

GENDER AND LEADERSHIP. THE IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS¹

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Abstract

This study approaches the public organizations and their organizational culture by taking into account the gender factor. More specifically, it will approach women's presence in the leadership of public organizations, the influence of the public organizational culture in the promotion of women in middle and top management positions, and it will finally identify the defining characteristics of the organizational culture of the institutions led by women in comparison to those led by men.

Our study is based on a research conducted in Bistrița-Năsăud County, Romania, by applying a survey in 12 public organizations. The survey comprises 16 questions, seven of which are open questions; 25 women with different positions in the medium and the top management of public institutions were surveyed. The conclusions of the research confirm the existence of some clear differences in the organizational culture of women-led and respectively, men-led public institutions. At the same time, the study identifies possible causes for the low presence of women in the public top management in contrast to their high presence in the execution positions.

1. Introduction

Public organizations reflect more accurately organizational culture due to its visibility in relationship to their clients. The type of dominant organizational culture of one public organization influences the way its members behave with each other, the relationships set between superior and subordinates, the atmosphere surrounding the organization, and all these will be finally transferred over the individuals' behavior in their relationship with clients, meaning civil servants' behavior in their relationship with public services' beneficiaries.

In Romania and other countries around the world, women compose the overwhelming part of the employees. The massive presence of women in public organizations is not to be found in the same proportion in their top management.

In the last few years most countries' legislations guarantee women's access to the labor market, including to those positions defined as managerial, thus stopping or limiting the women's discrimination in the labor market. Some progress has to be made however also in the appointments of women in middle and top management positions.

2. Why are not women in top management?

The female managers are concentrated in the medium and low levels of the management, only few of them managing to break the '*glass ceiling*' (Cole, 2004, p. 106) and to accede to top management positions.

Why women are so poorly represented in managerial positions and more exactly in top management? We may identify several causes:

1. Society's beliefs related to the woman's and the man's role;
2. Marriage and children;
3. A lack of benefits and facilities for working women;
4. Typical myths or men's prejudices; and
5. The domination of men's values in organizational cultures.

The male dominance at the work place is not just the consequence of the male prejudices regarding women in management positions, but it is also a consequence of the lack of the real experience of women in leadership for decades. The organizations are dominated by organizational cultures made by men for men. Researcher J. Marshall (*apud* Cole, 2004, p. 105) identifies two male and female value groups that define the organizational cultures which he considers 'as abilities accessible for both sexes ... Women and men are the same, but also different'. These values are, according to the author, the following:

Table 1: Values which define organizational culture based on gender

Male values	Female values
• Self-assertion • Separation • Control • Competition • Focused perception • Rationality • Clarity • Discrimination • Activity	• Interdependence • Cooperation • Receptivity • Merging • Acceptance • Acceptance of some patterns, wholes and contexts • Emotional tonus • The Being • Intuition • Synthesis

Source: Marshall *apud* Cole, 2004

In Western societies male values predominate, which lead to the hypothesis that women are considered inferior to men. Male values impose in organizations an autocratic and direct style, while female values are characteristics of the democratic and participative style. The management literature of the last few decades registers the proliferation in organizations of the participative management style that assures better results than the authoritarian one. How will male managers react to this pressure of the present? Will they adopt feminine values in their attitude and their behavior, or will they encourage a massive presence of women in the top management of the organizations?

3. What is the situation in Romania?

The researches made lately in Romania show a situation similar to the Western one regarding the statute of woman in society and therefore its leadership.

A research made by the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) for the National Council against Discrimination in December 2005, aimed at evaluating men's and women's situation in Romania, showed that 48% of the questioned people consider men's situation to be better than that of women; 40% claimed that men and women are equal in Romania. Those who consider men to have a better position in society belong to the following socio-demographic groups: the young population, up to 35 years old (52%), those with university studies (63%), those from the urban areas (55%) and those unmarried (51%). The equality of men and women is supported by the following groups: the elderly (45%), those that graduated maximum 8 years of school (45%), those married (43%), and those from the villages (46%).

The equality of chances between men and women is defined as:

- 'Having equal rights' – 58%;
- 'Making the decisions in common' – 15%;
- 'Equal family obligations' – 11%;
- 'Understanding inside the couple' – 7%;

- ‘Access to the same jobs’ – 6%;
- ‘Both partners have jobs’ – 2%; and
- ‘Both partners have the same amount of spare time’ – 1%.

