Inquiry into Leadership: The Case of Romanian Women Leaders

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Abstract: All over the European Union companies face the same problem: a dramatic gender gap in leadership. Men far outnumber women in senior business positions in developed and less developed countries, including Romania. What makes leadership positions so inaccessible to Romanian women? Senior women leaders in Western Europe mentioned stereotyping as an important barrier to consider. To demonstrate that stereotyping is indeed a factor in the leadership gender gap, it was first necessary to substantiate that stereotype-based perceptions of women's leadership do in fact exist in Romania. In the second part of this research, perceived existing differences between men and women leaders were scrutinized and compared to their standardized profiles as indicated by the Hogan Assessment Systems, both at the organizational and individual levels.

Whether women stereotyping was found to be relatively low in Romania, differences in personality traits between men and women seem to impede women from advancing to the top management positions. It also explains the emergence of a diversity of leadership styles.

Key words: gender gap, leadership, gender roles, personality assessment

JEL Classification: M10, M20, L290.

Introduction

Many women confront stressors in the leadership role that stem from stereotypical expectations and biases. Although there have been many important changes in Europe and around the world within the last 40 years, the insidious perceptions that women are stereotypically feminine and do not fit the image of an ideal leader is still pervasive (Chemers, 1997). These negative perceptions not only affect the evaluation and perception of women in a leadership role but they may also affect women's perceptions of themselves as leaders.

Stereotypes can be defined as perceptions about the qualities that distinguish groups or categories of people (Agars, 2004). Psychologists believe that people use stereotypes as a short-cut to help them anticipate the motives, abilities and behaviors of others. Rather than having to figure out each person they meet, people routinely use stereotypes for the sake of expediency.

Whether the stereotypes are positive or negative, research shows that they can cause us to miss information about other people (Bargh, Chen, Burrows, 2002). If people act on the incomplete information that stereotypes can lead them to, they can wind up making poor decisions (Catalyst, 2002). This happens in organizations: stereotypes create flawed impressions about women's skills and abilities to lead which then result in decisions that pass them over for top leadership positions.

Gender stereotypes: a literature review

Gender stereotypes refer to cognitive structures that influence the way individuals process information regarding men and women. Stereotypes are well documented, persistent and highly resistant to change (Heilman, 2001). Gender stereotypes contain both descriptive and prescriptive elements in that they do not only describe the stereotypic beliefs about women and men but they also prescribe how men and women should be (Glick and Fiske, 1999).

The gender stereotypes that directly relate to the leadership domain are those that revolve around communal attributes (e.g., women are stereotyped as sensitive, warm, kind, supporting and nurturing) and agentic attributes (men are stereotyped as independent, assertive, competitive and decisive) (Eagly, Wood and Dickman, 2000; Heilman, 2001). In leadership roles, agentic, as opposed to communal, tendencies are often indispensable thus making gender stereotypes particularly pernicious for women leaders. Indeed, Eagly and Karau's role congruity theory (2002) maintains that the agentic qualities deemed necessary in the leadership role are incompatible with the predominantly communal qualities associated with women. In support of this think-leader – think-male stereotype (Sczesny, 2003), substantial empirical evidence suggests that successful leaders are often thought to require and are often described as possessing stereotypically male attributes (Powell and Butterfield, 1989; Schein, 2001).

According to role congruity theory, the perceived incongruity between the female gender role and the leadership role leads to two forms of prejudice against women leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002). First, the descriptive aspect of the gender stereotype leads people to perceive women as more communal and less agentic, thus perceiving them as less qualified for leadership positions. Second, the prescriptive component of the stereotype suggests that when women leaders successfully demonstrate favorable

