Women's Leadership in Business

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Abstract

Contemporary organizations need leaders. Not only the ones, who will manage, but managers, who will be able to lead, create a vision, co-operate with people, eliminate barriers, and find new solutions. Success in the organization management no more depends on the person, who manages (man or woman), but on how he or she directs it and how he or she achieves the goals. The world is opening to the leadership of women, although this process is still not fast enough. For many organizations, women in the role of leaders have become a big chance, but also a challenge. Breaking stereotypes about the women leaders for many organizations is still not easy. We have to remember that the leader is not about sex, but state of mind and qualities which enable achievement of the objectives inaccessible to others. The key question, therefore, is not about whom the leader is but what kind of personalities is, skills or qualifications are the most important if we look for leaders. This paper focuses on indicating how the leadership of women influences an organization.

Keywords

Leadership, management, woman

Leadership in the contemporary world is changing. For ages until recently, a leader means a male exclusively. It seems obvious that management of a big company or a small organization, whatsoever, should be entrusted to men. Such a belief has grown deeply in the culture of many companies. The role of women in the world of business is pushed aside to the margin. The very fact of the possibility of working, earning money, going out, learning, developing, seems good enough for many people to believe that the role of women is appreciated and treated evenly with the roles of men. The contemporary world is evolving very fast. The pace of development and changes, the globalisation, and availability of modern technologies has caused a situation that there are very few fields, in which reaching targets by one person only is possible and additionally if this person is a man. Today even the fields dominated by men until recently, have become available and required by women. The contemporary world needs women and

not necessarily at homes in the roles traditionally expected from them. The modern organizations need new competences, skills, and most of all flexibility in adjustment to the changing conditions in the business surrounding. The highest level leaders have a far reaching influence, which has finally transformed the world around us.

The new look on motivation, the use of emotional intelligence, the style of management, building and developing teams, work in stressful conditions and changes are the issues that the contemporary leaders face and it is worth to look for them among women and provide an opportunity for a new world view and new quality of work. The modern management

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programs assume not only cooperation, but most of all, cooperation, flexibility, and undertaking tasks, which are far beyond well-known and standard schemes. The contemporary leaders are expected to concentrate completely on the future and such development and support of the organization and its workers, which will enable the completion of business goals. Well prepared and implemented programs of motivation, development, and evaluation of employees are not sufficient nowadays to reach a success, to keep people loyal and to develop a company and survive in the demanding, unforeseen, and fast changing environment.

These days, many companies notice not only advantages, but also the necessity to entrust high positions to women. Women are not afraid any more. They are not afraid of their beliefs, views, opinions, challenges. They set their targets bravely and complete them successfully. Positions and professions, which were until recently reserved for men, are now taken over by women with a big success. Courage, individuality, and bigger and bigger independence now have the face of a woman. The potential, which had been depreciated for so many years is now able to develop, because women have the courage to develop and to decide for themselves. What distinguishes them? First of all, the flexibility in action, the skill to adjust to new, demanding circumstances, the skill to cope with tough and unforeseeable situations. Women, although emotional on the one hand, are able to adopt many perspectives of action and to choose the best one in a given situation. After all, women are able to keep a cool head more often, than men do. They know how to see a situation from many perspectives and make a decision. Although they are perceived as emotional, they do not let their emotions take control, especially when they are to decide on relevant issues and influence other people. They consider a range of various aspects, because although emotions may be very powerful on the one hand, which may also be a big burden, when they try to make key decisions

without taking other aspects into account.

More and more organizations see the new trend—companies are no longer looking for managers, but for leaders. They are looking for persons, who are able to lead instead of focusing on the use of power to achieve their own or business aims. Aggressive approach to management, concentrated only on the completion of goals, irrespective of the type of applied measures, is a problem nowadays, not a success of many organizations. Caring about the environment of work and a widely understood image of a company has become the key issues both for employees and clients. This is why organizations today avoid managers, for whom power is the synonym of leadership. Leadership is supposed to invigorate and inspire, instead of humiliating or enforcing required behaviors or attitudes.

