

# WOMEN LEADERS' RIGHTS, BETWEEN ASSUMED COMMITMENT AND MODERN REALITY

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DOI: 10.19062/2247-3173.2023.24.11

**Abstract:** *Gender issues are an important dimension that is constantly on the international agenda thanks to the benefits of feminism and femininity. The presence of modern women in leadership positions, in key areas that are predominantly male-dominated, is more than a social desideratum, it is a necessity. As a form of humanism, feminism promotes the affirmation of women with their panoply of skills, without discriminating against or discrediting the skills of men, with the aim of harmonising psycho-socio-cultural flows within an organisation or community. The article emphasises a complementary, balanced perspective of engaging female-transformational and male-transactional personalities in potentially performance-enhancing roles. This perspective renders the rights, freedoms, responsibilities, opportunities and challenges of the modern woman who does not aim at a superiority ratio over the strong gender, but a validation, a large-scale recognition of female capabilities in quality management.*

**Keywords:** *female leadership, gender equality, gender equity, security and defence, women's rights.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a predominantly patriarchal society, globally, the world faces imbalances of representation in positions of responsibility. Gender equality manifested in all sectors of society is a topic of interest in the social policy sphere and beyond. Occupational equality, as a sub-framework, is built on deepening and understanding diversity, challenging stereotypes, overcoming prejudices and objectively prioritising those in charge in a sector according to ability.

In the methodological path, this article aims to use investigation, reflexive and interpretative research, to analyse data integrating a complex of deductive and inductive reasoning, an explanation, an analysis about quantitative findings. It's very difficult, even impossible to measure leadership, but a qualitative research can offer answers about its traits, about commitments and abilities. It is required because this type of phenomena has to be explored, deconstructed, reconstructed, and interpreted.

The research hypothesis is based on the essentially exploratory question: *What are the leadership differences between women and men?* More than that, regardless of the sector of activity, leaders exercise their authority in order to maximise the efficiency of their initiatives. This raises a secondary question: is it possible to speak of gender-differentiated productivity or efficiency in decision-making processes and institutional processes?

## 2. FEMALE LEADERSHIP – FROM CONCEPT TO GENDER IDEOLOGY

### 2.1. The concept and styles of leadership

In the literature, the relationship between *management* and *leadership* is intensely exploited. These two concepts are directly linked to the organic growth of an organisation. Leadership has received numerous definitions, starting from the finest characteristics or perceptions - as a performance or quality improvement practice, as a way out of repetitive patterns, as a social intervention, as a theory of action in exercising control through emotional and social intelligence. *"The practices of leadership become substantially more complex and powerful as they engage the energy and commitment of people in the organization."* [1]

Leadership engages inspiration, energy, skills, emotional and social intelligence, knowledge, assumed commitment. K. Davis *"Leadership is the skill to awaken in collaborators the dream to which they will tend, inspiration in them of the energy necessary to their movement."*[2]

According to Kurt Lewin, an American behaviour psychologist and specialist in interpersonal relations, in the 1930s and 1940s he distinguished three core leadership styles: autocratic (authoritarian), delegative (laissez faire) and democratic (participative) leadership. From this research, the models of leadership developed progressively and, our days we can talk about much more types such as strategic, transformational, transactional, bureaucratic, situational leadership.

Later, in 2002, in their book *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* [3], Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee proposed six basic styles of leadership:

- Visionary – *Come with me!*
- Coaching – *Try this!*
- Affiliative/ Collaborative – *People come first*
- Democratic - *What do you think?*
- Pacesetting – *Do as I do, now!*
- Commanding – *Do what I tell you!*

Transformational and transactional styles were theorized in the 1980s and 1990s by Bernard M. Bass. The American psychologist developed studies in leadership and organisational behaviour. Two perspectives of analysis are identified. On the one hand, the transformational leader is the visionary able to influence his subordinates through persuasion and moral influence, and the transactional leader is the manager who builds his mission on give and take tasks, on their accomplishment and on predictability. This approach places the two types of leadership in antithesis. [4]

On the other hand, female leadership is associated with transformational leadership, built on inclusion, diversity, digitization, soft skills. At the opposite pole, male leadership is built on transactional leadership. Transformational leadership is considered to derive from transactional leadership and can be more effectively applied nowadays through coaching and mentoring. It involves an idealistic vision, beyond self-interest, focused on process, motivation, group interest, intellectual stimulation and inspiration. Transactional leadership aims a pragmatic change, assumes a certain rigidity, is focused on the end goal and materialises on reward or sanction. [5]

Correlating the two researches, through transitivity, it appears that the traits of the transformational leader coincide with the female profile, while the characteristics of the transactional leader - manager overlap with the male profile.

