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MALE AND FEMALE LEADERSHIP – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Empirical study

Keywords

Manager
Subordinate
Differences
Gender
Characteristics

JEL Classification

O15, Y80

Abstract

Purpose - *This study aims to identify characteristics and behaviours typical for male and female managers from the managers` perspective as well as from the subordinates`.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The study involved 232 employed persons, 111 managers and 121 subordinates working in different branches. The independent variables of the research were: the position in the organization (manager or subordinate) and the managers` gender (male or female). The dependent variables were multiple and focused on the characteristics of managers in Romania. In order to develop tools for the assessment of Romanian managers` characteristics, 25 managers and 25 employers (from various professional categories) listed 10 qualities that they consider important for a manager.*

Findings – *The differences between female and male managers are less than the similarities.*

Practical implications/originality/value – *The overall conclusion – organizational characteristics have a greater influence than the personal ones in the managers` behaviour.*

The analysis of research on gender differences began with Woolley (1914) and Hollingworth (1918) and continued until the publication of *The Psychology of Sex Differences* (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, apud Hyde, 2007). In this work, more than 2000 studies on gender differences have been analysed pertaining to various fields, including skills, personality, social behaviour and memory. The authors classified as unfounded numerous popular beliefs regarding gender differences, including the opinion that women are more “sociable”, more receptive to suggestions, have a lower self-esteem, a better mechanical memory while men’s cognitive processes are superior. Maccoby and Jacklin concluded that gender differences have been well determined in only four areas: verbal skills, visual-spatial skills, mathematic skills and aggression. Generally, more proofs have been found in favour of gender similarities.

According to the theories of social role (Carless, 1998), attachment (Bowlby apud Sperling & Berman, 1994) and the relational theory (Boatwright & Forrest, 2000) we can state that gender differences that occur at the level of management styles could have as source both different socializing, attachment types that develop in the childhood and a stronger orientation of woman toward interhuman relations cultivated since childhood.

The Structural Theory (Carless, 1998) is one of the theories that tackles the presence of gender differences in leadership and underlines that the duties within a company are more important than the person who holds the position.

The gender of the leader will actually have less importance in terms of behavioural and performance differences. In this respect, the efficiency of a leader derives from the feeling of social responsibility and the attention given to the interests of community and organization beyond personal interests (according to House and Aditya’s 1997 theory of charismatic leadership). We can state therefore that the

gender of a leader will not be a determining factor of differences in the leaders’ behaviour or efficiency in the management act. Hence, the gender of a leader does bring about neither advantages nor disadvantages.

In the study we have tried to identify the characteristics and behaviours common to female and male leaders both from the managers’ and from the subordinates’ perspective.

More specifically, the first objective was to grasp gender differences that occur in the managers’ characterization both after self-assessment but also after hetero-assessment (made by subordinates). Given the various statements of women managers interviewed in the first study of those previously presented, we have decided to have a general approach to identify the possible characteristics and behaviours of managers where gender differences could occur. Starting from this first objective, we have formulated two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1.

There are differences between male and female managers at the level of self-assessing characteristics (the ability to motivate employees, respect, teamwork, thoroughness and empathy) and behaviours.

Hypothesis 2.

There are differences between male managers and female managers’ characterizations at the level of employees’ assessment regarding communication skills, employees’ motivation teamwork and empathy.

The second main objective of this research aimed to capture the differences that occur between self-assessment and hetero-assessment made by subordinates for female, namely for male managers. The multitude of research carried out within theoretical paradigms of attribution phenomena and stereotypes indicate considerable differences between self- and hetero-stereotypes.

Hypotheses of the second objective of this research:

Hypothesis 3.

There are differences between how managers assess themselves and how subordinates assess their bosses in terms of communication skills, the ability to motivate employees, thoroughness and empathy.

Hypothesis 4.

Regarding the characterization of male managers, there are differences between male managers' assessments and those of the employees, in terms of their ability to motivate employees, stress management and teamwork.

Hypothesis 5.

Regarding the characterization of female managers, there are differences between female managers' assessments and those of employees, in terms of their ability to motivate employees, thoroughness, empathy and respect.

