

Leadership Profiles – A Perspective on Managers Within French Chambers of Commerce and Industry Worldwide

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Abstract

The development and the evolution of the business environment and of the international economy remains a topic of major interest in academic and general areas. Important factors involved all over the world are the formal business associations, their members and their leadership. This research aims to explore the characteristics and the leadership profiles of the managers of the network of French chambers of commerce worldwide. The article examines the structural, analysing organizational tenure, gender representation, academic background, and professional trajectories. The result of the research concludes that leadership roles are feminized, often accessed directly, and shaped by a combination of academic specialization, private-sector experience, and cultural ties to France. Future research could explore the influence of leaders' originating companies on chamber governance, as well as historical analyses of leadership profiles to better understand organizational culture and national cultural influences on management practices. The originality of the article is linked with the fact that the worldwide network of business associations is poorly studied, even though it represents an immense organizational ecosystem with important influence on the development of foreign investment and the local economy.

Keywords

Leadership profiles; executive profiles; French business associations; leadership worldwide network

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Introduction

The international networks of bilateral chambers of commerce and industry represent key actors in bilateral economic relations and are vectors for the development of foreign investment in local markets. An analysis of the leadership within these structures is relevant for highlighting the ways in which a leader or a human resources manager must reconcile economic and social performance while supporting the sustainable development of the organization (Peretti, 2019). This qualitative research focuses on a comparative analysis of the numerical structure of French chambers of commerce and industry around the world and the leadership profiles they exhibit. The analysis explores in depth several dimensions, including gender representation, academic background, professional experience, and affiliation with various structures belonging to business or institutional ecosystems with a French footprint. Professor Michel Ferrary considers that, with human resources placed at the center of organizations' economic model, management priorities have shifted toward attracting, training, motivating, and retaining employees capable of sustaining organizational performance (Ferrary, 2014). These research topics, the leadership of Chambers of Commerce, local or international, have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers, viewed from multiple angles. Most recent studies come from American researchers. One of the studies explores the leadership of Chambers of Commerce in the United States and their boards, focusing on the onboarding process and leadership development for organizational leaders (Viola, 2026). Another study, is centered on the largest Chambers of Commerce for each of Texas' 254 counties and examined the gender composition of management and boards with the aims to determine whether women have equal opportunities to participate in the chamber's leadership (Nelson, 2023). Another perspective of the Chamber of Commerce

leadership, examines the leadership challenges and development needs of members before and after COVID-19 (Lindbeck & Daley, 2021).

1. Review of the scientific literature

1.1. Leadership and HR perspectives

In the analysis of organizational leadership, several differences emerge between individual perceptions, those of employees, and the perspective of the organization itself. Each level of involvement and decision-making within an organization interprets internal and external factors, successes and failures, risks and opportunities in its own way. Beyond individual experiences, these perceptions are also shaped by the working environment, particularly in entities with an international component, where at least two cultures are involved: the national one and the foreign one.

Boxall and Purcell, argue that the field of human resources can be understood through three major subsystems. The first, referred to as the micro level, encompasses human resource policies and practices, as well as the management of work and social relations. The second concerns the international dimension, while the third addresses the strategic level, through the lens of human resource strategy and its translation into organizational performance (Boxall et Purcell., 2003).

The professional training of employees influences their actions and behaviours and has a direct impact on organizational culture (Ghinea & Brătianu, 2012). Researchers have defined organizational culture through its components, through the actions of organizational members, and through its defining elements. Some theorists tried to analyse the role of organizational culture in shaping professional development. Another theoretical approach found in the specialized literature is that of researchers who have examined the relationship between a country's national culture and the management styles adopted within work environments (Dextras-Gauthier & Marchand, 2016). In his studies, Geert Hofstede tried to understand, through the analysis of organizations, how organizational culture differs from or resembles national culture, as well as the impact of these distinctions (Macarie, 2011). Edward Hall highlights the importance of encounters between people belonging to different cultures and the role of dialogue in understanding groups with diverse ethnicities, religions, and cultural backgrounds (Cuche, 2007).