Almost half (48%) of those questioned recognize that nowadays in Romania there is not a real equality between men and women. The main reason for the discrimination of women in the Romanian labor market is that: ‘women work more at home’ – an opinion expressed by almost half of those questioned.

There were identified also traditional attitudes expressed as prejudices: ‘women cannot practice some professions’ (40%); ‘there are biological differences between men and women’ (35%); ‘the Christian moral makes the difference between men and women’ (24%).

The roles of men and women in couple are seen in a traditional and stereotype way by the majority of people: 76% consider that ‘the man is the head of the family’, 67% believe that ‘it is more a man’s duty to bring money at home’, and 64% believe that ‘it is more a woman’s duty to do the housework’.

In relation to the analyzed socio-demographic categories, traditional attitudes are present with higher values than the average in Oltenia and Crișana-Maramureș, in the rural areas mainly, and among persons with a low level of school training, among elderly and among men. The persons with a more open attitude toward equality of men and women live in Transylvania and Banat, predominantly in cities, and hold university diplomas or higher.

4. Research methodology

For studying the feminine presence in Romanian public organizations’ management and observing the gender impact on organizational culture, we conducted a survey in 12 public organizations from Bistrița-Năsăud County; women who hold top and middle management positions in these organizations were surveyed. We focused on women from middle management as well because the number of women in top management is limited (*i.e.* a woman leads only one of the organizations included in our sample).

The 12 public organizations comprise 1598 employees: 1029 are women (64%) and 569 are men (36%). We used a questionnaire, comprising 16 questions, 7 being open questions and 9 closed questions. The surveyed female managers are between 30 and 60 years old; most of them are between 50 and 60 years old (55%), followed by the group of those with ages between 40 and 50 (27%), and those with ages between 30 and 40 (18%). There is no woman under 30 in top or middle management of the organizations included in our sample. The average age of the surveyed women is 49; all of them have university diplomas and 36% of them attended post-university or master courses.

70% of the questioned women are married and have children. The average seniority in management is 9.18 years, which means, considering the average age, that the surveyed women had been promoted mostly after 40, quite late especially that they are not in top management jobs but rather in middle management jobs.

5. Survey results

Asked about the chances to get a management position, 64% of the subjects consider that only sometimes women and men have equal chances, 18% consider that seldom there are equal chances, and 9% consider that these chances are often equal.

Asked about the preference for male or female managers in organizations and the preference to collaborate with men or women, an overwhelming percent of the subjects (91%, respectively 64%) argued that their preference is not gender-driven; these percents show that women have no gender prejudices in organization's management.

Still, 82% of the subjects consider that there are many prejudices against women, and 46% of them see a causal relation between the emancipation movement of Romanian women, not active enough, and the low presence of women in the public organizations' management.

We included in our questionnaire a question with multiple choices in order to find out who supported them mostly. Many female managers chose family (81%) and close friends (55%), these answers offered an image about their relationships and behavior – the family is most important in relation to their career and only in the second place come the formal relationships with their partners or colleagues from organization.

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of a woman in top management, our subjects offered similar answers. The main advantages they identified were – professional recognition, trust, social recognition, self-esteem, financial and material advantages, the opportunity to understand social reality, the decrease of inhibition in relation with the authorities, organizing abilities (she organizes everything, including her private life), meticulousness, integrity (less corruptible than a man). Some of the disadvantages identified by our subjects are – less spare time to spend with her family, stress, inevitable involvement in unpleasant conflicts, taking upon herself the team's failures, neglecting her resting time, sometimes a hostile environment, not enough time for the organization (like a male manager, excluding exceptional cases), she gives up more easily than a man when involved in 'battles' (conflicts), excessive sensibility etc.

The main obstacles faced by female managers in their activities refer to – organization's culture, an apathetic and indifferent team, the need of the superiors to demonstrate and confirm, duplicity, obsolete mentality, incorrect and insufficient information, legislation – especially regarding personnel selection, a lack of trust (sometimes not shown), both from superiors and subordinates, that creates an obvious discomfort and makes communication difficult, low acceptance of change in organization, avoidance of what is new, and surpassing her own emotiveness.

