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ROMANIAN BUSINESS WOMEN: MANAGERS OR LEADERS?

Empirical
study

Keywords

*Leadership,
Management,
Lateral thinking*

JEL Classification

M12, M54

Abstract

Leadership is a concept appeared in the second part of the twentieth century which developed later on because of the business necessity as the economic environment has become more and more complex and the classic managerial style was no more efficient. In this complex world of business, women were traditionally involved in business at the administrative level, with small chances to reach top structures in a company. Due to the modern times, they won their rights to prove their management skills and to obtain more important jobs in famous companies. This paper presents the results of a research based on interview method and getting responses from Romanian women involved in business at the middle and top management in multinational companies. The main goal of the study was to identify the main features that define the women as a leader or a manager by finding lateral thinking skills. This research revealed that most of the women interviewed have their features closer to the conventional leader and only few of them have developed strong lateral thinking skills.

Introduction

Leadership is a concept appeared in the second part of the twentieth century which developed later on because of the business necessity as the economic environment has become more and more complex and the classic managerial style was no more efficient. The numbers of the companies involved in the economy raised their volumes, number of employees, products or created services, firms developed and became multinationals or global and the managers needed to communicate with continuously growing internal community and in the same time with external structures. These relations become more complex and implied a development of management functions into something new that involved different approaches from heads of the companies.

In this context, people involved in leading must dedicate their time and creative ideas to their jobs.

In this complex world of business, women were traditionally involved in business at the administrative level, with small chances to reach top structures in a company. Due to the modern times, they won their rights to prove their management skills and to obtain more important jobs in famous companies.

Romania, as many other former communist countries, tries to learn this lesson of doing the business in the right way by opening the doors to many foreign companies that carry out an important culture by allowing the woman to be in an important position and offering her trust and support to develop a great business environment.

This paper presents the results of a research focused on Romanian women involved in business at the middle and top management positions from the multinational companies. The main parts of this work are: literature review, methodology, the results of the research and conclusions.

1. Literature review

Counting the number of articles and books released to public the latest twenty years there are few subjects more extant than communication or leadership in world interests (Frohman, 2008), and the amount is constantly increasing. In Brian Tracy's (2010) opinion, leadership is the most important factor also the key for an organization, bringing together "the success or failure of a company" implying the ability to step forward a business but also lead to success in competitive markets.

The huge literature articles, books, and programs on the subject create the impression that leadership is a matter of trainings, a set of skills that can be taught as leadership means mostly actions (Egmon, 2005).

The false impression would be that the right books read or maybe the right coach should be the right receipt, but in real life, nothing can fully prepare somebody for the challenge (Frohman, 2008, p.17).

Also in the world of leadership there are some possibilities: to learn, to be already a leader or both, depending of the aimed targeted level (Sloane, 2003, p.12).

Some people are self-thought as they have not learned, nor studied, nor seemed to be interested in leading, but they become multinational leaders because of their complex life or experiences, these kind of people are called by Anna Lee Saxenian "new Argonauts" (Frohman, 2008, p.23) and their life stories distillate experiences as base for leaders, but most of the time they are not common personalities nor easy to handle becoming as Andy Grove claimed famously that "only the paranoid survive" (Frohman, 2008, p.31).

Authors like Frohman believe that soft skills are a successful way to reach leadership. From his point of view some soft skills that cannot be taught, they might be "the inner life of the leader" (Frohman, 2008, p.70) as the special sense of persons fighting against the usual, a survival instinct by which managers develop particular way of thinking and find opportunities in each situation. The special bond with the colleagues and lead communication with them in a strategic way in order to respond positively is a natural gift that cannot be taught. Along all these a manager can learn some things from the great leaders and these might be:

- The ability to free up time as a way to release too much unproductive business to stay focused on what really matters.
- "The discipline of daydreaming" as a process of losing all constraints and clarifying the main ideas keeping the important things reframing and targeting them through innovation and improvisation
- Intuition based on double loop of the facts - what Frohman consider the circle: Trusting — and Testing — Intuitions
- Communicating through behaviour is a skill that can change the approach inside of the organization as its high sensitivity to the people can reject or accept a leader.