The skill to build, develop, and care for relations with people—superiors, subordinates, co-workers, clients—has also become a crucial thing. What matters today is a relation and a human being, not the very product itself. A product, even the best one, is only one of many products in the market full of goods. Since we are overflowed with a huge number of goods and services, the perspective also changes, as well as the possibilities of sale and the very approach to client.

Empathy and compromise are also very powerful in management. Various people, various opinions, points of view, needs, and possibilities bear conflicts, misunderstandings, and tension, which is normal. The ability to adopt other people's perspectives, to understand one's own and other people's emotions and adequate reactions may stop or mitigate tough situations, which appear practically in every organization. As Barbara S. Miller and Jeanne Bergman pointed out:

Good board leaders exhibit passion, commitment, and vision, and they articulate these clearly. They have the ability to communicate with and engage others. They know what they do not know, are willing to take risks, are

comfortable seeking outside help, and are honest and forth-right in recognizing and naming problems. (Miller and Bergman 2008: 3)

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP—KEY ASPECTS

As Mariola Dźwigoł-Barosz pointed out:

Leadership is defined as the ability to influence the behavior of employees, based primarily on the authority of a person as well as the power that others willingly accept. Leadership is setting the direction, working out the vision of the future of the organization, as well as broadcast the actions of people. It is also motivating and inspiring, triggering energy in people. It is necessary for skillful management of people, building organizational culture, creating change and mitigating resistance to change, to stimulate learning in the organization. (Dźwigoł-Barosz 2014: 105-118)

A leadership assumes a number of relevant things, which make them different from classic management. First of all, it gives a direction to the actions of people, who make an organization. The direction is set by a leader, but not in the form of orders, demands, punishments, only by his or her own actions and behaviors. It is the leader, who shows what is acceptable and desirable and which way the organization should go. A leader cares about his or her own development, but also the development of people he manages, because he or she knows that without his or her own development, the development of the organization is impossible. Many women have the natural drive to share their knowledge and skills, both at home and at work. Women do not want to see their co-workers as rivals. They are mindful, but not concentrated on aggression, rivalry, or fight. For women, rivalry often means a fight, putting oneself in the worse position, underestimation, actually everything, which contains negative emotions, which are unnecessary in daily life. It does not mean that women do not want or do not know how to compete, what is more, they often do compete among

themselves. The difference is that they do it in a more subtle way. First of all, they estimate their capabilities and their own aims and how they want to achieve them. How much the competition is worth and what they need to devote. Rivalry for itself is not necessary for them, because it does not influence their prestige and it does not elevate their moods. Therefore, it must be connected with a concrete aim. Rivalry associates with aggression, that is why so much depends on the fact how a woman wants to be perceived. According to E. Aronson, T. Wilson, and R. Akert, women, who are bosses are not evaluated differently than men at the same positions, as long as their leadership style is typically “female” (oriented to interpersonal relations, democratic). Women, who assume the “masculine” style (autocratic, managerial) are evaluated—especially by men—as less desirable than men leaders, who assumed the same style (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert 1997: 671). According to Crystal L. Hoyt, foremost among the barriers female leaders confront are the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination faced by these “stigmatized” individuals. Women are considered stigmatized in the leadership context because they have characteristics that indicate low status and power and lead others to devalue them (Hoyt 2010: 489).