All these obstacles identified by our subjects describe a state of mind that characterizes the public organizations they are members of, and offer some clues about the type of dominant organizational culture.

As regarding the reasons why they prefer to collaborate with female and respectively with male managers, our subjects offered a detailed list of the most important

characteristics of the both. The answers at this open question are in fact a description (according to a female manager point of view) of the two types of managerial cultures, feminine and masculine. A synthesis of this description is shown below.

Table 2: Elements of the managerial culture according to gender

Female managerial culture	Male managerial culture
• Good organizing abilities • Rigorousness • Dedication • Better communication • Flexibility in decision-making • Tenacity • Keeps her promises • Compatibility in approaching inter-human relations • Meticulousness in tasks fulfillment • Systematic character in the achievement of long-term objectives • Analytical, pays attention to details • Patience • Power to listen • Empathy • Progress opportunity through discussing women's common interests • Ability in offering support for finding some positive aspects in mistakes • Sensibility concerning others' needs and feelings • Politeness, elegance, prestige and safety • Honors commitments • Practical • Deep analysis of situations • Involved in what they are doing • Caring • Integrity • Responsibility in approaching issues • Open minded	• Courage • Lucidity • Diplomacy • Concision • Pragmatism • Social ambition • Success and notoriety due to existent social prejudices • Able to work more without being pressed by family responsibilities • Less obstacles in career development • Emotional intelligence • More ability to delegate tasks than female managers • Assure some equilibrium in a partnership • More capable to take on higher risks • More certainty in decision-making • More firm • Have more spare time • Do not have to worry about domestic problems (everyday problems) • Supported by family • Easy to be manipulated • Good organizers • Stress resistant

As for strengths and weaknesses of female managers compared with those of male managers, our subjects identified a list of individual characteristics that actually describe the dominant managerial styles of men and women. A synthesis of these characteristics is shown below in Table 3.

Table 3: Characteristics of female management style

Strengths of female managers	Weaknesses of female managers
• Intuition • Discipline in achieving objectives • Prudence • Devotion • Perseverance • Emotional intelligence • Team work • Sense of humor • Self-evaluation • Patience • Social altruism • Communication • Mind flexibility, open minded • Responsibility, integrity • Meticulousness (pays attention to details) • Organizing ability • Scrupulosity • Empathy, power to listen • Sensibility concerning others' needs and feelings • Higher preoccupation for inter-team relationships • Systematic character in long-term objectives achievement • Hard work ability • Analyzing ability • Sense of esthetics	• Women make efforts for convincing their superiors that they are competent • Inflexibility • Lower negotiation skills • More domestic obligations • Preoccupation for details • Less tenacious • Vulnerability in relation to 'unorthodox' methods used sometimes both in business and politics • High influenced by others in everything she's doing • A lack of courage to say what she thinks • Low tasks' delegation ability • Too involved in what they are doing, loses perspective • Suspicions from others regarding her managerial abilities • She hardly gives enough time for the job • She does not own her spare time (family dependent) • More sensitive • Low resistance to stress • Emotiveness

We may observe that most of the characteristics identified by our subjects as strengths in the managerial activity belong to a democratic, participative style. The main weaknesses identified by our subjects refer mostly to the others' attitude, men or women, towards their ability to face the challenges in management, but also characteristics of femininity itself, such as sensitivity, less resilience to stress, emotiveness, domestic obligations etc.

The women admit that public organizations' environment is full of prejudices that influence women's management activity. Among others, they identified the following prejudices that belong to both men and women:

1. Men are more competent than women are.
2. Women have to play only domestic roles and less social roles as leaders.
3. Morals and religion talk too often about women as being good wives and mothers, and rarely about men as having the same role, of husbands and fathers.
4. The idea that particular activities belong exclusively to men.
5. The others' skepticism vis-à-vis their managerial abilities.

6. Many people consider the role of female manager as being rather decorative.
7. The man leads and the woman must subordinate and always follow him.
8. The woman represents the image of stability.