leadership characteristics they are perceived less favorably because those behaviors are inconsistent with expectations of appropriate (and desired) female behaviors. Together, these two forms of prejudice can account for research findings that indicate less favorable attitudes toward female than men leaders, greater difficulty for women to attain top leadership roles and greater difficulty for these women to be viewed as effective in these roles (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Theories and models accounting for the emergence of gender-related behaviors in organizations and thus the creation of a glass ceiling fall into three categories: biological explanations; socialization explanations; structural/cultural explanations (Lueptow et al, 2001). Biological models argue that there are biological differences between men and women. These differences are thought to be a result of an "evolutionary model postulating constant gendered differences based on genetic patterns evolved from adaptation to differing reproductive challenges of early males and females" (Lueptow et al., p. 1). From a psychological perspective, biologically based models explain stable biological differences between genders as a result of psychological dispositions. These different psychological profiles of the sexes have evolved over time (Wood and Eagly, 2002). Today, biological models and evolutionary models usually are not employed in the context of leadership differences between men and women leaders (Lueptow et al, 2001). Instead, socialization and structural/cultural explanations have received much more attention than biological models (Bartol et al. 2003) and have been called "the most accepted explanation for gender differences" (Lueptow et al., 2001, p. 11). Both models are social constructionist accounts of differences between genders.

Social constructionist theories have argued that biological differences do not have a fixed meaning across cultures – rather it is societal expectations that produce and maintain inequality between genders (Wood and Eagly, 2002). More specifically, authors of socialization theories argued "gender identity and differences are acquired through various developmental processes associated with life stages, such as schooling and work life" (Bartol et al, p. 9) and therefore are based on individuals' socialization.

In contrast to biological models, structural/cultural models proposed that "social structures, systems and arrangements that channel and define gender differences due to discrepancies in status and power" (Bartol et al., 2003, p. 9) are the cause for differences in leadership attributed to gender. According to the distribution of different social roles between men and women, relatively stable patterns of behavior are displayed (Deaux and Major, 1987; Lueptow et al, 2001).

Can stereotypes really contribute to the gender gap in business leadership?

According to Catalyst (2002), stereotypes do not have to be true to exist. Although they are very difficult to prove accurate with scientific evidence, many people generally accept them to be true (Schneider, p. 224). Experts on stereotypes believe that they develop as justifications for the different social roles and statuses that groups have in a society (Jost, Banaji, Nosek, 2004). One fact that supports this belief is that similar stereotypes exist about low-status groups everywhere in the world. For example, groups that occupy subordinate/low statuses – such as women

and the poor – are all stereotyped in common ways. When compared to high status groups such as men and the wealthy, these low-status groups are commonly described as incompetent, dependent and lacking ambition. Researchers believe that these characterizations develop and persist because they justify the standing that these groups have been assigned in society – not because they have been shown to be true over time (Jost et al, 1990). This reasoning applies in business too: stereotypical characterizations of women leaders may justify why women are excluded from the highest positions of leadership in organizations and do not necessarily represent undisputable truths about women's competence.

More important than the issue of whether stereotypes are true or not is how they can change one's behavior once he/she is exposed to them. For example, researchers have shown that we can influence others to act in ways that confirm our stereotypes of them (Jost and Kay, 2005). But perhaps the most lasting and damaging effect of stereotypes is that they cause us to accept the status quo. Research suggests that when women and men are exposed to gender stereotypes, they also become more accepting of existing gender inequalities (Agars, 2004). This means that in organizations where gender stereotyping is pervasive, there is not likely to be much support for changing the gender mix in leadership.

In 2002, Catalyst surveyed senior women leaders from large companies and firms in 20 countries across the European Union about the barriers they faced in business leadership. That study found that the leadership barrier most cited by women leaders was gender stereotyping.

Why do women blame stereotyping for the gender gap in leadership? To find an answer, I investigated first the Romanian context, namely the most popular stereotypes related to women present in this country. Next, I discussed perceptions of participants related to attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of women in an attempt to identify stereotypes on women's traditional role, values, biology, behavior and motivation.

Purpose of the research

To demonstrate that stereotyping is indeed a factor in the leadership gender gap, it was first necessary to substantiate that stereotype-based perceptions of women's leadership do in fact exist in Romania. Therefore, I focused on the following questions:

a)What stereotypes are frequently met in Romanian leadership?

b)How pervasive is gender stereotyping in Romanian organizations?

c)Do women in leadership positions significantly differ from men in terms of behaviors and values?

According to Dragusin (2006), social perceptions and stereotypes related to women in executive positions most frequently met in Romania are:

1)Women do not want to be managers;

2)Women do not have the same leadership skills as men;

3)Women do not have the appropriate training needed for managers/leaders;

4)Women do not have enough experience to be promoted as top managers;

5)Top jobs and parenthood are impossible to reconcile – for women.