## **2.2. General Considerations on Women's Leadership. Ideology and theories**

Female leadership is the art of balanced, integrative, empathetic, detail-oriented influencing, changing perceptions, persuading, leading responsibly, effectively, goal-oriented, harmony and people-centred. Female leadership is and has to be resilient, noble and natural at the same time.

Feminist ideology is a doctrine of action that claims the fight against gender inequality, aims to promote the role and rights of women in society. Feminism has evolved from the perspective of a woman inferior to a man, who makes demands of substance in terms of social and psychological specificities, to a modern woman who makes demands of refinement in terms of power relations, objectification, social justice, elimination of stereotypes and prejudices.

In the 1950s, the demands were subtle or timid, like Simone de Beauvoir's structuring of the feminist theme in « *Le deuxième sexe* ». Later, in the 1960s, it was a more courageous, militant period of expression.

Recently, a new feminism movement emphasizes the complementarity men-women and introduce social change. Women do not deny femineity, elegance, aesthetics, accept gender differences, know how to value their uniqueness and procreative vocation and support men. Men and women are becoming interchangeable entities and we can observe that there is a tendency for the woman to place herself superior to the man, due to some assets that make her recognize her own power.

**Gender-Role Congruence Theory.** Among the leading theories in female leadership, the *Gender-Role Congruence Theory* by Eagly and Karau stands out. According to this theory, there are sectors of activity dominated by men, and women are thus in an incongruent relationship with society's expectations. An example of this is women in the military, who are commonly perceived to be unqualified to occupy such a social and professional role, let alone in a position of authority and leadership. [6]

**Theory of Gender Differences.** Gender theory highlights that women's qualities are questioned. They argue against the widespread view that they are the weaker sex, trying to appear more distant, more tough. As early as 1977, Rosabeth Kanter was developing the idea of women's differing performance in men. The history of the 1980s set out to contradict their approach, so that cooperative/ participatory leadership was intended to replace authoritarian leadership. Women's transformational leadership built on empathy, trust, responsibility and team spirit overshadowed male leadership. In 1990, Helgesen points out that women act cooperatively, with quality as their main goal, while men are more competitive. [7]

**Gender Equality Theory.** Studies confirm gender equality from all perspectives: equal opportunities, equal rights, equality between genders in terms of autonomy, social behaviour, self-control, responsibility. [8]

To connect the essence of these theories born from the societal problems of women, McKinsey & Company's 2007 study *Women Matter* shows that the leadership of woman behaviours increase and reinforce the performance within an organization. According to this study, we can observe and the male and female leadership assessing the leadership behaviour for every gender. Analysing 9 behavioural dimensions, we can observe the differences in the frequency. Women apply more people development, expectations and rewards, role model, women apply slightly more inspiration, participative decision making and thus contribute to stronger organizational performance. Men apply more individualistic decision making and control and corrective action. Even if we are looking to a corporate performance, in the military field or in the sphere of international relations, leadership processes and systems are very similar. Female leadership, described as process from this perspective is "a competitive edge for the future". [9]

### **2.3. Women's rights in international documents and institutions**

Immediately after its foundation in 1946, the United Nations Organization showed its commitment to women's rights, so that, from the very beginning of the UN Charter, the "equality of rights of men and women" is stipulated and brought to attention in Article 8 of Chapter III. Subsequently, at its 4213th session on 31 October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 (2000). This recalled the commitments of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* which had at its core equality, gender equity, human rights and the protection of all women participating in the process of maintaining and promoting international peace and security. [10]

The UN Charter, from its preamble, highlights the principle of equality between women and men, and Article 8 of Chapter III mentions equal access of men and women to the main and subsidiary bodies. [11]

Women's rights are also found in the constitutions of states, and their importance is major both at national and international level.

Until now, the United Nations has organized four world conferences on women: in 1975 in Mexico City, in 1980 in Copenhagen, in 1985 in Nairobi and, the last one and the most important, in 1995 in Beijing.

Considered the key global policy document on gender equality, *The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action* were adopted unanimously by 189 countries, in an agenda for women's empowerment. There are contained 12 critical areas: *women and poverty, women and health, education and training for women, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women and the media, women in power and decision – making, institutional mechanism for the advancement of women and finally, human rights of women.* [12]

At UN level, gender parity is on an upward trajectory. In 2022, 32% of civilian peacekeepers in the field will be women, up from 28% in 2017. As for military personnel, between 2018-2021, the number of female staff officers increased from 8% to 20%, and female police officers from 20% to 30%. [13]

According to European Union law, equality between women and men is one of the most important objectives. The principle of equal pay for women and men was included in Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, a treaty that became enshrined in 1957.

The issue of gender equality between women and men is multidimensional. The topic of equal opportunities between women and men is shifting from the sphere of leadership to the area of discrimination, domestic violence, its prevention and combating.