Research methodology

Participants

This study involved 232 employed persons, namely 111 managers and 121 subordinates. Among them 98 were males and 134 were females working in different branches: product sales, service sales, production in light industry, production in heavy industry, education, health, public administration, mass-media, IT, research-development.

Research variables

The main independent variables of research were the position held in the organization (manager or subordinate) and the manager's gender (male or female).

The dependent variables were multiple and focused on the characteristics of managers in Romania.

The description of apparatus and procedure

To build the apparatus which assesses the characteristics of Romanian managers,

25 managers and 25 employees (from various professional categories) listed 10 qualities that they consider important for a manager. After analysing them a number of 20 qualities was kept for research (Table No 1).

For the participation in the study, the managers and the employees received the same list but with slightly different instructions.

Managers were asked to rank (from 1 to 20) the features and behaviours from the list depending on the extent to which they apply to themselves. The requirement was to grade with 1 the feature that characterizes them the best and with 20 the one that suits them the least.

Subordinates were asked to rank (from 1 to 20) the features, so that these would characterize managers, either male or female, under whose leadership they have worked during their professional experience. The requirement was to grade with 1 what characterizes them the best and with 20 what suits them the least. Apart from these characteristics, other socio-demographic data have been collected like: sexual orientation, age group, but also data about the professional area of the participants.

Although initially, the assessment of the same managers was wanted both from their own perspective and from the employees', it was not fully possible due to reluctant attitude of both managers and employees. Consequently, we have not succeeded to obtain data about the same managers from two perspectives: self- and hetero-assessment. The employees assessed their managers who are not the same (wholly) to the managers included by us in the study subjects. It has been tried to obtain a high similarity between self-assessed managers and those assessed by the others by means of variable controls such as: age, origin (rural-urban), activity branch, seniority in leadership positions and number of people in the team.

Research results – Descriptive data

The participants in this study belong mostly to young population (almost 78% of the respondents are under 35 years old) (Table No 2). The reason for the disequilibrium in the structure of our group is to be found in the reluctance of older persons to answer such a questionnaire.

The Mann-Whiney test (within SPSS 14.00 programme) has been applied to verify the research hypotheses because we have been interested in the differences that occur in some dependent variables of ordinal type, and the comparison is made between independent groups.

Hypothesis 1.

There are differences between male and female managers at the level of self-assessing characteristics (the ability to motivate employees, respect, teamwork, thoroughness, and empathy and behaviours. As revealed by Table No 3, there are some differences between men and women in what concern the importance given to certain characteristics that define them. Men, as compared to women, consider that the ability to motivate employees and stress management suits them better. On the other hand, female managers, as compared to male managers, consider respect, teamwork and thoroughness more important in their portrayal (Table No 3).

The fact that female managers, as compared to male managers, consider that respect and teamwork suit them better is in accordance with the conclusions drawn by Eagley and Johnson (1990, apud Gardiner & Tiggeman, 1999), but also by Boatwright & Forrest (2000) who state that women in leadership positions lay more emphasis on personal relations while men focus on goal achievement. Thus, differences seem to be fewer than similarities.

Hypothesis 2.

There are differences, at employees` assessment level between the characterization of male and those of female managers, in what concerns their communication skills, the ability to

motivate employees, teamwork and empathy.

From the employees` perspective, gender differences between male and female managers seem very few (Table No 4). According to the data collected for this study, there is only one statistically significant difference: empathy seems more common among women in leadership positions than among men in the same position. The social, rational dimension is worth to be observed as it is more obvious at male managers than at female ones (Table No 4).

It is interesting that gender differences occurred in managers` self-assessments do not overlap assessments made by subordinates.

A first explanation could be formulated in terms of methodological limitations: self-assessing managers are not the ones that have been assessed. A second explanation would favour the perspective supported by structural theories arguing that organizational norms, characteristics and position specific activities have a stronger impact on the managers` behaviour than gender differences – be they innate or social models.

Hypothesis 3.

There are differences between the managers` self-assessment manner and the manner subordinates assess their bosses, in terms of communication skills, ability to motivate employees, thoroughness and empathy.