By developing the idea that the leader should embrace change as a source of development and improvement, searching the unseen path, constantly looking and questioning for a different prospective put him in the same perspective with Sloane (2003) who creates a parallelism between the manager classical point of view and leaders lateral thinking solving way (Table 1).

Sloane (2003, pp.10-12) considers that conventional leaders or leadership are easily recognized as mostly goal oriented, involving decisive actions, results, efficiency and process improvement. At the same time lateral thinking actors are seen in fast moving companies and they focus on creativity, innovation and team, building good intellectual surrounding, more collegial than build on pyramid scale. If the lateral thinkers prefer to inspire and create inner focus for their

colleagues, being prepared to share their vision, the conventional leader sees business through analysis, results, command and control. Both ways are perfectly working but big corporates work better with efficient aspects even the creativity will be slightly lost, but there is a desiderate to involve inspiration and creativity together.

There is no pure situation where leaders act in one way or another; a leader must be able to balance in between.

In our research we chose the Sloan's theory because it is clearer specified and defined and it allowed us to compare better our results with this theory and getting a vision on the dominant management style applied by a Romanian woman employed in a multinational company.

2. Methodology

Before starting the research, we collected some statistical data to understand the gender landscape of business environment and we considered that the world of business women is divided in entrepreneurs and employees.

In this way we discovered through the site of the Register of Commerce (2016) that in December 2015 there were 432 440 women owning shares in companies, from a total of 1 184 843 owners. In this case it is obvious that men are dominating the entrepreneurial business landscape by their 752 403 number of share owners.

Since the entrepreneurs have the freedom of decision and they behave as leaders in their own companies, we did not focus on women that own shares in our study.

The National Statistical Institute (2016) shows that in 2014 the active population involved in private companies was about 7 017 200 people, but the statistics do not prove gender figures. If we consider that the active people includes also the people involved in business, we find that 5 832 357 men and women are working as employees in the private business system.

In the same time if we correlate data from Register of Commerce and the Romanian Chamber of Commerce (2016) we discovered that from the total number of companies 773 781, about 204 466 are foreign companies. In this case, we decided to concentrate our study on women employed in private foreign companies where competition for getting a leading position and playing internationally is stronger and the multinational culture environment requires private skills to get efficiency.

From the beginning we guided our study by two questions:

1. What are the main features of a Romanian employed woman allowing her to become a leader in a multinational company?
2. Then the reverse of this idea is welcomed to be analysed by answering to what does stop other

women employees to not succeed in being leaders in multinational companies?

For getting answers to these questions, we planned a research divided in three main steps. The first one is presented in this paper and gets a perspective of women that are already in management positions through the interview qualitative method.

The second step regards a quantitative method through questionnaires and the third step will be based on results gathered from the focus group.

This paper concentrates the results obtained from the first part of the research which was the direct interview method. In this study, we collected answers from 16 women managers who are in the middle and top position.

The main goal of the interviews was the identification of the main features that defines the women as a leader or a manager, based on the theory of Sloane, P. (2003) regarding the lateral thinking skills. To reach this, another three secondary objectives helped during the process. First, we wanted to understand the business environment where our subjects work. Second, we identified experiences from the past and present, which recommended the subjects to be promoted to the top of the companies. Third, we wanted to discover their way of interacting and their dependence to the others from the company or outsiders.

The interview process was based on three main sections correlated to the objectives, each having seven questions and each conversation took 30-40 minutes, generally inside the office where our subjects work.

After we collected the answers, we try to reach the goal of the study and presenting the results into the Sloan table, by comparing the gained information with the theory. In the next section, we present the results grouped by objectives.