Leadership is not determined by the position someone holds, but by their ability to behave and act as a leader (Lapierre, 2008). In Michael Armstrong's view, recruitment must follow three stages: defining the profile, attracting candidates, and selecting them (Armstrong, 2001). Initially, those responsible for leadership positions came from the aristocracy; over the years, various criteria were introduced for assuming such roles, including five to ten years of professional experience (Moine, 2013). Many researchers have deepened their analyses to explore the links between leadership and performance and to determine whether leadership style influences organizational success (Țiclău, 2015). Another aspect related to human resources is the fact that, from their very foundation, chambers of commerce also had boards of directors—bodies that included marquises, commercial attachés of embassies, consuls, and the most prominent merchants in the city. In practice, leadership roles were reserved for individuals holding high-ranking, respected positions and enjoying strong financial stability (Talamante-Perez, 2017).

However, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argued that appointing a business administrator to a leadership role posed a risk, as such an individual would be unable to ensure fair and unified representation for all businesses (Monnier, 2004). Researchers Jacques Rojot and Alice Le Flanchec emphasize that behind every recruitment process lies a strategy—whether aimed at reducing costs, fostering innovation, or seeking specific expertise—all intended to ensure the continuity of an organization (Bchini et al., 2016).

1.2. Origins and evolution of the French Chambers of commerce abroad

To obtain a clearer picture of the structures under examination, it is important to review the rationale behind the creation of French chambers of commerce abroad. With the aim of strengthening the connection between French territory and foreign markets, and of supporting the development of exports and economic diplomacy, the idea of establishing Chambers of Commerce abroad was recommended in 1883 by the Minister of Commerce, Charles Heresson, to the President of France (Poton, 2025). For small merchants and artisans, these forms of association enabled them to connect with major traders and to lay the foundations for commercial relationships (Talamante Pérez, 2017).

A few years later, in 1876, the first such entity was established in New Orleans, and between 1885 and 1890 the French Ministry responsible for commerce financed the creation of 30 similar structures. French consuls played an important role in their establishment and development, and for some of them, the Chambers constituted the main objective of their mandate (Poton, 2025). Charles Maurice de Talleyrand,

the French diplomat, considered that the mission of chambers of commerce was to represent civil society, the interests of trade and industry, as well as both general and specific interests (Monnier, 2004).

At the international level, there are currently 125 such structures (including France), the first having been created in 1876 in the United States, in New Orleans. Between 1876 and 1900, fifteen entities were established, most of them in Europe (Spain–Barcelona and the United Kingdom in 1883; Belgium, Greece, Italy, and Turkey in 1885; followed by Spain–Madrid, Switzerland, and Portugal). Three were created in Latin America (Uruguay–1882, Argentina–1884, Chile–1884) and one in Australia (1899). From the earliest years, an increase in trade between France and the countries where chambers of commerce were established can be observed (Poton, 2025). Between 1901 and the end of the First World War, six entities were created, including the one in France, which today coordinates collaboration among these structures worldwide. During this period, the first chamber in Asia (Japan, 1918) and the first in Africa (Morocco, 1913) were also established. The period leading up to the end of the Second World War was marked by the creation of four chambers—two in Europe and two in Latin America. (www.ccifi-international.org).

After the Second World War and until 1990, thirty-eight chambers were created across all geographic regions. Between 1991 and 1999, the most dynamic phase of expansion occurred, with thirty new structures established in ten years, many in Central and South-Eastern Europe, as a result of newly formed democratic regimes that encouraged the inflow of Western investment. Between 2000 and 2009, nine new structures appeared; between 2010 and 2019, twenty-three; and after 2020, five additional entities were created, the most recent being established in 2025 in Vancouver, Canada, and in Laos. There is no doubt that these structures—designed to unite, to highlight the ties between two countries, and to foster commercial development—have fulfilled their objectives since their creation (Moine, 2013). By initially bringing together merchants and later companies of all types, entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions, the chambers of commerce in Europe today represent ecosystems ranging from 18 members (Panama) to 3,680 members (Morocco) (www.ccifi-international.org).

