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**THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES
IN SOCIAL SCIENCES: EMERGING PERSPECTIVES**



CONSILIUL JUDEȚEAN TIMIȘ

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Chapter I

PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS OF ROMANIAN FEMALE MANAGERS

Brigitta IELICS, Marius Vasiluță ȘTEFĂNESCU

Abstract

The increase of occupation rate among women is one of the main goals of development at national and international levels. According to statistics, Romania ranked 50 in 2010 among 175 countries from the point of view of human development; as for sex disparity index, it ranks 56 among 175 countries (*Human Development Reports 2007-2009*) [5]. Though occupation rate among women aged 15-64 was, in 2007, in Romania, 51.7%, it is still far from the 60% stipulated in Lisbon for the year 2010, decreasing steadily compared to previous years. As far as part-time occupation is concerned, there are still great differences compared to the EU indicators. The share of women employed part-time of the total women employed was only 11.2% in 2004 compared to 31.4 in the EU. If, to all this, we add the fact that, in 2010, only 1/3 of the new firms were established by women; the status and role of women in Romanian economy and society show that there are still considerable differences between female managers and male managers. In this context, our research aims at suggesting ways to reduce gender differences on the Romanian labour market at managerial level in the business and social policies sectors, by identifying women's key skills for success (i.e. profit); we also aim at transferring competencies to potential managers from both the public and private sectors [9].

Keywords:

Women Executives, Gender, Role Conflict, Career Development, Romania

Introduction

Any woman involved in a professional activity, who wishes her work [1] performances to be acknowledged, has to face numerous barriers – from flagrant inequities at her job place to the inevitable household chores – in an environment where only changes are certain.

For the women aspiring to management positions, the situation is even more difficult, since they need to continuously prove that they are more skilled than men, that they are capable of reaching the same standards of

performance as men or even more. Changes in the scale of values of corporative culture, in working technologies, in the structure of the jobs available and of the labour force, in the classical model of life styles, of social attitudes and of role distribution in the family, globalisation [2, 3, 6], the new legislation requirements, firm reorganisation, the emphasis on team work [1] and on each employee's involvement – all this are factors that develop new opportunities for women to resist and compete successfully in a harsher and harsher economic environment (Sitterly 1999).

Despite these barriers and negative attitudes, women continue to make steps forward in the managerial field. Adopting a mentor, using one's personal relations, and overcoming barriers are three elementary techniques female managers can use to get contracts, support, and influence. Though image, attitude, performance, and social skills are essential elements, female managers also need initiative and facility in approaching business and difficult situations if they wish to be successful.

Goals and Methodology

To reach our goal, we identified 1,500 female managers at national level using rate sampling. We had in view the four development macro-regions of Romania (North – West, Centre; North – East, South – East; South Wallachia – București – Ilfov; South –West, Oltenia, West), where we identified 1,500 female managers working in both public – 48.9% and private – 49.8% sectors, holding top management positions – 55.13%, middle-management positions – 24.63%, and operational management – 20.22%.

The research technique we used was the quantitative-qualitative one, i.e. the interview, and the instrument we used to inquire our 1,500 subjects was the semi-structured interview guide [8] (Miftode 1995).

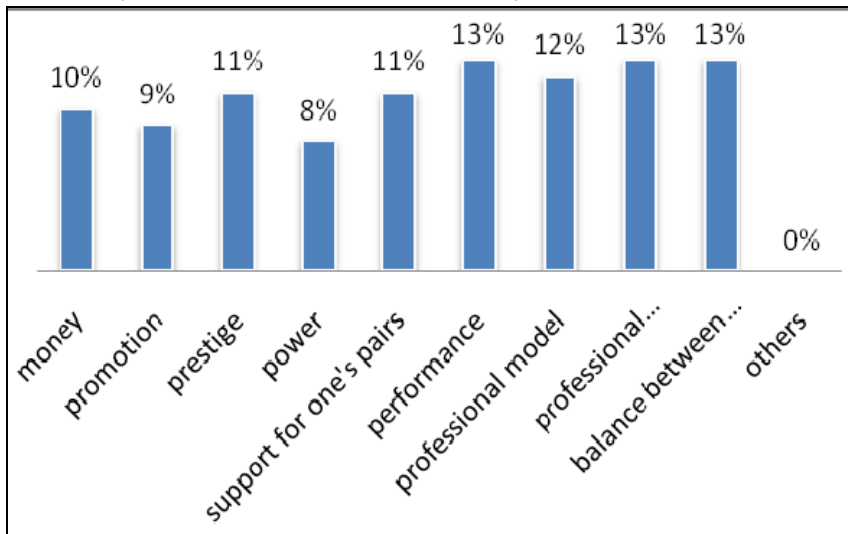
Since the main goal of our research was to identify key skills ensuring professional success in female managers, the semi-structured interview applied to the 1,500 female managers focused on several aspects, such as:

1. Perception of female managers of professional success;
2. Reasons for having chosen a professional career and factors contributing to building a career;

3. Difficulties female managers face and how they managed to overcome them;
4. Strengths and weaknesses of a female manager compared to a male manager;
5. Perception of female managers of the skills they need in order to be successful and their role in the managerial activity of the 1,500 female managers (subjects of the present research).

As for the perception of female managers of professional success, most of them associate success with professional satisfaction (13.36%), performance (13.11%), and balance between work [1] and one's personal life (12.87%) (Figure 1):

Figure 1 - Perception of female managers of professional success



Asked to rank the different items associated with professional success – money, promotion, prestige, power, support for one's pairs, performance, being a professional model, professional satisfaction, balance between profession and one's own life, or others – the ranking was as follows:

1. Balance between profession and one's own life – 27.1%;
2. Performance – 21.8%;
3. Professional satisfaction – 20.7%.

It is surprising to see that such items as money (8.5%), promotion (5.6%), or power (5.3%) are not very important in female managers' perception of professional success.

Asked about their perception of their own professional success correlated with their own aspirations and motivations, female managers associated success with satisfaction (22.2%), professional performance and professionalism (19.5%), serious work (18.4%), perseverance and responsibility (11.7%).

Since we aimed at designing the profile of a successful female manager, we also investigated the perception of female managers of the main skills they need to be successful. As shown in Table 1, female managers ranked these skills from 1 to 20, depending on their importance.

Table 1 - Responses to the question concerning successful skills

Rank	Skill	Frequency (%)
1	Efficient communication	7.52
2	Negotiation skills	6.82
3	Resource management	6.68
4	Target orientation	5.84
5	Conviction	5.84
6	Mediation	5.70
7	Maximum valorisation of available resources	5.47
8	Time management	5.46
9	Result orientation	5.26
10	Concept operation	5.04
11	Assertiveness (expressing a factual situation; simply stating something)	4.99
12	Organising and coordinating skills	4.63
13	Self-control	4.55
14	Diplomacy	4.42
15	Attention caption	4.32
16	Delegation of tasks and authority	4.28
17	General vision of the business	4.22
18	Influencing	3.43
19	Adaptability	3.02
20	Decision-making and problem solving	2.52
21	Other	0.2

We can see that the scores of these skills are pretty close, but the first ten ones are: efficient communication (7.52%), negotiation skills (6.82%), resource management (6.68%), task orientation (5.84%), mediation (5.70%), maximum valorisation of available resources (5.47%), time management (5.46%), result orientation (5.26%), and concept operation (5.04%).

Female managers' perception of the main skills one needs to be successful ranks these skills as follows:

1. Organising and coordinating skills (51.7%);
2. Decision-making and problem-solving (42.7%);
3. Efficient communication (33.1%);
4. General vision of the business (31.1%);
5. Time management (24.5%);
6. Diplomacy (20.6%);
7. Maximum valorisation of available resources (19.8%);
8. Resource management (19.5%);
9. Delegation of tasks and authority (19.1%);
10. Negotiation skills (15.7%).