Of all research characteristics, the differences between managers` self-assessments and employees` assessments seem limited to thoroughness: managers, compared to subordinates, consider that this feature defines them stronger. Managers consider themselves more thorough than the subordinates see them (Table No 5).

A possible explanation could argue that not all activities and dimensions of management positions are perceived completely and fairly by subordinates. Another explanation would favour the

managers` tendency to give more desirable answers to this dimension.

Hypothesis 4. Regarding the male managers` characterization, there are differences between male managers` assessments and those of subordinates in terms of their ability to motivate employees, handle stress management and teamwork.

Of all investigated characteristics (Table No 6), the differences between male managers` self-assessment and the subordinates` assessment are limited to teamwork: the subordinates consider that their managers are characterized by a strong teamwork spirit, compared to assessments made by the managers themselves (Table No 6.).

The explanation of this difference could be found in the different perspectives that the employees from various hierarchical positions have on a certain issue. It is possible that what employees view as teamwork spirit in their managers, is actually a job specific requirement and not a personal characteristics.

Hypothesis 5. Regarding female managers` characterization, there are differences between female managers` self-assessment and that of subordinates, in terms of their ability to motivate employees, thoroughness, empathy and respect.

Most differences occur at the level of characteristics describing women managers. (Table No 7). When self-assessing themselves, women managers regard empathy and the ability to motivate employees more important than the employees see them. From the other perspective, subordinates consider respect and thoroughness as important characteristics for female managers – compared to the manner women managers` self-assessment (Table No 7).

The differences can be explained through the perspectives of evaluation (self-assessment versus hetero-assessment). However, the high number of differences found in this situation can be due to the controversial aspect of female management. When talking about women in management

positions, their experience is strongly influenced by the existence of relevant self- and hetero-stereotypes.

Conclusion

By analysing the results obtained, we can draw some conclusions. Firstly, the differences between female and male managers are less than the similarities. This observation is valid also when we take into account the managers` self-assessments but also assessment performed by subordinates. Consequently, we can consider that the data of this study support the structural hypothesis which stresses the importance of organizational determinants for the managers` behaviour in the detriment of individual determinants. The few differences which were found are in agreement with the conclusions drawn by Eagley i Johnson (1990, apud Gardiner & Tiggeman, 1999), but also by Boatwright & Forrest (2000) which state that women in charge lay more emphasis on personal relations while men focus on goal achievement.

Women managers consider their ability to motivate employees lower while men managers believe that this ability strongly characterizes them. Interesting is that subordinates consider this ability specific for women managers even in a higher extent than the women consider it when self-assessing themselves. It is possible that women managers have higher standards regarding this dimension (compared to male managers or to subordinates) and therefore assess themselves unfavourably.

Empathy is another dimension worth to be taken into consideration. Subordinates view women managers more empathic than men managers and even more empathic than the women view themselves. This result is supported by the fact that gender differences in terms of empathic abilities are frequently mentioned in the field literature. (Strongman, 2002).

Respect for the others is another social characteristic that is more valued by women managers – compared both to male managers` self-assessments and to the assessment made by subordinates to female managers. The importance of this characteristic for women managers can derive from their own need to be respected on a professional level by their workmates, subordinates and bosses.

None of the analysis revealed differences in characteristics and behaviours like professionalism, strategic vision,

determination, experience, communication skills, ability to adapt to new situations. These characteristics are likely to be compulsory requirements for promotion in a management position in a worlds based on meritocracy. Without them any employee, man or woman would not accede in a management position.

The overall conclusion of this study is in agreement with the structural theory which supports the influence of organizational characteristics over personal ones in a manager`s behaviour.

