

DISCRIMINATION IN LEADERSHIP: MYTH OR REALITY!?

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Abstract

The development of the society has been marked by the relation between males and females, by the individual evolution and also by their interaction. Although, presently, one would often hear about “the equality between genders”, there still are countries in which the opportunities for women and men are different, not only in the social sphere but also in the economic one.

The present paper presents not only some defining aspects regarding the leading styles that women and men adopt, but also representative analyses that demonstrate the fact that, although progress has been made regarding the “equality between genders” in the social and economic sphere, yet, there is gender discrimination in leadership.

Keywords: leadership, discrimination, equality between genders, evolution, culture

JEL Classification: J71, J83, M12, M5

Introduction

Globally, there is the tendency to promote women in many areas, by adopting some governmental programs, and also by involving different organizations with the purpose of facilitating the access of women on the labor market. Despite this, the number of women in management or political leading positions is continuously reduced, with a percentage of only 10% of all directors of public companies, and 20% of the number of parliamentarians, according to a study in 2014.

According to „The Global Gender Gap Report 2016”, the average of the presence of women in the board of directors is 14%, and only in five countries this average surpasses 30% (Iceland, Norway, France, Latvia and Finland). („The Global Gender Gap Report 2016”, p.30)

An important aspect in gender discrimination refers to the prejudice that comes from trivial things in the daily life, such as the preferences of each individual. Discrimination (direct, indirect, subjective, total or relative) represents a networking model that results in the enforcement of one or more persons who are deprived of rights and social liberties, or, on

the contrary, receive rewards due to the simple membership to a class or to a social or professional category.

A change in attitude is expected, regarding the work of women and men and the awareness of stereotypes and prejudice, so that a woman will not declare herself contented when doing the same job as a man's, receiving a low salary. The main reason for the low number of women on the labor market is the mentality of the employers, who believe the costs of payment grow in the case of a potential pregnancy.

In the case of equality of salaries between men and women, no country has ever reached the balance. From the total of 144 countries in „The Global Gender Gap Report 2016”, only in 5 countries the difference is lower than 20%, while in 88 countries (Romania as well) the difference is between 20% and 40%. In 35 countries, the difference is between 40% and 50%, and in 5 countries (France, Chile, Peru, Hungary, Brazil) the difference in payment for a similar work done by men and women, outgrows to 50%.

According to an analysis of KeysFin agency from March 2015, almost 40% of Romanian companies have a woman-leader or a woman – as the main stockholder. This business represents 22% of the total business in Romania, with 71,4 billions.

The areas where ladies excel are: commerce, consulting and management, transport of goods and people, construction work, bars and activities involving serving drinks, pharmacy.

Leader - women vs. leader – men

„Women, just like men, have the right to inspire and fulfill their visions. People realize this differently, because each person has got his own system of values and also understands life and results differently. The woman fulfills things in connection with her senses and intuition. She uses emotions in order to get the resources she needs, unlike man, who gets what he wants, by being directive and focused on the action plan.”

Independence and self-trust, professional mobility are essential features in choosing a leader, because it is desirable that the leading person should inspire trust and safety. The assumption of risks, affiliated to men-leader mainly, competes with the responsibility for these, affiliated mainly to women-leader. Men are tempted to adventure in presuming projects, while women analyze the possibilities to assume the risk, before showing interest in something. Prestige, diplomacy, charming, popularity are other features which make the difference between a leader and a simple human being. In the case of leader-women, one could talk about prestige, diplomacy and popularity, all these being recognized in the results of the public actions done.

The personality traits of leaders considerably influence the leading style and the way in which they are seen by their employees, having a major impact on the performances of the company. Thus, taking into account the gender (male/female), it can be stated that some traits are specific to women, some specific to men, these having an impact on the leading style.

Taking into account that in the present riotous economic environment certain qualities such as: flexibility, intuition, networking development and the motivation of employees represent „feminine values”, it can be said that, in this case, gender is an opportunity.

Yet, if the impacts of culture, of certain mentalities and perceptions that exist regarding the position of women in society, economy and politics are all taken into consideration, it can be said that gender is a discriminating element, because the tendencies to consider men the best leaders still exist.

So, in order to support all these, the idea of biological differences is one argument, certain traits genetically belong to men (authority, power, “fresh” thinking), while others to women (maternal instinct, altruism, communicating skills, detail attention, esthetics), all shaping different leading styles.



Figure no. 1: Women leader vs. Men leader

Source: Adaptation

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The approach of the concept of business by women and men is identical in many cases, but the leading style is different. Thus, while men have a rational, mathematical thinking and guide themselves towards tasks, the women combine logical thinking with feelings, emphasizing links, cooperation, and networking. The leader-woman is capable of listening her employees’ complaints, understand and create a motivational space of working, proving altruism.

Generally speaking, leader-women tend to adopt a participative leading style, based on orientation towards people. Women, unlike men, are much more flexible and tolerant and this allows the creation of an incentive, motivating space and performance acquisition in any area. Comparing to men, the leader-woman is remarkable for her consideration to people and for encouraging free-speaking. Moreover, women think the success of a company is given by the capacity of managing and developing employees, while men think the most important aspect is the visibility and the awareness of internal rules.