Comparing female managers' necessary skills and qualities, we can conclude that they possess those qualities that correspond to the skills a female manager needs to build up a successful career. These qualities and skills are mentioned in all successful professional stories told by female managers. We refer mainly to professionalism, responsibility, self-confidence, respect, perseverance, efficient communication, negotiation skills and diplomacy, optimism. Surprisingly, those qualities considered to characterise women and that we expected to find among most frequently used by female managers such as empathy, elegance, or charisma are less frequent in the respondents' options: this makes us think that it is about female managers adapting to male managers' world, i.e. a "masculinisation" of female managers who strongly wish to be successful in their career.

At the same time, in a comparative register, female managers consider they have, like male managers, both strengths and weaknesses. Their strengths are perseverance, ambition, fidelity (13.3%), negotiation skills, diplomacy, persuasion, responsibility (7.9%), intuition, prudence (7.4%) – all of which rank first among female managers, unlike male managers.

Female managers' weaknesses are, compared to male managers, physical aspect, strength, sensitivity, empathy (18.1%), fear, lack of managerial skills (15.0%), family responsibilities (5.7%).

Thus, a large number of female managers (68.6%) consider there are differences between female managers and male managers, but they can be overrun by female managers' strengths.

We consider the successful female manager's profile has the following elements: aged 30-59, with high education and post-doctoral education, good organisation and coordination skills, good decision-maker and problem-solver, efficient communicator, good general vision of the business, good time manager, good diplomat, good administrator of available resources, good resource manager, good delegator of tasks and authority, good negotiator. This profile also includes such qualities as responsibility, respect, perseverance, devotion, self-confidence, optimism, and tenacity.

Compared to a male manager, a female manager's assets are perseverance, ambition, fidelity, diplomacy, persuasion, intuition, prudence, and empathy, which help female managers to be strong and able of being successful in a mainly "manly" world.

Conclusions

Any woman involved in a professional activity who wishes her work performances to be acknowledged, has to face numerous barriers – from the flagrant inequalities at her place of work to the inevitable household chores – in an environment in which the only certainty is change [7].

For those women who aspire to management positions, the situation is even more difficult because they have to prove continuously they have more skills than men, they are capable of reaching the same performance standards or even more. In these conditions, female managers or females with professional aspirations can no longer rely only on traditional skills such as time management, delegation of responsibilities, problem solving, conflict negotiation, or assertiveness. They need a lot of dedication, leadership skills, ability to establish and to achieve clear goals, as well as the capacity of assuming risks.

“The last decade was called ‘the decade of women and for the women’, and the firms that operate on profit need, at present, typically female values: soul availability, intuition, compassion, and much understanding for the people’s needs. These are social values that have already started to change all organisational structures. The changes brought about in the values scale of corporative culture, in work technologies, in the structure of available jobs and of labour force, in the classical model of lifestyle, of social attitudes and of the distribution of the roles in the family [2, 3, 6], globalisation, the new requirements of the legal frame, firm reorganisation, the emphasis on team work and on each employee’s involvement – all these changes are factors that enhance women’s resistance and successful competitiveness in an ever harsher economic environment.” (Sitterly 1999)

There are, also, factors that inhibit women’s evolution, such as lack of models (there are relatively few women that succeed professionally, compared to the number of male managers); salary inequity (even in the same work conditions, for the same requirements and responsibilities, female managers gain less than male managers); discrimination [4] and prejudices (in employment, promotion, salary, inter-human relationships); the feeling of isolation (quite often, a female manager find herself alone in a room full of men, with no other female manger as business partner); the natural gap between debut positions and managerial positions (one needs 10-15 years to become a manager, and when it gets the position, it is very difficult to keep it because of the pressure from outside); clichés, stereotypes [10] (treating any woman as a mother, sister, wife, or lover, including her automatically in one of these categories, and believing all women are, as a rule, sentimental, vulnerable, bitches, and always complaining – these are some of the most frequent male stereotypes that undermine the position of a female manager [10].

Despite all these barriers and negative attitudes, women continue to be promoted at managerial level. Adopting a mentor, using personal relations, and overcoming hardships are three elementary techniques on which female managers can rely in obtaining contracts, support, and influence. Though image, attitude, performance, and people working skill are main elements in a manager’s activity, female managers needs something more to succeed: initiative and facility in approaching business and difficult situations.