3. Results of the research

The first objective is understanding the business environment where the interviewed women managers from middle and top management work.

To reach this, we used a set of seven questions to find out the field and type of activity - standard or personalized - the age of the company from Romania and from the World, the origin of the headquarters, the number of the existing branches, particularity of the Romanian branch, the size of the company, number of employees, if there is a final activity dedicated to the Romanian market as the final consumer. The more questions proposed had the main purpose finding the role of the HR department in the companies as the key of personal training. The target was to understand what does the HR to improve the performance of the company. Another set of questions were asked in order to see what language is used in a multinational culture for better efficiency and proper communication.

After all these questions and answers have been gathered, we discovered women managers in the most unexpected fields, such as information technology, tele-communication, medical research, research of semiconductors and oil industry as well as in the food industry, beauty, financial services, textiles and banking. Their position is often in marketing, human resources, law adviser, trade and general management, but in two cases we got that women involved in logistics and trade are not well appreciated by the foreigner top management. Most of the activities suppose standardization, but often the offer is personalized or customized for private customers. Here the creativity is built around the team, the manager interviewed accept their role of good mediators between customers and their team.

Most of the companies are active for more than 10 years on the Romanian market, their main headquarters are in Bucharest, having branches in other cities, and only few concentrate their activity in one city, always Bucharest.

In only two cases the Romanian companies do different things from the others international branches, most of the cases interviewed they declared that there is a business model followed and imported from abroad.

There are also less cases where companies are not interested in Romanian market, they create here the business which is sold abroad. Usually the selling activity is separate and controlled by another company of the group. The employees are trained by a program controlled by the headquarter or directly by company, through qualified seniors. The model of training is almost the same in all the cases, except two cases, where it was a kind of self-education.

Usually the courses offered by companies are technical, but in most of the cases there is a budget dedicated to personal development so we can say that the companies care about the mind and the good spirit of their employees.

Regarding the language, all the companies use Romanian and English, but rare French and German. Basic language is Romanian, but starting from the level where team managers interact with their correspondent from abroad, English language is a must, even in French companies, where employees are not obliged to learn and speak French.

The first objective had a role of understanding what kind of environment is suitable for a woman to be promoted. The second and the third goals are the core of this study that will define the Romanian business women profile. For a better preview, we identified experiences from the past and present, we asked about the longevity inside the company, their last place of work, the way they were promoted. We wanted also to find if their education was helpful for actual job, if it was necessary to complete the education by the help of the company or by themselves. For an entire image the right position in

the company it was very important, for a better understanding of how many people are under and above, picturing the working style which is individual or concentrated in a team.

A description of how new ideas are created and implemented is important in order to design the differences between routine and creativity.

A self-characterization through a fair description of strength and weak features and also getting a female opinion about the difference between a woman manager and a man manager gave a good perspective of self-perception based on the myth "our words talk about us".

The results show that in three cases we met managers with an experience less than three years, all the others being in the same position for at least five years up to ten years. Most of them (except two cases) did the same activity or very closed to the actual. In those two cases the present position was very new with no connection to the past. Except those two cases, all the others had a relevant experience in the past, from the ex-job. In those two cases, one has been promoted from the same company, the other one came from a different one. All the others came from different companies.

All the sixteen cases interviewed confessed that they were recommended from somebody inside the company – usually it was an ex-colleague from the ex-job, a former collaborator, a good friend from inside the actual company.

The old experience was very important to get the actual job, but the education was important too sometimes at the beginning of working life, sometimes for the actual job.

Most of them are involved in the same field of their education, but in five cases the education didn't help too much in their business life. All of them dedicated time to improve knowledge in connection to their activity or personal development by spending their own money or having the support of the company where they are working. Besides they received specialized trainings to improve their skills for this actual job.

Regarding the level in the company, we were lucky to meet people very close to the top of the company or even the general manager. In two cases the structure of the company was flat and the working style is more individual, depending on some targeted figures from the estimated budget.