In addition to this, the leading style adopted by men is authoritative, following the accomplishment of tasks, unlike women. The difference between men and women is not necessarily to be seen in the efficiency of their authority, but in the way they use this authority.

Yet, there is a tendency in our country to consider leading success behavior, masculine. Following this, women have been trying to adopt this specific masculine behavior in order to succeed as leaders in a wrong way, and thus they have suppressed their own feminine

features, which make the difference. A certain leadership behavior can be judged as being more beneficial when it comes to men.

The index of gender gaps

In order to quantify and measure the dimensions and the evolution of inequality of opportunities between men and women, the World Economic Forum, introduced in 2006, the index of gender inequality. This instrument reflects the gaps between women and men, analyzing four areas (lower indexes) which put the basis of the calculation of global index, at the level of each country: economic attendance and opportunities, education, health and life expectancy (the proportion women/men at birth, life expectancy), access and opportunities in politics. The values of this index are annually published for over 100 countries analyzed in “The Report of gender gap”, available on the official site of WEF. Taking into consideration the four pylons, worldwide, the European North countries are classified as being on the top of the states which have gender equalities (Iceland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland), to which we add New Zealand, South Africa, Philippines. Romania is at the second half of the ranking.

In order to analyze this, there have been taken into consideration the following:

- For health and life expectancy, birth gender report has been taken into consideration, together with the average life expectancy of women and men in each country.
- Regarding the economic participation and opportunities, there have been taken into consideration the following: the differences of values between women and men in the work field, equal wages for similar works, the rate of income, the number of people who are in leader positions.
- In the case of education, the literacy rate has been taken into consideration.
- For political emancipation, the number of women working in parliament, government and administration.

Taking into consideration the present work is focusing on the leader-woman in social-economic area, economic and political sub-indexes will be the next focus.

Thus, in 2016 our country was approximately at the middle of the top, occupying the 76th position out of 144, with the score of 0.690 of gender gap index.

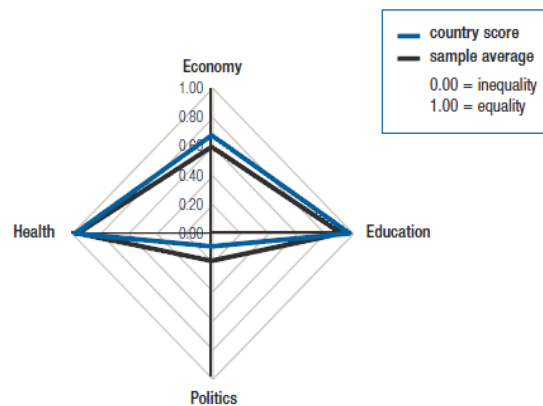


Figure no. 2: The index of gender gaps in Romania

Source: *The Global Gender Gap Report 2016, World Economic Forum, p.300*

As one could notice in Figure no. 2, the sub-index “economic participation and opportunities” is 0.683, leading our country on the 60th place out of 144 in the hierarchy based on this index, a position that is not bad at all. There is, still, room for improvement (for instance a more active economic participation of Romanian women and the growth of the number of model-women, representative leader-women).

Table no. 1: The evolution of global index regarding the gender gap and its components in Romania, from 2010 to 2016

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Global index	0.683	0.681	0.686	0.691	0.694	0.693	0.690
Economic participation and opportunities	0.708	0.694	0.681	0.693	0.683	0.708	0.699
Education	0.989	0.995	0.994	0.994	0.994	0.994	0.992
Health and living	0.977	0.979	0.979	0.979	0.979	0.979	0.979
Access and possibilities in politics	0.056	0.056	0.089	0.097	0.119	0.090	0.090

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2010-2016

The sub-indexes of “education and living” have high rates of 0.994 and 0.979, which demonstrates the fact that women and men are equally treated in education and health, having the same opportunities and services. Regarding political participation, things radically change: the value of only 0.119 sends our country on the 91st place in the top of this index. The weak result indicates an extremely low rate of political participation of women, leading at diminution of the value of global index, although the sub-indexes of education and health are scoring high rates.