Charles Maurice de Talleyrand emphasized that their influence derived from and was supported by the notoriety and the social and economic standing of their members (Monnier, 2004). Foreign chambers of commerce are also regarded as a source of information and insight into the economic environment and market developments (Marciniak, 2025). Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, raises questions about the differences in mentality that may exist between peoples (Cuche, 2003). National cultures are the primary frameworks through which individuals develop their beliefs, values, and behaviours. (Voynnet-Fourboul, 2013).

Ralph Linton emphasizes the importance of individuals adapting to the cultures they encounter, arguing that each person knows from their own culture only what is necessary to conform to their various social statuses and to perform the roles associated with them (Pomian, 2007).

In the XIX century, the mandate of representation opened doors and justified personal and business relationships, while also requiring the assumption of commitments (Moine, 2013). Leaders were known as advocates for various economic issues. Moreover, they were active in committees, working groups, juries, and trade unions (Moine, 2013). The specialized literature, through Jacques Igalens and Alain Roger, offers a definition of recruitment as a rational decision-making process aimed at bringing in or replacing personnel. The individual leading the chambers represented the business community in its relationship with the state, being regarded as an advisor, and over time came to develop administrative activities through the management of equipment and services (Moine, 2013).

2. Research methodology

This research represents a stage within a broader, more extensive research process, both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The present study is based on the hypothesis that the leadership role within a structure representing a business community corresponds to a personal and professional profile that is specific to the economic domain, whether through academic training or career experience.

The research aimed to address several key questions related to defining this leadership profile: Is the leadership role more strongly represented among men or women?; Is the leadership role most often obtained as a result of prior work experience within the organization?; Can a specific leadership profile be defined according to the size of the team and the structure being led?; What level of academic education predominates in the professional trajectory of these leaders?; Are MBA-type specializations predominant in their profiles?; Is experience in the public sector a niche background or a defining characteristic for leaders?; What is the degree of involvement of leaders in the French ecosystem of the country in which they operate?; Is there official recognition of their achievements?

The general objective of the research was to present the context in which French chambers of commerce around the world were created. The specific objectives focused on highlighting the evolution of leadership profiles within these structures and how they have changed over time. Additionally, the study underlines the dominant leadership profiles in these moments and the differences across continents and organizational structures.

In conducting this research, the qualitative method was employed, more specifically desk research through content analysis. The study required the use of several instruments. First, primary sources were consulted—digital library catalogues and scientific article databases—to identify relevant documents (specialized literature, studies, articles), using keyword searches and established researchers in the field. The historical and comparative analysis of the literature on the concept of leadership highlighted the evolution of concepts, ideas, and changes that have occurred over time. Additionally, the historical and economic development of French chambers of commerce worldwide was examined. The second source of information consisted of the websites of the chambers of commerce, as well as the professional profiles available on LinkedIn and information found in various articles or interviews referring to the personal career paths of the directors. Digital resources were consulted between 29 December 2025 and 20 March 2026.

The second research instrument used was benchmarking, through the analysis of elements such as the year of establishment of each organization, geographical location, number of members, and number of employees. Comparing these aspects is necessary in order to determine whether the differences or similarities among them represent relevant or defining elements for the leaders' profiles. Today, at the international level, there are 124 French Chambers of Commerce operating in 98 countries, 36 of which are located in Europe. Their activities continue to be guided by the mission that underpinned the creation of the first such structures. Together, they comprise 38.619 members and employ 1.046 staff (CCI France-International, n.d.).

In general terms, the role of a leader is defined by their representational authority and by their capacity to promote commercial interests and development opportunities in the country in which they operate. Lapierre was saying that when analysing leaders, the unique and different aspects are more important than the similarities. (Lapierre, 2008). The purpose of the analysis was to determine whether a process of professionalization can be observed in these leadership positions, what the gender distribution of managers looks like, whether a dominant profile can be identified based on academic and professional experience, leadership background, membership in other organizations, or tenure within the institution.

