etc.



It's all about balance

The new leadership does not mention male or female leadership. Just by the choice of words we tend to linger in us-them thinking. And so we get bogged down in discussions about quotas. Let us agree together that we now only speak of feminine and masculine leadership. Where to feminine leadership, the focus is on people and feeling, win-win situations and long-term, characterized by masculine leadership results, quick wins and an inexhaustible desire to improve. Both forms have the same value in terms of balance and connection to the needs of the company.

The best leader in the right place!

The good news

The good news: Both feminine and masculine leadership can be developed by both men and women. So instead of frantically placing

more women in senior positions, it is important that the male leaders make room for the feminine qualities in themselves.

Take the example of the male people managers. Men are perfectly able to pay attention and genuine interest in people in their team, not always just pushing for results. Look at Matthijs Bierman, CEO of Triodos Bank. His job requires results, vigor and decisiveness. In addition to these masculine characteristics, Matthijs dares to show his vulnerability, he doubts continuous or he serves the company and he shows genuine interest in his employees. A beautiful balance between power and vulnerability.

Conversely, therefore, of course, is that women must make more room for the masculine qualities in themselves. We quote the Dutch magazine Opzij, "Jeanine Hennis was voted the most powerful woman in the Netherlands. According to the jury's report Minister Hennis "outstanding insights into complex issues and international relations, enforce her authority throughout the armed forces - from high to low -. She got a lot around but stood her ground and did bring more transparency within the relatively closed culture of the Ministry of Defence. Her humour and accessibility are her secret weapons." A wonderful/great example of balance between feminine and masculine qualities!

New leadership requires letting go of judgments and accepting the equivalent appreciation of feminine and masculine qualities. Only when there is room in ourselves for both forms, more space will be created for women leaders in our organizations. Equality and uniqueness create more diversity in leadership and so human capital will get justice. Hence the best leader is the leader which is able to adjust his or her style to the need of the moment.

“Until we appreciate female leadership instead of judging it, a true revolution is there to come”

But how do you do that?

Women need to take responsibility and use their feminine qualities and be more visible. In addition, they will have to develop their masculine qualities such as self-confidence to embark on leadership positions. Top women that show much vigor and results have to connect again with their feminine qualities such as caring and empathy. But how do you do that?

- In understanding that the glass ceiling or sticky floor does not exist. This is a limiting belief that keeps us from applying new forms of leadership. So a matter of perception.
- Investigate what your qualities are as a female leader. Understanding yourself better shows you the differences with others. What is obvious to you, might just indicate your uniqueness as a leader. How can you appreciate this if you yourself are not aware of it?
- Let's create a learning and development program to get your leadership skills to full advantage.

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About the author

Madelon Barens, director/owner of 2mbConsultancy Ltd and Insights distributor.



2mbConsultancy had partnered with Insights on design and delivery of their solutions for over 6 years. Since November 2016 Madelon Barens is based in Nairobi, Kenya. Madelon has over 20 years' experience working within management consultancy and educational learning at both strategic and operational level across a wide range of industries in the private and public sectors. She accompanies women in medior and senior management positions, helping them successfully achieve lasting behavioural transformation in a changing and competitive environment.

WHO Madelon Barens

WAT Certified Insights Discovery and NLP Master Practitioner trained in organizational structures and intuitive development. Mindfulness, yoga are part of her daily routine.

WHY Her passion is to empower women and encourage them to grow in their consciousness with pleasure. Madelon believes that life begins outside your comfort zone. This begins with understanding self, understanding others and an understanding of the team with whom you work.

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