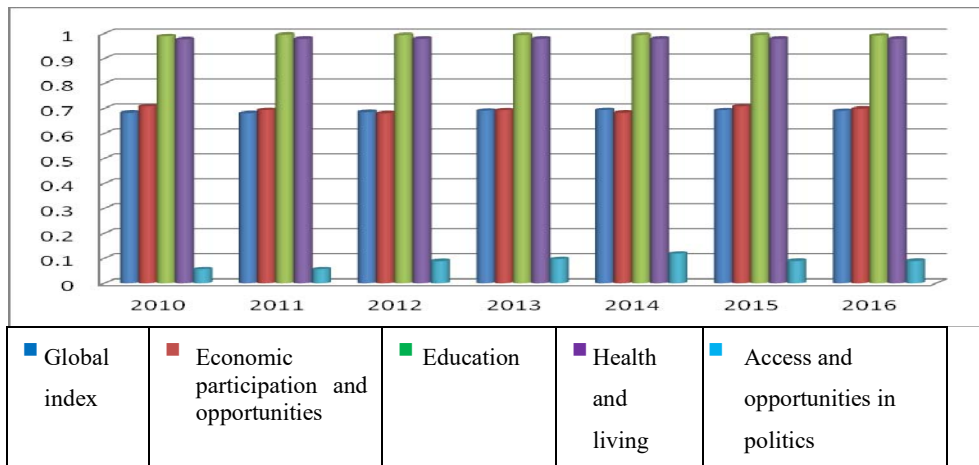


Figure no. 3: The evolution of global index regarding the gender gap and its components in Romania, from 2010 to 2016

Analyzing the evolution of gender gap index and its components in Romania from 2010 to 2016 (Figure no. 3), one can notice the value of global index does not score significant changes. Our attention is on the rise and fall of the index indicating economic participation and opportunities and the low values of “access and opportunities in politics.”

The role of culture in gender discrimination in leadership

The culture of a nation obviously influences the position of woman in society and business. There are cultures, like the Arabic one, in which, though women are allowed to access the education, have the right to activate in certain areas of economy, yet, they are not allowed to sit at the same table with men, or to walk alone on the streets. Obviously, in these cases, the concept of leadership is taboo. Another example of gender discrimination is in China, where, though the social status of woman has improved in the last decades, they are surpassed by men in professional and political life.

So, recent studies made by The Legal Centre of Woman and Legal Services of Peking University on the labor market in China, points out that 20% of women have met employers who give different tasks to different genders for the same work; 1 of 9 women loses her job when giving birth to a child, while 1 of 25 women was forced to sign contracts which stated that she will not get marry or have any children.

Taking these into account, it can be stated that in China leadership is also taboo for women. In India, the access of women to education, health or work is limited. Women in India are discriminated at work and underestimated when speaking about their competences. They are paid, on average, with 30% less than men. In addition to this, despite the efforts of authorities to equal gender gap, women still do not have the right to get a property on their names. Yet, there are situations when men are clearly disadvantaged. For instance, if a man is accused of adultery, he goes to jail, but a woman will never be charged with this. The custody of the child is given to the mother, in case of divorce, and for harassment cases, the man will be charged, even if the act itself had been initiated by a woman.

Although initiatives of discouraging women discrimination have become visible in the Indian society, it can be stated, at the moment, that women are not building a way to business in India, and even less in leadership.

In old times of Japanese, people thought women must be only housewives and mothers for their children. The fact that women in Japan did not have the right to vote until 1945 can demonstrate an obvious female discrimination, but this right was given in Japan at the same time as in France or Italy. The differences are clearer in some areas, such as politics or business. Due to the law of 1986, which established the balance between women and men on the Japanese labor market, women started to earn a well-worthy place in the Japanese society.

In America and in many countries of Europe, women have gained the right to lead, their number being larger comparing to Japan, China, India. Thus, according to a study of The World's Bank, the European average of places occupied by women in the management of big companies was 21,1 in 2015, France being the leader with a rate of 32,8%. At the same time, many European countries have clear aims of promoting women in leadership, but Romania does not have this kind of target. In France, the target is 40% until 2017, in Austria-35% until 2018(from 17, 8% presently), in Belgium-33% until 2017(from 23,4%), in Germany-30% until 2016(from 25, 4%), in Greece-33% -no deadline (from 10,3%), in Italy- 33% in 2015(from 25,8%), in Holland -30% until 2016(from 23,8%) and in Spain-40% until 2015(from 16,8%).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the idea according to which men are better leaders than women cannot be justified. It can be stated that the personality traits of leaders significantly influence the leading style and the way in which they are seen by subordinates, all these having a great impact on the performances of the organization. Thus, depending on the gender, it can be said that women and men have specific defining traits, which influence the leading styles of each.

According to this specific area, the success of leader women in companies is due to their capacities of communicating honestly, of empathizing with co-workers and respecting their work. The advantage of woman is the assessment of team performances according to the targeted aims and the attempt to train her staff in order to put the basis of a skillful team. Men have a rational thinking and not an intuitive one, and in their vision business is a race to glory, the information being a precious source of gaining a competitive advantage.

Yet, the issue must not be generalized. There must be leader-women who have typical male characteristics as well as leader-men whose targets are the motivation of their staff, communication and intuition-typical female characteristics. So, in our opinion these arguments tend to be subjective, especially if we take into account the impact of culture in gender gap: the access of women to leader positions is strongly influenced by mentalities and conceptions existing in different regions of the world. Tradition and culture play a significant role in the acceptance of leader-women by society. Women have been trying to distinguish themselves, to demonstrate they can be part of an environment in which all individuals are equal in rights and obligations. There have been, worldwide, remarkable women in history, culture, and politics and not least in business. Thus, we cannot have a fair analogy between leader-women and leader-men as long as gender discrimination is present.

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