Perceived existing differences between men and women leaders were then scrutinized and compared to their standardized profiles.

Questioning the existence of stereotypes – the organizational level

43 items related to attitudes, behaviors and beliefs regarding women were designed and administered to 186 participants. The questionnaire measured 5 types of stereotypes using a Likert scale (strongly disagree-strongly agree) related to: women's traditional role, values, biology, behavior and motivation.

Stereotypes about women related to their motivation

In general, most respondents did not embrace the idea that women do not want to be managers. Specifically, 63% strongly disagreed with the myth that "women do not have career expectations as high as men"; 86% were in favor of the idea that women are as interested in professional success as men and 83% of the interviewees strongly disagreed with the stereotype that "women do not like power positions".

This finding is consistent with Adler and Izraeli's survey (2004) of more than 1000 graduating MBAs that revealed that female and male MBAs are equally interested in pursuing a management career. But because senior managers assume that women do not want top positions in organizations, it is unlikely for these organizations to invest in the development of their women managers and provide assignments with power and opportunity. The study suggests that because men hold most upper level management positions, they do most hiring and they may not be willing to offer career advancement opportunities to women subordinates not because women refuse it, but rather because they are judged on the male model of career development and their appropriateness of their "fit" in organizations.

As far as women's behavioral issues, more than 50% of our responded strongly disagreed with the following affirmations: "Neither men nor women like a woman – leader" (62%); "women do not handle successfully a crisis situation" (55%); and "women do not possess leadership skills" (51%).

In support of Romanians' perceptions on women, behavioral scientist Shannon l. Goodson states: "Women can be competent, assertive role models without becoming pinstriped male clones". Dr. Judy Rosener(1995) adds that there has been a move to look at women's style of leadership not as better or worse but as added value. Rosener found that women tend to share power and information, be collaborative and often lead in an interactive manner. Their leadership style is, simply put, different from men's leadership model. They are more patient, honest, flexible and consensus-oriented than their male counterparts, traits that in crisis situations may make them better leaders than men.

In line with women's behavioral issues were the respondents' perceptions regarding women in their (assigned) traditional role: 60% of respondents disagreed with the general myth that "the duty of housework should belong to women only" and 78% strongly disapproved the affirmation that "men do not have time for housework". On the other hand, only 17% of our respondents did not support the idea that "women are the ones that should be concerned with raising and educating children". In other words, women are primarily perceived as mothers while sharing housework with their male partners is rather seen as "normal", "necessary" and "fair".

Do women and men have different values? 56% of the interviewees strongly agreed that "management positions remove women from their families", therefore there is little chance for them to be both CEOs and have a family. Women also "care too much about the working conditions" state 37% of the respondents while 68% think that "women would accept management positions even if it were not for economic reasons".

Indeed, this finding is consonant with the results of a major study conducted on women in European businesses by the Wall Street Journal and Arthur Andersen in March 2001 which concluded that job satisfaction was by far the most important characteristic in a job to European women executives, though being promoted and paid fairly were also top priorities.

It seems that for Romanians, stereotypes cannot be explained by biological differences between men and women: 67% neither agree nor disagree with the affirmation that "inequalities between men and women are a consequence of biological differences". "Differences between men and women are at the personality level" – this is what 44% of the interviewees believe. On the other hand, only 2% of them believe that in Romania women are treated correctly.

Feminist author Sally Helgessen feels that the talents, experiences, attitudes and skills that women bring with them are precisely what is needed in today's innovative economy. Women are better at seeing the human side, quicker to cut through competitive distinctions of hierarchy and ranking and impatient with cumbersome protocols (Helgessen, 1990). It is this confluence of abilities and required leadership capacities that creates unprecedented opportunities for women to play a vital role in leading transformational change in organizations and communities.

Leadership at the individual level – do personality differences between men and women really exist?

The sample consisted of 120 CEOs, top managers and middle managers from various industries. 56% were women and 44% were men between 30 and 50 years of age. In order to investigate whether differences in leadership styles between men and women exist, I used the Hogan Assessment Systems framework that uses its own personality assessments to help organizations select employees and develop leaders. Because of its proven ability to predict leader performance, the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) is considered the industry standard for measures of normal personality based on the Five Factor Model designed to predict career success. In table 1, HPI scale definition are presented and explained. It encompasses the "bright" side of a leader's behavior in day-by-day situations.

