

Leadership and Gender Differentiation¹

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Abstract

Leadership is clearly one of the main factors that influence organizational competitiveness. It means both science and art, both born and learned skills.

Leadership and gender differentiation is a subject that leads to at least two main questions: (1) Do significant differences exist between men and women in terms of leadership styles? (2) What are the real determinants of differences between men and women especially looking at who assumes leadership positions and what is leadership behavior like?

With respect to “born” and “learned” leadership style, some differences between men and women do exist, in spite of the general tendency towards uniformization.

This paper aims to examine these general differences and to provide a critical comparative analysis between them.

Keywords: *leadership, gender, business, management, analysis*

JEL classification: J16, M12, M14.

Introduction

Leadership and gender differentiation is not a very recent subject. However, it is one that increased in interest only after 1970, when women slowly began to seek and gain entry into management in the United States. It is important to notice that the number of women as leaders is still relatively low; therefore, further analysis for understanding the reasons for this situation is needed.

1. What is Leadership?

In order to increase organizations' competitiveness, leadership development plays a very important role, being a key factor in the process of organizational transformation that can explain the shift from a competitive level to another one (Radu, 2009).

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Leadership is seen as “the process of influencing the activities of a person or group of people in order to achieve the organization’s objectives (Ursachi, 2005). Organization’s leaders should be managers and not other people, in order not to lead to organizational conflicts. Obviously, this condition is not always met.

More than 30 years ago, Stogdill felt the need to underline that “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (quoted in Yukl, 2002). And almost everybody think they can give a definition on leadership and some great guidelines to be followed – researchers, academics, business people, students, etc.

The considerable impact of leadership on organizations’ performance is clear, for instance, in Six Sigma. Six Sigma can be considered, among others, a model of leadership, whereas commitment of business leaders is essential in order for Six Sigma initiatives not to disappear too quickly (Pande, Neuman and Cavanagh, 2000).

A successful strategy can hardly be formulated by one single person or by a very small group of leaders. Strategic leadership implies involving the right people in critical decisions, because key information may appear very scattered within the organization. This approach is valid not only for the profit oriented companies, but also for non-governmental organizations (Bibu, Lisetchi, 2011). In addition, successful implementation of a strategy requires active leadership that is able to identify the necessary changes before being too late.

According to Lyons, there are four conditions to be met for a real leadership development (Lyons, 2007):

- Obvious differences in power resources (for instance, experience or position) do not limit a person’s openness to change;
- Participants in a transaction are assumed to behave rationally;
- Motivation to influence others is taken for granted;
- The target perceives the agent (the one attempting to influence) as possessing attributes and skills to assist the target (the one at whom the influence is directed) to achieve objectives or success.

Actually, many authors and researchers have really contributed something with respect to leadership. For example, (Ulrich, 1999) has focused his research on values motives, personal traits (who leaders are), knowledge, skills and abilities (what leaders know), behaviors, habits, styles and competences (what leaders do). There are certain leadership characteristics that allow leaders to experience greater success. For instance, a basic characteristic for a successful leader consists in his credibility, a quality that needs to be permanently cultivated (Năstase, 2009). Also, leaders are the ones who energize people and sometimes they need to put them in conflictual situations, in order to make them generate new ideas. However, leaders must also pay attention not to generate large disfunctionalities and tension within organization (Leibling, 2005). Other important leadership characteristics include goal orientation, optimism, courage, etc.

Collins (2001) identified Executive Leader who “builds enduring greatness”, whilst Amidon and Macnamara (2001) have identified seven domains to be analyzed – the so-called “7 C’s” of leadership: (a) context, (b) competence,

(c) culture, (d) communities, (e) conversations and common language, (f) communications and (g) coaching.

Traditional literature on leadership has been clearly dominated by the “single” perspective, meaning that leadership is exercised by a single person (Pearce and Manz, 2005). However, there are other specialists who consider that leadership should be seen in terms of collaboration between two or more persons (Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007).

Leadership is not only an essential part of the management process, but also, it is an integrant part of the social and cultural structure of an organization. A good manager must support the forming of an organizational culture that comes to the employee’s aid (Popescu, 2008).

There are also many authors who talk about the so-called “knowledge leadership”. Knowledge leaders are the ones who can bridge the role of managers and leaders by overseeing knowledge management systems and creating supportive workplace environments for knowledge development (Cavaleri, Seivert and Lee, 2005).