The new ideas come from headquarters, in few cases the Romanian branch is free to promote new proposals. In few cases, there are periods of idea competition, where all the employees are invited to a brainstorming session, but all the proposals have to be approved from abroad.

The women managers interviewed use to consult their team since they depend on them. Mostly they cannot work independently, being an interface between the customers and their team or the top management level.

Their strengths were emphasized with a modest attitude and it was like a common voice saying “we are more human and understand people”, but this statement turns into a weak point when it is too much exaggerated. Then the way of asking is milder than a man’s style. The women managers have a reflex of protecting the others and creating a secure atmosphere. Other important information consists in discipline, order, well organized, fighting for an equilibrium between the personal life and professional life and they talk about their families. The weak features come from the lack of firmness, the hen with chicks’ behaviour, the fear to delegate some activities.

In comparison with men managers, they consider that they are better in communication, intuition, focus on details, which are features more specific to women. The men can separate better the personal life from private life and focus on the integrated objectives of the company, but in some cases the woman can succeed easier than a man because they work better with people.

The last part of our study focused on understanding how these managers interact with people from inside and outside the company.

Maybe one of the most embarrassing question from the interview was if they met situations when men considered them unable or inferior because they are women.

Another exercise of honesty was to confess if the technology seems familiar or some specialists help is required. In the same time, it was important to understand if technology is more important than people’s creativity.

The story of the most beautiful and the worst experience from this actual position had the aim of understanding the perception of the others’ reaction to them.

Also to confess their preference of working with men or women and describing their working style with them or talking about the moments when they were little punished for their or others mistakes was another test of honesty.

This study identifies only two cases of interaction inside the company, but from the international point of view, inside means the multinational group of companies.

All the others work with people inside and outside the company. In contact with outsiders they are in advantage when they recommend themselves as employees of these companies, as a guarantee of trust.

From their position all of them interact with all the departments of the company and with their correspondents from international group.

Some of the subjects confess that working with foreigners is better than working with Romanians. The difference between the two consists in respect, education, natural behaviour and modesty.

In three cases the women managers confess the situations when they were not respected because

they were women. All the others they felt always respected and self -confident for being a woman.

The technology is well manipulated, but often there is a need of specialists’ help, invoking the reason of the efficiency.

Technology is perceived as a middle of improving the results. For all the companies, this is the engine of the entire activity. The human creativity is born in contact with others and for a better design of the activity in order to optimized the way of obtaining good results.

All the beautiful experiences were codified as an appreciation and bad experiences were created by bad behaviour of trustful people.

All the interviewed women recognized that they prefer to work with men instead of women. Also they accept that their success counts sometimes on their charm by speculating some weak behaviours of the men when they are flattered to do a favour to a woman.

The working style is different from people to people.

Usually they ask for cooperation, but can impose it when is required. The communication is the women’s gun, they do not abuse on their position and follow only the objectives that have to be reached, with careful monitoring of the process steps.

Usually the stress comes from the boss of the level up and not from the daily activity.

After all this work, we concentrated our results into the Sloan’s table (Table 1) and compared them with his theoretical model. This research relieved that most of the women interviewed have their features closer to the conventional leaders and some of them have developed strong lateral thinking.

Conclusions

This paper presents the results of a research made by the interview method applied to Romanian women managers. The main objective of the research is to identify the main features that define the woman working in middle or top management as a manager or a leader. To find this, the study focused on tree goals.