Table 1. HPI scale definitions (The bright side)

Characteristics	Explanation
Adjustment	Composed, even-tempered, handles pressure well or anxious, worried, moody and easily irritated
Ambition	Competitive, leader-like, self-confident, career-focused or socially retiring, lacking confidence, struggling
Sociability	Needs or enjoys social interaction, outgoing, talkative, easily approachable or independent, withdrawn, socially reactive
Interpersonal sensitivity	Perceptive, tactful, warm, sensitive, agreeable or cold, tough, cynical, critical, task focused
Prudence	Conscientious, conforming, rule-compliant, reliable or flexible, open-minded, impulsive, non-conforming, risk-taking
Inquisitive	Creative, full of ideas, with a broad range of interests or pragmatic, interest-focused, details-focused
Learning approach	Takes pleasure in learning, enjoys staying up to date in business and technical matters or hands on, practical learning

Our findings show that the "bright" side of the Romanian men leaders consists in: calm under pressure; good stress management; confidence in their own strength and inclination towards self-reliance. Men leaders are also competitive, aggressive, ready to take initiative, dominating, energetic, creative, good strategists and less oriented towards implementation. Women leaders manifest themselves as: self-criticizing, demanding more from themselves and the others; inclined to ask for feedback and willing to receive feedback; less calm in stressful situations; may seem less shy; more pragmatic and oriented towards implementation.

The HDS (Hogan Development Survey) – refers to peoples' interpersonal style when strengths become weaknesses in times of frustration. The HDS is designed to assess characteristics associated with managerial derailment and leadership dysfunctions. This is why they are associated with the "dark" side of personality. In table 2, HDS terms are explained.

Table 2. HDS scale definitions (the dark side)

Characteristics	Explanation
Excitable	Moody and hard to please, enthusiastic about new persons or projects and then becoming disappointed in them
Skeptical	Cynical, mistrustful, doubting the good intentions of others
Cautious	Conservative, careful, concerned about making mistakes, reluctant to take initiative for fear of being criticized or embarrassed
Reserved	To keep to oneself, dislikes working in teams or meeting new people, indifferent to the words and feelings of others

Leisurely	Independent, refusing to be hurried, ignoring other peoples' requests, becoming irritable if they persist
Bold	Unusually self-confident, strong feelings of entitlement, unwilling to admit mistakes, listen to advice, attend feedback
Mischievous	Enjoys taking risks and testing the limits, easily bored, seeks excitement
Colorful	Lively, expressive, dramatic, wants to be noticed
Imaginative	Acts and thinks in creative and sometimes unusual ways
Diligent	Meticulous, precise, critical of others' performance
Dutiful	Eager to please, ingratiating, reluctant to take independent actions or go against popular opinion

Traits that are associated with the "dark" side of Romanian men leaders include: charisma; being not afraid to make decisions in critical, tough situations and excessive confidence in them. The tendency to dominate and be aggressive sometimes also accounts for the dark side of men leaders. As far as women leaders are concerned, women may seem impulsive; they may be slower in making decisions and afraid of disappointment/ failure.

The MVPI (Motives, Values and Preference Inventory) refers to a leader's core values (the inside of personality). There are good values such as charity, honesty and fairness and bad values such as greed and selfishness. A values profile associated with successful business leadership is presented in table 3. As values are predictors of peoples' choices in life, in the specific context of leadership I assumed that a leader's core values would be the cornerstone of a leader's organizational culture.

Table 3. MVPI scale definitions

Core values	**Explanation**
Aesthetics	Motives are associated with creative, artistic self-expression and quality
Affiliation	A desire for and enjoyment of social interactions
Altruistic	Concerns about others' welfare and making a difference
Commerce	Interest in business and financial gains
Hedonism	Orientation towards fun and pleasure
Power	Desire for success, accomplishment, challenge and career status
Recognition	Need to be recognized, visible, famous
Science	Analysis and the pursuit of knowledge and new ideas
Security	Desire for certainty and predictability
Tradition	Dedication to rituals and old-fashioned virtues

According to my data, Romanian men leaders as founders of an organizational culture would value success and competition, value business opportunities and pay much attention to results/profits while women leaders would focus more on the human side of the business, and pay attention more to the company's image. Women are generally looking for predictability and manifest respect for tradition. They also distinguish themselves from their male counterparts with their sense and taste for the aesthetic and altruism.