3. Leadership and Gender – Do Some Differences Really Exist?

There are many different perspectives specialists are looking at the intersection of leadership and gender. Eagly and Karau (2002) suggest that there are three main categories of elements to be analyzed: *attitudes* towards men and women as leaders, *access* of men and women to leadership roles, and *evaluations of success* for men and women in leadership roles.

There are quite significant differences between males and females in who becomes a leader, by this meaning that not many so women are recognized as leaders compared to the number of men seen as leaders. The main question derived from this idea is therefore... why are so few women leaders?

Of course, there are many different answers. One clear reason comes from the education received when children. In many families females’ life aspirations are diminished by transmitting particular “appropriate gender behavior”. For instance, girls are supposed to be reticent to risk and rather passive, while boys are really encouraged to pursue their goals.

However, it is true that a series of rather “feminine” qualities are needed for succeeding in leading people: social skills, relationships, concern for people. The problem is a quite high number of women did not develop also the “masculine” qualities, which are also important: self confidence and initiative. In terms of self confidence, the differences are quite high and at least two examples deserve our attention. First, studies on children reveal the fact that girls tend to underestimate their potential, while boys tend to overestimate it. When taking a test, if they are asked to say what they think about their results, girls generally do believe they have a lower mark than the one professor give them, while for the boys we can observe the opposite trend. Second, this diminished self confidence continues to exist for the grown-up women. Their lower salaries for a similar job

are at least partly explained by the fact they are not used to demand for more. Again, there are many researches on the subject that prove the fact women generally do not ask for more, while men do.

Then, another real explanation for not having so many women as leaders is the society by itself, which developed a popular perception of the maleness of leadership. Actually, thinking in terms of jobs that both genders can successfully address, it is not only leadership a field in which differences between men and women can be observed. Of course, in some domains differences are higher than in the others. For instance, in advertising (the creative part), women account for only 3% of the jobs, according to a recent research (Stewart et al, 2011). It seems there is still discrimination against women in personnel decisions involving promotion, selection and supervision.

Oakley (2000) suggests that there are three categories of theories and explanations of the barriers faced by women in the attainment of leadership positions. First, there are barriers created by corporate practices that tend to favor the recruitment, retention and promotion of males over females. The arguments that women lack the necessary "line experience" needed for senior jobs fit into this category. Second, there are behavioral and cultural causes related to stereotyping, power, preferred leadership styles. Third, there are feminist arguments that deal with questions of power and influence.

Thinking in terms of behavior, a recent study developed by Hart, Asebuss MBA and Exec-Edu (2011) showed the fact there are not significant differences between leadership style of men and leadership style of women. Scores obtained by managers-women proved the fact women can be as good leaders as men are, since both categories corresponded to the standard managerial profile in the world (Oancea, 2011).

Women obtained higher scores for introspection, self analysis capacity, alert to received feedback, openness towards development, action-oriented approach and collaboration. Women are also very good in their relationships with customers, are esthetically sensitive and pay attention to quality. Males are more rational, assertive, and direct while females are more sensitive, warm and tactful (Deaux and Lewis, 1984). Males are identified as being more autocratic and task-oriented while females more nurturing and democratic (Tannen, 1990).

A quite important difference between Romania and other countries refers to the fact that Romanian women are less "politically moral", are less concerned with being "nice" and more oriented on tasks and objectives (Oancea, 2011). It is maybe one of the reasons why in Romania there are more women top managers than in other countries from Europe or even than in United States.

Conclusions

Some real differences between men and women in terms of attitudes and behavior do exist and it is very important to understand them, in order to control situations and to permanently improve leadership skills:

- In terms of **strengths**, women are more opened to feedback related to performance, do establish higher standards, are more introspective and more opened towards new, change and development; they are more involved in solving problems and cooperating (high score for ambition), and are more likely to execute (high score for curiosity).
- In terms of **areas of development**, women tend to be too exigent with themselves and with others and are less constant with respect to the way they use their energy and emotions; they are also less self confident.
- With respect to **values**, there are still some differences. **Women** tend to involve in sustaining others, even in non-job-related problems and like to involve in various actions that improve the society as a whole (CSR initiatives); they value ethics, loyalty, family and do respect authority (high score for tradition); they pay attention to company image and tend to base their decisions at least partially on feelings and intuition. On the other hand, **men** tend to value more various business opportunities, money and profits.

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