The first was to understand the business environment where these women activate and the interviews showed:

- internationally role
- ability to work in every field, in every department, less appreciated in logistics and trade
- good knowledge of the firm from inside and outside

The second goal was to identify some experiences from present and the past that helped the ladies to be promoted. Most of the results are included into the Sloan’s table, but we found more:

- experience and education are very important for a manager
- the family life and professional life complete them

- awareness about themselves
- modesty and self-confident
- discipline, hard-working and well organized

- awareness of the limits

The third goal was to understand the interaction inside and outside the company. The main issues, besides those mentioned in the Table 1 are:

- better work with foreigners and men
- activating feminine charm to obtain chances
- the misogyny not often behaviour
- appreciation and people who disappointed them are the two poles of good and bad experiences
- sometimes penalties are accepted to protect the team
- the style of assuming and not delegate enough
- available to work many hours every day

By correlating all this information to all the results in the Table 1 and if we compare with Sloan's theory, we understand that the Romanian business women employed in multinational companies have most of their feature as conventional leaders, but there are some of them that can be real leaders base

on lateral thinking. As the theory shows, both styles are suitable to get efficient results.

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Table 1. Different approaches on leadership, results and conclusions

Conventional leaders:	Lateral leaders:	Results	Conclusion
Lead from the front	Lead from alongside	Depending on situation	both
Direct	Inspire	direct	conventional
Use conventional methods and seek to improve effectiveness and efficiency	Develop new methods and seek to change the rules, change partners or change the approach to the problem	Mostly use conventional methods, but there are some cases interested in developing the working system	mostly conventional
Think they know best (and often do)	Harness the abilities of others	They depend on others but	Leaders
Have a strong sense of direction and purpose	Have a vision and use it to inspire others	They ask to reach the goal	conventional
Spend more time on improving day-to-day operational matters than on strategic issues	Spend more time on finding new strategic initiatives and partners than on solving operational or day-to-day matters	They don't have time to improve; they are anchored in the routine	conventional
Give directions and orders	Ask questions, solicit suggestions, delegate	They don't delegate, mostly give directions	conventional
Look for greater efficiency, more productivity, faster development, more aggressive sales and marketing	Look for new ways to do things, new approaches to the customer, new solutions, new partnerships	Few cases for new ways of business, mostly they do their best for efficiency	conventional
Treat staff as subordinates	Treat staff as colleagues	Hen with chicks behaviour	Leaders
Are decisive, often without prior consultation	Solicit views and inputs before making decisions	They require a lot of information before a decision	Leaders
Use analytical, critical, logical thinking	Use lateral thinking	intuitive	Leaders
Build an effective team of managers who can execute policy and implement plans	Build a team of creative, entrepreneurial individuals	They attract people who obey	conventional
Focus on actions and results	Focus on direction and innovation to achieve results	Focus on action	conventional
Communicate through memos and e-mail	Communicate through open discussions	Very technological personal contact	conventional
Instruct	Empower	Instruct/empower	both
Hire based on experience, proven track record and qualifications	Hire based on talent, potential and creativity	Experience and education	conventional
Discourage dissent	Encourage constructive dissent	Encourage	Leaders
Cherish results first, people second	Cherish ideas, innovation and people	Mostly results, but they are good to people	Both
Promote themselves as leaders and figureheads with the press, customers and the outside world	Share exposure and prestige with the team	They are modest	Leaders
Encourage action, activity, work	Encourage ideas, innovation, fun	Encourage action	conventional
Reward performance and results	Reward creativity and risk taking	Everything is target and results	conventional
Are numbers oriented and analytical	Are ideas oriented, analytical and intuitive	Numbers oriented	conventional
See technology as a means to do things better, faster, cheaper	See technology as means to do things entirely differently	Technology means efficiency	conventional
Overrule ideas and initiatives they see as flawed or wrong	Encourage all initiative and often implement ideas or suggestions over which they have doubts	Initiative is encouraged by the headquarter not from inside	conventional
Look for ideas from their own experience	Look for ideas from anywhere!	Own experience, but they implement others ideas	conventional

Source: merged ideas from the paper authors and Sloane, P. (2003), "The Leader's Guide To Lateral Thinking Skills Unlocking the Creativity and Innovation in You and Your Team",