Our subjects were asked to offer an explanation regarding the low number of women in the top management of public organizations; they referred especially to political factors involved in promotions, more obligations assumed by women in domestic life, and a lack of interest of their behalf for these kinds of activities. Some of their answers are listed below:

1. Appointments in public functions are often political, and men dominate politics.
2. They are not promoted or encouraged to apply for higher positions.
3. Public organizations are directly influenced by politics, and in politics stress, contradictions and conflicts are more present than in other domains.
4. More closed to their families and children, women are more cautious when it comes to becoming public persons or more visible.
5. They do not really want to get involved.
6. Women tend to get more criticism than men regarding their external image, such as clothing, gestures, body positions, hackneyed expression, and this scrutiny is unavoidable when it comes to top management positions.
7. Earning the respect of male colleagues is too complicated and requires a lot of extra effort.
8. Mostly men run these organizations, and the promotion of women in leading positions is rather an exception than the rule.
9. They are dedicated to their families.
10. Men are the decision-makers and rarely recommend a woman.
11. A lack of support from their families (most of times), despite the fact that most of the surveyed women say that families are important to them.
12. Misogynism.
13. A lack of self-confidence on their behalf which can sabotage their chances or willingness to try to accede to such a position.

6. Conclusions

This analysis and the main findings should be approached in light of the limitations of this research: on the one hand, it only addressed the women's perception in relation to this issue, without testing the opinions of male managers for comparative results, without seeing the male managers' perception of the women's presence in the leadership of public organizations, and especially, without seeing if men perceive the same differences between organizational cultures. On the other hand, the structure of the sample is not ideal – only one woman is in a leading position and she is not married and has no children, while the rest of our respondents are women that have middle management positions, they are married and have children.

In conclusion, this research confirms the opinions existing in the management literature regarding the fact that:

- There are some differences between organizational cultures in the organizations led by women or led by men.
- There is a different style of management practiced by men compared with the management style of women.
- The presence of women in top management of public organizations is rather low, compared with their presence in private organizations. There is a continuing and growing discrepancy between the high number of women in private organizations' top management and their presence in public organizations' management.
- The women who 'broke the glass ceiling' in public organizations are found especially in middle management and to a less extent in top management.

The main causes of this situation, showed also by our analysis, are the dependency of decision in public organizations on the political factor dominated by men and the women's skepticism regarding politics seen as an space where 'stress, contradictions and conflicts are more present than in other domains', a reason for 'women's cautionness when to became public persons'.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

1. Do you think that women and men have equal chances in getting a top management job in public organizations in Romania?

1. Never	2. Very rarely	3. Rarely	4. Sometimes	5. Often	6. Very often	7. Always	8. Do not know/ Do not answer
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2. Please make a hierarchy of the main advantages and disadvantages of having a woman in a leading position in a public organization.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

3. Which are the main obstacles you face in your top/middle management activity?

.....

4. Do you think that if you were a man you would have faced the same difficulties ?

1. To a very small extent	2. To a small extent	3. To the same extent	4. To a great extent	5. To a very great extent	6. Do not know/ Do not answer
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5. Your subordinates are:

- a. Mostly women
- b. Mostly men
- c. Women and men, in the same proportion

6. Your close collaborators in organization's leadership are:

1. Mostly women	2. Mostly men	3. Women and men
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7. In your management activity you were supported especially by:

- a. Family
- b. Close friends
- c. Another female managers
- d. Former colleagues
- e. Present partners
- f. No one
- g. Somebody else

8. The organization you currently work for is run by:

1. Mostly women	2. Mostly men	3. Women and men
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9. As leading partners you prefer:

1. Especially women	2. Especially men	3. Women and men
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10. What are the main reasons that makes you prefer to collaborate with an organization led:

- A. by women

1.....
2.....
3.....
- B. by men

1.....
2.....
3.....

11. What qualities set aside female managers from male managers?

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

12. What weaknesses have a female manager compared with a male manager?

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

13. Do you think that in Romania women are prejudiced against?

1. To a very small extent	2. To a small extent	3. To the same extent	4. To a great extent	5. To a very great extent	6. Do not know/ Do not answer
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14. What prejudices do you encounter the most in your activity?

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15. Why do you think that there are few women in public organizations' leadership?

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16. Do you think that women would have been more present in public organizations' leadership if the emancipation movement had been more active?

1. Yes	2. No	3. Do not know
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17. Please provide the following socio-demographic information:

Age:

Under 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Over 60
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Last qualification:.....

Family status:.....

Seniority in leading position:.....

Number of the employeesout of whom.....are women and..... are men