The applied research methodology included defining the elements on which the analysis would be based, collecting data, and conducting statistical and content analysis using a predefined grid, followed by evaluating and interpreting the results in accordance with the hypothesis and research questions. The grid focused on the time spent within the organization, the time spent as manager, all types of academic degrees (bachelor's, master's, MBA, doctorate), academic specializations, professional experience (public and private), and highlighted elements typical of the French ecosystem (associations, recognitions, etc.).

The conclusions indicate that the research can be further deepened both through the use of interviews or questionnaires and by extending the analysis to include the leaders who hold the position of president.

The limitations of the research were linked to the fact that not all information was available, and not all managers have LinkedIn profiles or updated profiles. We also cannot know whether the information provided on these profiles or on the websites is complete, or whether additional studies, professional experiences, or affiliations within the French ecosystem exist but were not specified.

3. Results and discussion

In total, the research targeted 124 organizations. The age and structural characteristics of the organizations were analyzed for all entities; however, the leadership profile analysis included 114 profiles, and the examination of academic and professional backgrounds covered only 96. For eight countries (Armenia, Canada–Montreal, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Paraguay, USA–Cleveland, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Uzbekistan), public information is available regarding the manager, but it is limited to the first and last name. For six countries (Belgium–Wallonia, Canada–Quebec, Cuba, Haiti, Iceland, Macao), no information is published regarding the existence of a leader. Two countries, Kuwait and Israel, indicate on their websites that the role of representation is held by the President.

3.1 Gender's representation

First, the gender distribution shows that women constitute the majority in director positions, accounting for 60.5%, while men hold 39.5% of these roles. At the continental level, gender representation reflects the

same pattern: women are the majority across almost all continents, with percentages ranging from 66% in the United States and Canada, 64% in Europe, to 56% in South America. In the Asia–Oceania region, male managers constitute the majority (52%), Figure no. 1.

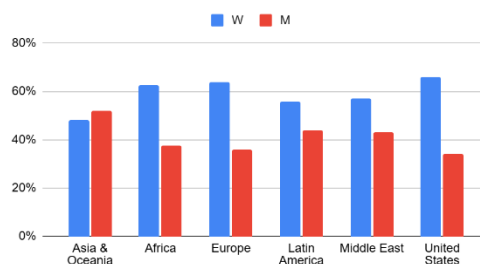


Figure no. 1. Leaders' gender representation

3.2. Leaders'time spent within the organization

The analysis of leaders'time spent within the organization shows that the average organizational tenure is 8 years and 8 months, with the shortest tenure being 6 months and the longest 32 years. We observe that the directors with only 6 months of tenure are those in Detroit and Laos, while the longest-serving leaders are in the Philippines and Germany. In both cases, there is one female leader and one male leader. The difference lies in the fact that the structure in Laos itself is only 6 months old. At the continental level, the longest average organizational tenure is found in Europe—12 years and 8 months—while the shortest is in Africa, at 5 years.

On the other hand, the analysis of the duration of the director's mandate shows that the average tenure in the director role is 7 years and 5 months. The shortest tenure is again 6 months, held by the directors in Detroit and Laos, while the longest is 32 years, held by the director in the Philippines, followed by 25 years for the director in Norway. Female directors have an average tenure of 7 years and 7 months in this role, while male directors average 7 years and 2 months.

A first conclusion is that 76 of the managers—representing 76%—have the same length of tenure in the organization as in the director position, meaning they entered the organization directly as directors. For example, this pattern is more pronounced in Africa, where 12 out of 15 leaders (80%) accessed the leadership role directly, and in Europe, where 70% followed the same trajectory.

3.3. Academic background

Regarding the analysis of academic background, 101 leadership profiles were examined. All leaders hold a completed bachelor's degree. Four major fields of study emerge. The first field, which includes 57% of the leaders, is economic sciences, encompassing specializations such as business administration, commerce, finance, banking, economics, and business studies. The second field, representing 23% of directors, consists of social sciences, including law, political science, international relations, foreign languages, and psychology. The third field, comprising 9% of directors, includes marketing and journalism. The final category groups together 11% of leaders who completed diverse specializations such as IT, electronics, agriculture, film studies, chemistry, mathematics, sciences, and telecommunications.