## **3. FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1. The woman leader - blocking prejudice and disseminating power**

There are stereotypical narratives that portray women as constrained. Thus, she is portrayed as incapable of making decisions, with a poor capacity for orientation, deficient in interacting with technology, with a restrained interventionism, incapable of acting, of coordinating, assuming predominantly their second role. In reality, women with leadership skills can take on decision-making roles as negotiators, challenging professions as pilots, technology specialists, military personnel or in management positions. [14]

In the popular, mainstream view, various preconceptions are conveyed that women cannot be dynamic, competent and effective leaders, often inoculating an unintentional discrimination. Women are described as sensitive, cautious, gentle, with an aesthetic

sense, while men are more competitive, risk-taking, domineering, more focused on managing stress and crisis situations better or being imposing,

However, the woman is adaptable, giving, more empathetic, creative, confident, motivated, adopts a democratic style, while the man has an autocratic style, is more aggressive, tends to make decisions on impulse.

But what qualities should an authentic, reliable and effective leader have? It is important to be honest, dedicated, hard-working, articulate in communicating with his team, organised, punctual, visionary, with adaptive potential, resistant to stress and crisis situations, with an emotional and social intelligence that supports him in decisions and predictions, flexible and firm at the same time.

Before being part of the gender equality paradigm, gender identity establishes gender roles, overlaps different social and cultural influences.

### **3.2. Prominent female figures in international leadership**

Throughout history, female leaders have been found in politics, security and defence, diplomacy, science, technology and business, in professions perceived in the collective mind as compatible with the male profile.

Among the great figures of international female leadership are *Queen Elizabeth II* of Great Britain, American diplomat and Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Former US Secretary of State *Margaret Thatcher* – Former Prime-Minister of United Kingdom, German Chancellor *Angela Merkel*, Former US Secretary of State *Condoleezza Rice*, Former First Lady *Michelle Obama*, Prime Minister of New Zealand *Jacinda Ardern* or *Kamala Harris* – Vice President of the USA.

Who are these leaders and what they did? Every leader has a message that develops new perspectives, inspire and teach us how to be more confident, more open-minded, and powerful. For example, Kamala Harris expressed her faith to „inspire young people to pursue their dreams”, Michelle Obama said that „education ...gave me the confidence to pursue my ambitions and make my voice heard in the world. For me, education was power.” [15]

Other women leaders we admire are mobilizing other different systems: global climate, social protections, COVID-19 crisis, racial discrimination. There are parts of the world where the struggle is for equality, only in the democratic world can we talk about equity in leadership.

*Michelle Bachelet*, human rights advocate, the first woman President of Chile, and the first Executive Director of UN Women works to protect, defend, and promote the fundamental rights. About the leaders of feminist movements, she said: “Their vision, strength, courage, empathy, and achievements are enormous sources of inspiration and hope for the future.” [16]

*Demecia Yat* is known as one of 15 women survivors of sexual violence during the internal armed conflict in Guatemala (1954–1996). From 2011 to 2016, the women, respectfully called the *abuelas* (grandmothers) in their small community near the Sepur Zarco outpost, fought their case in the nation’s highest court. Her message is “today’s generation [...] should speak out against any violation of their rights”. [17]

The activist *Malala Yousafzai* was 11 years old when the Taliban announced on the radio that girls could no longer attend school in Pakistan. Yousafzai began speaking up for girls’ right to education, and, very soon, she became a target for the Taliban. In October 2012, Yousafzai was shot as she returned home from school. After surgeries and rehabilitation, she continued to fight for girls’ education, and she became the youngest Nobel laureate at 17 years of age. [18]

The future of leadership is based on consensus, on cooperation, on innovation, on empathy, on powerful and inspiring leaders.

Whether we are talking about military leadership or about politics, international relations, diplomacy, the image of the woman, is still remaining the symbol of force, courage and elegance.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the current evolution of organizational management, the role of women is becoming more and more prominent in the labour market and beyond, given their skills, abilities, determination, considerations of excellence in any work environment.

This article is intended to draw the attention of practitioners to the fact that female leadership advances a well-defined common goal in the group's understanding, soft skills, opportunities in professional environments.

The role of the modern female leader is focused on process rather than outcome, denoting a greater attention to detail, quality and a desire for self-development.

Regardless of gender, an authentic leader knows how to use their qualities at the highest level. In the era of the struggle for gender equality, the very spirit of consensus that would maximise productivity and efficiency in the top management of any organisation has been neglected. Although the balance between women and men is stabilising, we are still far from parity. Men's earnings are still even higher than women's, the representativeness being still high in different fields.

Equity in leadership is more than equality in leadership, equity is multidimensional, incorporating elements of *identity*, *power*, *achievement* and *access*. Our leaders has to use their power, compassion, curiosity, creativity, courage, education to change the world beyond difficulties and pressions, social barriers. [19]

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