A female style of management is typically associated with delicacy, tenderness, emotionality, however, it really shows that women can be psychologically stronger and more resistant to difficult and unforeseeable situations. The fact that they know how to use emotions and how to find their appropriate meaning may only be beneficial to them. A good example of a female leader is Hillary Clinton, the Secretary of State in the USA in the period 2009-2013 nominated by President Barack Obama. Hillary Clinton was the first woman in the history of the United States, who was a candidate to the Senate and the first senator in the state of New York. Although she

arouses extreme emotions, she definitely is strong, brave, consequent, and persistent in what she is doing. It is also worth to mention Angela Merkel, who, as the chancellor of Germany, even if she is not the most distinctive or charismatic person, does not try to focus attention on herself, definitely she is wise, calm, and hardworking. Her image of a strong, stable woman, ready for a dialog and for solving tough situations is really true. Her skills definitely have a very strong influence on the way of management of people and the position that she achieved after years of work.

As Helen Fisher pointed out:

Psychologists report that when women cogitate, they gather details somewhat differently than men. Women integrate more details faster and arrange these bits of data into more complex patterns. As they make decisions, women tend to weigh more variables, consider more options, and see a wider array of possible solutions to a problem. Women tend to generalize, to synthesize, to take a broader, more holistic, more contextual perspective of any issue. (Fisher 2005: 134)

Another important feature in female management is motivating and inspiring, namely—everything, which is connected with arousing other people's energy and elimination of obstacles. Women want to inspire others and they know how to do it, but they themselves also use other people's inspiration quite willingly. Women know how to appreciate profits, which is why they appreciate coaching and mentoring. They often see a value, not a threat in learning from others. They themselves become mentors quite willingly and they share their knowledge. It is enough to take a look at a number of foundations and organizations created by women and for women, such as Vital Voices, the aim of which is support in widely understood personal and professional development.

Women's leadership assumes a little different approach to several basic issues, which are strictly

related with an effective management. First of all, many women, when they decide to take managerial positions, do not go out of the role that they normally fulfill at home—it means that they focus on other people, not on themselves. It does not mean at all that good leaders totally forget about themselves and think only via the prism of their own profits. Such people are the first ones to lose. A success means a combination of needs, expectations, and opportunities of other workers with the purposes of an organization. When a leader focuses only on himself and on the completion of personal aims, he is certain to lose. Nobody will want, for a long time, to complete targets they do not identify with and which are oriented for the maximization of profits of only one person. A good leader focuses on people. He or she wants to and can monitor their needs, behaviors, attitudes, expectations, and is not afraid to face them, because he or she knows that people make an organization and a certain community. People's involvement and motivation create the success in the completion of intentions of every enterprise. As J. Maxwell said, they always want to be with people, with whom they can feel better and they go away from the ones, with whom they feel worse (Aronson et al. 1997: 189). That is why they should be given such conditions of work and such atmosphere, which will enable people to use their best features.

Neglecting employees, arousing their fear or lack of trust normally brings losses, which are difficult to assess. Women have a tendency to focus on people, especially the ones, who depend on them (e.g. children, or subordinates at work). They know how to detect needs and if they do not know them they are able to ask straightforward, because they know that unfulfilled needs (sooner or later) will appear and the problem is the form, in which it happens.

The issue of what is said and done is also a matter of one's own image and cohesion. Cohesion

builds the climate of trust and cooperation. As indicated by L. B. Belker, J. McCormick, and G. S. Topchik, personal standards are patterns for the members of your team. If you act carefully and ethically when making decisions, you inspire your employees to do the same. If you respect your colleagues even when you do not agree with them, your people will also start showing mutual respect. If you are classy in every situation, then your attitude will become a standard for the whole team (Belker, McCormick, and Topchik 2013).

An important issue, which is a characteristic feature for female leadership is focusing on getting to know the values of people that women want to lead. The human aspect appears to be the key issue again. Although it cannot be excluded that male leaders also are able to get to know the values and beliefs of their subordinates, teams, clients, in the case of women, the human aspect often wins with other factors. It is a matter of upbringing, but most of all, the culture patterns. For women, people are important, because they create families, marriages, relations, etc. Certainly all general and simple clichés should be avoided in this scope, because it is impossible to say that for men other people are meaningless. They mean a lot, but differently. A woman often looks at a given matter in the context of what she can give from herself, whereas a man sees it differently: What he can take for himself. Of course, it is not a standard and everything is up to a number of factors, circumstances, motives, attitudes. Getting to know the values of other people facilitates and generally enables a better cooperation with them. As J. Maxwell pointed out, big leaders do not use other people in order to become individual winners. They lead others to a common victory (Maxwell 2007: 195).