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Table No 1. *The analysis of qualities a manager should have*

Communication skills	13
Stress management	13
Equidistance	13
Professionalism	13
Creativity	12
Teamwork	12
Tolerance	12
Strategic vision	12
Thoroughness	11
Discipline	11
Determination	11
The ability to motivate employees	10
Empathy	10
Optimism	10
Ethic features (honesty, correctness, integrity, fairness, sincerity)	10
The ability to adapt to new situations	9
Charisma	9
Experience	9
Loyalty	9
Respect	9

Table No 2. *Distribution of participants according to age categories*

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Score
between 20 and 25 years	69	29,7	29,7
between 26 and 30 years	66	28,4	58,2
between 31 and 35 years	45	19,4	77,6
between 36 and 40 years	29	12,5	29,7
between 41 and 45 years	11	4,7	94,8
between 46 and 50 years	8	3,4	98,3
between 51 and 55 years	3	1,3	99,6
between 56 and 60 years	1	0,4	100
Total	232	100	

Table No 3. *Comparative analysis between male and female managers` self-assessment*

	Average Male managers (self-assessment)	Average Female managers (self-assessment)	U	Z	p
Communication skills	53,97	58,06	1426,50	-0,675	0,500
Ability to motivate employees	45,23	66,96	937,00	-3,565	0,000
Ability to adapt to new situations	54,10	57,94	1433,50	-0,629	0,529
Stress management	47,64	64,51	1072,00	-2,765	0,006
Charisma	52,65	59,41	1352,50	-1,109	0,268

Thoroughness	65,75	46,07	994,00	-3,228	0,001
Creativity	52,95	59,11	1369,00	-1,011	0,312
Discipline	57,70	54,27	1445,00	-0,562	0,574
Equidistance	50,86	61,24	1252,00	-1,703	0,089
Empathy	53,25	58,80	1386,00	-0,912	0,362
Experience	58,36	53,60	1408,00	-0,780	0,435
Determination	60,52	51,40	1287,00	-1,496	0,135
Loyalty	59,79	52,15	1328,00	-1,253	0,210
Optimism	56,92	55,06	1488,50	-0,304	0,761
Respect	62,45	49,44	1179,00	-2,134	0,033
Teamwork	64,85	46,99	1044,50	-2,929	0,003
Tolerance	57,41	54,56	1461,00	-0,468	0,640
Ethic features	57,24	54,74	1470,50	-0,411	0,681
Strategic vision	51,86	60,22	1308,00	-1,371	0,170
Professionalism	60,76	51,15	1273,50	-1,579	0,114

Tabel No 4. *Comparative analysis between employees` assessment of male and female managers*

	Average Male managers (hetero-assessment)	Average Female managers (hetero-assessment)	U	Z	p
Communication skills	58,03	63,73	1655,00	-0,901	0,368
Ability to motivate employees	63,14	59,03	1703,00	-0,645	0,519
Ability to adapt to new situations	62,77	59,37	1724,50	-0,533	0,594
Stress management	55,96	65,64	1534,50	-1,520	0,128
Charisma	62,06	60,02	1765,50	-0,320	0,749
Thoroughness	63,17	59,00	1701,00	-0,655	0,512
Creativity	63,72	58,49	1669,00	-0,821	0,411
Discipline	60,91	61,09	1821,50	-0,029	0,977
Equidistance	63,04	59,12	1708,50	-0,617	0,537
Empathy	68,06	54,50	1417,50	-2,131	0,033
Experience	60,54	61,42	1800,50	-0,138	0,890
Determination	66,42	56,01	1512,50	-1,634	0,102
Loyalty	57,14	64,56	1603,00	-1,165	0,244
Optimism	62,90	59,25	1717,00	-0,572	0,567
Respect	56,37	65,26	1558,50	-1,395	0,163
Teamwork	57,68	64,06	1634,50	-1,001	0,317
Tolerance	58,64	63,17	1690,00	-0,713	0,476
Ethic features	59,62	62,27	1747,00	-0,416	0,678
Strategic vision	61,07	60,94	1823,00	-0,021	0,983
Professionalism	56,53	65,12	1567,50	-1,353	0,176