Female leaders score higher than male leaders on 'ambition, bold, mischievous, colorful and imaginative'. Men are more confident, competitive, visionary and have a stronger presence. They also scored high in science, hedonism and recognition. Interestingly enough, both women and men leaders scored the same on power which is a key indicator of goal orientation and career assertiveness.

Women leaders in Romanian organizations: what do statistics say?

According to the National Institute for Statistics, in Romanian businesses only 22% were women CEOs while 78% were men in a similar position in 2013. Women's proportion as members of the board was 28%, far behind men that account for 72% of the board of directors. Apparently, women are better as team managers – 42% - but they are still below men as team managers. As a general observation, it should be mentioned that women represented 49% of the total number of employees.

Even more interesting it is to see how the rate of women in a top position (President/ General Director) correlates with the company's dimension: 35% of top positions belong to women in companies with less than 50 employees. In companies that have 51 to 150 employees, only 27% are female leaders. Only 24% are women situated in a top position in companies that have between 151-500 employees while only 10% are female General Directors of large companies (over 500 employees).

Conclusions

To demonstrate that stereotyping is indeed a factor in the leadership gender gap, I first investigated the stereotype-based perceptions of women leaders in Romania. Contrary to my expectations, I found that stereotypes regarding women in Romania are generally low. This finding is supported by Eagly and Karau's study (1991); "the tendency for men to be chosen as leaders should not be interpreted as a blind tendency to choose men over women, despite behavioral equivalence of sexes. Rather, the tendency to choose men may instead reflect a tendency to define leadership in terms of task-oriented contributions" (p. 692). In other words, it is not that leaders are mostly men because men are preferred as leaders. Rather, most leaders are men because leadership is described as a task that requires behaviors deemed masculine. Thus, if women become leaders, they are likely to behave in a manner that is not expected of their gender based on gender-role stereotypes and they therefore may fear negative consequences.

Romanian women leaders are ambitious and strongly motivated to work by factors others than money. Their style of leadership is different from that of their men counterparts. A pervasive stereotyping of women leaders is that related to the women's

traditional role: mothers and wives, taking care of their families. Differences in leadership between men and women may be explained by personality traits and not by lack of skills and abilities.

At the organizational level, Romanian women leaders manifest themselves as (self) criticizing, very demanding from their subordinates and self, rather impulsive, asking for feedback, pragmatic and willing to see the job done. Traditional gender roles prevail in organizations too: women should take primary responsibility for raising the family and engender doubts about their capacity to fulfill this role together with a professional career, particularly at senior level. This contributes to vertical segregation: women are under-represented in line management positions that lead to the top positions and where recruitments for CEO posts are made. This finding is fully supported by statistical data.

At the individual level, women leaders focus more on the human side of the business, and pay attention more to the company's image. They are generally looking for predictability and manifest respect for tradition. Women-leaders' "hot buttons" are their sense and taste for the aesthetic and altruism. Examples of traits where female-leaders score higher than male leaders are ambition, boldness, mischievous, colorful and imaginative.

In other words, Romanian women-leaders have the same skills as men in order to get and hold leadership positions but there are differences that depend on various organizational and contextual factors. Some organizations are still following typical female and male role models whereas other organizations challenge typical gender roles. As a general characteristic, in Romanian companies, it seems that gender stereotypes are still holding women back from senior management positions.

The findings must be interpreted in the light of the study's limitations. First, one should bear in mind that the samples for this study were limited as people were asked to participate on a voluntary basis. Therefore, results may not be generalized. Second, this research does not entirely explain the multiple reasons for the under-representation of women in top management positions. In this perspective, new approaches for companies committed to he advancement of women should be researched such as creating a work-family friendly culture or possible transitions from typical career models towards the acceptance of alternative career paths

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