With respect to master's studies, more than 68% of general directors pursued advanced specializations. These continue to fall within the same four major academic areas. Half of the leaders (50%) deepened their studies in economic sciences, most of them specializing in business. A further 24.6% pursued specializations in social sciences, and 14.5% in marketing and communication. Other niche specializations include territorial planning, human resource management, education, gastronomy, urban planning, telecommunications, and new technologies.

Only one leader—the director of the Chamber of Commerce in Serbia—has completed doctoral studies.

MBA programs were completed by 28% of the leaders. Interestingly, MBA graduates are present across all continents, although the lowest numbers are found in the United States, Canada, and Africa, where only one leader in each region holds such a degree. The themes of these programs include digital business, energy, management, human resources, and sustainability. Overall, the academic background of the directors shows continuity across different levels of study and a deepening of expertise within an already established field.

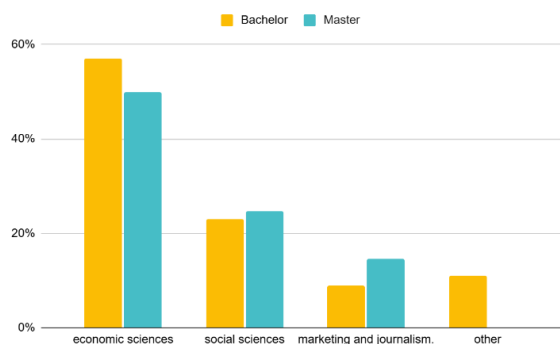


Figure no. 2. Educational Background: Bachelor's and Master's Degree Specialties

3.4 Professional experience

Regarding the professional experience of the directors, the analysis covers 100 leadership profiles and focuses on whether they have professional experience in the public sector, the private sector, or both.

A total of 25% of leaders have professional experience in both the public and private sectors. When examining experience exclusively in the public sector, we observe that 27% of leaders have worked in public institutions. The public sector is represented primarily by embassies, where 27% of these leaders have held positions such as advisers, communication officers, or secretaries. For example, the leader from Bulgaria worked at the French Embassy in Bulgaria. Leaders have also worked in the French embassies in Ghana, India, Bahrain, Yangon, and New Zealand.

Business France represents another professional stage for 15% of leaders (currently directors in South Africa, Kazakhstan, Texas, and the Philippines). For another 15%, public-sector experience includes roles in Business France, the Lyon Chamber of Commerce, or various French ministries—Economy, Defense, Foreign Affairs—as well as the Ministry of Education in New Zealand or the Ministry of Agriculture in Romania. Additionally, 15% of leaders have experience in education, either as university professors or teachers in French Lycées.

When analysing experience exclusively in the private sector, the data show that 95% of leaders have worked in private companies. The sectors with the highest representation are finance and banking, services, and retail. A total of 46% of leaders have held managerial positions in the private sector. The remaining leaders have worked in departments such as sales, marketing, communication, public affairs, IT, or technical roles.

Within this analysis, it is noteworthy that the directors from Austria, Luxembourg, and the Republic of Moldova have not worked in either the public or private sector; instead, they have been active in non-governmental organizations.

Several profiles stand out due to their professional trajectories. A first example is the director of the Chamber of Commerce Spain–Madrid and the director of the Chamber of Commerce in Côte d'Ivoire, both of whom served as Presidents of their Chambers before becoming directors—a career path that may appear reversed compared to the usual progression within these structures, even though both roles serve the purpose of representing the organization.

A second example is the director of the Chamber of Commerce in the Dominican Republic, who previously served as Vice President and board member of the European Chamber of Commerce in the Dominican Republic, as well as coordinator of the network of French chambers of commerce in Latin America.