Tabel No 5. *Comparative analysis between managers` self- and hetero-assessment*

	Average Hetero-assesment managers	Average Self-assesment managers	U	Z	p
Communication skills	120,51	112,13	6230,50	-0,958	0,338
Ability to motivate employees	113,74	119,51	6381,50	-0,655	0,512
Ability to adapt to new situations	119,55	113,18	6347,00	-0,723	0,470
Stress management	115,60	117,48	6606,50	-0,214	0,831
Charisma	116,55	116,45	6709,50	-0,012	0,991
Thoroughness	126,33	105,78	5525,50	-2,334	0,020
Creativity	116,26	116,76	6687,00	-0,056	0,955
Discipline	117,36	115,56	6611,50	-0,204	0,838
Equidistance	118,26	114,58	6502,00	-0,419	0,675
Empathy	112,45	120,91	6225,50	-0,962	0,336
Experience	111,90	121,52	6158,50	-1,092	0,275
Determination	110,86	122,65	6032,50	-1,340	0,180
Loyalty	118,55	114,27	6468,00	-0,486	0,627
Optimism	113,41	119,86	6342,00	-0,733	0,464
Respect	122,18	110,31	6028,00	-1,348	0,178
Teamwork	113,76	119,49	6383,50	-0,651	0,515
Tolerance	113,50	119,77	6352,00	-0,714	0,475
Ethic features	120,81	111,81	6194,50	-1,022	0,307
Strategic vision	112,74	120,60	6260,00	-0,893	0,372
Professionalism	115,66	117,42	6613,50	-0,201	0,841

Tabel No 6. *Comparative analysis between male managers` self- and hetero-assessment*

	Average Male managers (hetero-assessment)	Average Male managers (Self-assessment)	U	Z	p
Communication skills	58,78	56,18	1550,00	-0,423	0,672
Ability to motivate employees	62,75	52,06	1319,50	-1,731	0,084
Ability to adapt to new situations	60,41	54,48	1455,00	-0,960	0,337
Stress management	59,47	55,46	1509,50	-0,650	0,515
Charisma	59,84	55,07	1488,00	-0,773	0,440
Thoroughness	59,32	55,62	1518,50	-0,599	0,549
Creativity	60,21	54,70	1467,00	-0,892	0,373
Discipline	57,22	57,79	1607,50	-0,094	0,925
Equidistance	61,61	53,24	1385,50	-1,355	0,175
Empathy	60,32	54,58	1460,50	-0,930	0,352
Experience	53,43	61,71	1388,00	-1,340	0,180
Determination	55,40	59,68	1502,00	-0,693	0,488
Loyalty	54,89	60,21	1472,50	-0,861	0,389
Optimism	56,27	58,78	1552,50	-0,406	0,685
Respect	54,53	60,57	1452,00	-0,977	0,329
Teamwork	50,37	64,88	1210,50	-2,349	0,019
Tolerance	54,45	60,66	1447,00	-1,007	0,314

Ethic features	58,34	56,63	1575,00	-0,278	0,781
Strategic vision	57,10	57,10	1601,00	-0,131	0,896
Professionalism	52,41	62,77	1329,00	-1,679	0,093

Tabel No 7. *Comparative analysis between women managers` self- and hetero-assessments*

	Average Female managers (hetero-assessment)	Average Female managers (Self-assessment)	U	Z	p
Communication skills	62,18	56,43	1563,50	-0,919	0,358
Ability to motivate employees	50,98	69,26	1195,50	-2,902	0,004
Ability to adapt to new situations	59,60	59,38	1726,00	-0,035	0,972
Stress management	56,63	62,78	1552,00	-0,976	0,329
Charisma	57,28	62,05	1592,50	-0,757	0,449
Thoroughness	68,06	49,70	1193,50	-2,914	0,004
Creativity	56,70	62,71	1556,00	-0,954	0,340
Discipline	60,77	58,05	1652,50	-0,432	0,665
Equidistance	57,40	61,90	1600,50	-0,714	0,475
Empathy	53,51	66,36	1355,00	-2,044	0,041
Experience	58,83	60,27	1690,00	-0,230	0,818
Determination	55,92	63,60	1507,00	-1,219	0,223
Loyalty	63,68	54,71	1469,00	-1,425	0,154
Optimism	58,06	61,15	1641,50	-0,492	0,623
Respect	67,43	50,42	1233,00	-2,700	0,007
Teamwork	64,94	53,26	1389,50	-1,855	0,064
Tolerance	59,42	59,59	1727,50	-0,027	0,978
Ethic features	63,60	54,81	1474,50	-1,394	0,163
Strategic vision	56,30	63,16	1531,00	-1,089	0,276
Professionalism	63,31	55,14	1492,50	-1,301	0,193