People want to feel important, also at work. They want their values to be partially covered with the values of the company, because, first of all, they spend a lot of their life at work, and second, they devote energy and engagement to their work (although of

course in various quantities and dimensions). If the company philosophy is similar to their values, they are more eager to devote their time and attention to it. Such an approach to an employee has become a standard for many organizations, in which people play the key role. As J. Moczyłowska pointed out, the value of engagement results from the fact, that respectively permanent status of an employee, leading to undertaking profitable actions on behalf of the employer. That is why high engagement is so precious, because it lets achieve better results with the same resources. Managers are mostly aware of this fact (Moczyłowska 2015: 154).

Feminine leadership is also another kind of motivation. Most of all, many women do not ignore the issue of motivation and understand the necessity to motivate other people. Money, although it means a lot, for many people, appears to be an insufficient motivator for work. It should be remembered that money motivates fast, but for a short time, that is why the adequate priority of the issue of motivation is important especially where companies expect quality products and timely completion. Women perceive the issue of motivation with more attention, because motivation, again, is the issue related with meeting the needs of another person. Where orientation toward a person is high, the actions aiming at the improvement of his or her capacity and commitment will always be at a high level. Women prefer a little different style of motivating other people than men do. They know how to motivate other people with the method of small steps, which assumes that one should think about certain stages, the performance of which will facilitate a task completion, but they do not expect spectacular effects all at once. They can focus on minor tasks, the completion of which will not influence the performance of the whole work. They can motivate and show that even the completion of a small part gets them closer to the achievement of the generally assumed goal. It does not mean at all that men cannot do it or that they do not do it at all. They just do it

differently. They have other expectations toward themselves and, by the same, toward their subordinates. Men focus more on targets, women on people. Effects of motivation in every case will be different, but a lot depends on the fact who is motivated, how long and how much it is similar to the needs and expectations.

The skill of listening is also an important issue. A good leader inspires people to work, but he or she can listen to their opinions and refer to them, even if he or she does not really share such opinions. For many women, communication has the key meaning when they perform their tasks. They want to and they are able to talk, even if it requires more involvement from them. Again, this is the human factor, which will be important for the appropriate management. Of course, it should be emphasized again that there are many men, for whom communication is also meaningful, but it will be carried out in a different way. The gist of a good communication is listening. It is even more important than speaking. As K. Hogan put it, it requires something from us more than waiting for the interlocutor to stop talking. We should get into his or her heart and see a situation from their point of view (Hogan 2010: 19). It is difficult to understand another person without giving enough attention and without listening to what he or she wants to say. Of course, it takes time, focus, and authentic interest in the other person. It requires empathy.

CONCLUSIONS

Myths and stereotypes on the subject of the place of women in the traditional model of society are overthrown in a more and more noticeable manner. Success in business, but also in many other fields, does not depend on gender, but most of all, on competences and determination in the completion of setting targets. As Marion Eberly, Michael Johnson, Morela Hernandez, and Bruce Avolio pointed out:

“Authentic leadership emphasizes that being an effective leader entails high self-awareness and demonstrating consistency between one’s values and actions” (Eberly et al. 2013: 433).

More and more organizations see not only a necessity, but also big chances in employing women and in benefiting from their potentials. Talent and skills have no gender. In changeable, tough, and unforeseeable business conditions, the matters that count are: courage, bravery, the skill to take decisions, even if they are difficult or controversial. Many of the features perceived as weak, are stereotypically ascribed to women, but in fact, they may appear a big advantage if they are used properly.

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