A third example is the director in Morocco, who is currently serving his second mandate as director, having previously held the same position for five years.

3.5. Connections with French ecosystem and recognition

Approximately 25% of the directors are members of the boards of entities within the French ecosystem—French Lycées or NGOs dedicated to promoting new technologies, such as French Tech. Created in 2013 under the French Ministry of the Economy, Finance, and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty, French Tech's mission is to develop and promote public policies aimed at supporting start-ups and strengthening this ecosystem (<https://lafrenchtech.gouv.fr/fr/>). Leaders from 11 countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Colombia, South Korea, the United Kingdom, Nigeria, Romania, USA–San Diego, USA–Miami, USA–Boston) serve on the boards of these organizations.

Seven leaders also mention having been decorated by the French state with various medals or distinctions. These include the managers of the structures in Belgium–Brussels, Bulgaria, Bahrain, Canada–Toronto, Luxembourg, and Romania.

Conclusions

Following these analyses and considering both the structural characteristics of the French chambers of commerce worldwide and the elements most frequently present in leaders' profiles, three managerial contexts and three corresponding leadership profiles can be identified. The first profile is that of managers overseeing teams of 1–9 employees and communities averaging 157 members. These leaders constitute the majority in the study, represented by 90 individuals. Their distribution accounts for 91% of leaders in the United States and Canada, 77% in Latin America, 66% in Europe, and 63% in Asia and Australia.

These managers—predominantly women (66%)—have an average organizational tenure of 7.5 years and an average leadership tenure of 7 years. A total of 83% entered the organization directly into a leadership role, with 27% having public-sector experience and 90% having private-sector experience. Interestingly, only 45% had previously held a managerial position. Their academic background is primarily in economic sciences, with a strong emphasis on business-related specializations.

The second managerial profile includes leaders overseeing teams of 10–30 employees and communities averaging 659 members. These managers (14 in the analysis—Argentina, Brazil–São Paulo, Belgium–Brussels, South Korea, United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, Italy, Madagascar, Poland, Romania, Singapore, Spain–Madrid, USA–New York, Tunisia) are exclusively women. They have an average organizational tenure of 11 years and an average leadership tenure of 9 years. A total of 57% entered the organization directly into a leadership role, with 14% having public-sector experience and all of them (100%) having private-sector experience. Only 42% previously held managerial positions. Their academic background is rooted in the social sciences (law, international relations, European studies, foreign languages), with predominant specializations in marketing and human resources. Only 35% hold an MBA, and none hold a doctoral degree.

The third managerial profile includes leaders overseeing teams of 30–108 employees and communities averaging 1,316 members. These leaders (Algeria, Germany, Japan, Morocco, Russia) are predominantly men (71%). They have an average organizational tenure of over 17 years and an average leadership tenure of more than 14 years. Their academic backgrounds at the bachelor's level are highly diverse (sciences, foreign languages, commerce, construction, applied sciences). Only one leader holds an MBA (Japan), and only one has public-sector experience (also Japan).

This research remains dynamic, given the indefinite nature of leadership mandates, which may result in management changes at any time, as well as ongoing developments in academic trajectories—new specializations or newly completed degrees. The preliminary conclusions indicate that the leadership role is a feminized one, and in most cases, leaders access the position directly. These appointments may be grounded in academic and professional trajectories, as well as in personal cultural ties to France—whether through education or professional networks. The dominant profile that emerges is one combining training in the social sciences, strengthened by specializations in economics. Professional experience in the private sector clearly represents a competitive advantage for leadership roles.

An interesting avenue for further analysis would be the role of the companies from which leaders originate in the activities of the Chamber—whether they are members or have had representation on Boards of Directors. Another more stable research direction could involve analyzing past leadership profiles over a longer historical period. Through a combined quantitative and qualitative approach, such a study could provide new insights into organizational culture and reveal whether the cultural profile of a country or the leader's nationality influences structural aspects, human resource management, or strategic priorities.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) usage statement

Microsoft copilot was responsibly used to check the English accuracy of some sentences.

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