# WOMEN LEADERSHIP: CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTIONS

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**Abstract**

*Over the years women have won many fights during their road to emancipation. One of the main victories took place in the last decade when politics have become a won battle to the feminist representants. After more and more women began to occupy key positions in politics, administration, or the private environment, researchers were interested in the ways women lead. Scholars like Judy Rosener, Alice Eagly and colleagues, Catalyst or Carli have tried to find differences in leadership between women and men, but also the dominant characteristics of women leaders. Common views were that women are more concerned with the welfare of other people (helpful, sympathetic, nurturant etc), women lead in a more democratic and participative style than men and use relational skills to influence others, encourage participation, share power and information. The present research presents chronological references of women emancipation during the history, brings into discussion, according to the reviewed literature, gender differences in leadership, looks over women in leading position worldwide and makes some consideration about public leadership. This paper also highlights, through the focus-group qualitative research method, the main characteristics of women leaders in Romania, also trying to briefly describe how women politicians are perceived by the public. This paper is part of a wider research work that approaches the online communication of women political leaders.*

**Keywords:** *leadership, women leaders, feminism, gender differences, women emancipation*

## 1. Introduction

For several years now, there has been a particular concern about gender relations in leadership. This concern is due, on one hand, to the increased number of women in leading positions and, on the other hand, to the fact that men are the ones with the most influential positions in all areas.

All leaders nowadays, no matter the gender, – political leaders, corporate leaders or civil society leaders – "have to act within the context of a dynamic system of global pressures and trends. (…) Leadership is often seen as one of the most important and effective responses to the challenges and opportunities presented by the global context."[1]

Many scholars have defined the leadership concept over time. To introduce this paper, the author of the present research will refer to some of the most relevant definitions. M. Shanmugam, R.D.G. Amaratunga & R.P. Haigh from *Research Institute for the Built and Human Environment*, University of Salford, argue that leadership is „ process in which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal".[2] Rost sees leadership as "an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend significant changes that reflect their mutual purposes"[3] A integrated and complete definition is presented by Winston and Patterson who argue that "A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives."[4]

The definitions seem simple at first glance and all all point to the leader's power to influence. That is why we ask ourselves the natural question: are not women capable of influencing a group of individuals to achieve a common goal? Are not women smart enough to do this? The author of the present research tries to find the answer to this dilemma, revising the literature and studying people's perceptions about this topic through a focus group.

## 2. Women emantipation - chronological references

The beginnings of feminism could be marked by Mary Astell's influential work - A Proposal to Ladies (1694). Astell's had dreamed then, in the seventeenth century, about a world where women are able to learn useful things and bring their contribution to society. She claimed that women could become scientists and experts in many fields, even in politics, and stressed

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[1] Global Definitions of Leadership and Theories of Leadership Development: Literature Review, University of Cambridge, Institute for Sustainability Leadership, 2017

[2] M. Shanmugam, R.D.G. Amaratunga, R.P. Haigh, „Leadership styles : gender similarities, differences and perceptions" , in: *7th International Postgraduate Research Conference in the Built and Human Environment*, (28th - 29th March 2007, Salford Quays, UK).

[3] J. Rost, *Leadership for the twenty-first century*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991), p 102

[4] Bruce Winston, Kathleen Patterson, „An Integrative Definition of Leadership", *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, (2006) p7,

that it is essential for women to improve their knowledge and become smarter. Her text was a philosophical one but claimed that women were in a lower moral position than men. After determining the causes of this problem, Astell insisted that women should become rational citizens with the right to a male-like education, to a education based on the right to liberty, with the opportunity to hold any office, with the possibility to be political represented and to have personal dignity. [5]

The second woman that remains important in the history of the feminist movement is Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) known especially for providing a systematic analysis of the subjugated state of women. Like her predecessor, she realizes that the only major difference between men and women is education and insists that women have access to education. Mary Wallstonecraft is famous for the question that feminists had to find the answer, namely: "If all people are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?" Given that some women were struggling with survival (black women, working women, women in rural areas), the struggle for development and affirmation ranks second among the priorities of these women.

The two mentioned researchers are in the first wave of the feminist movement because, through their work, they have responded predominantly to the problems of certain categories of women: the white, of European culture, belonging to the middle class.

In Romania, the first wave of the feminist movement unfolds in parallel with the Western one. It is a feminist movement of the elites, category of educated women with access to information coming from outside the country. However, it should be noted that at that time 80% of Romania's population lived in rural areas, therefore the Romanian feminist movement can not be integrated or compared with the feminist movement in Europe or around the world, becoming very active and strong only after World War I. The most important period for women in Romania is the period preceding the Constitution of 1923, considered to be the most democratic. In this period, the Romanian women have engaged in intense lobbying to obtain equal civic and political rights with men, got involved in having acces in all institutions, dignities and public functions like men, and in politically prepare women to exercise their rights. The year 1929 also gives Romanian women the right to vote, but we are talking about a restrictive right for educated women aged over 30 years. In the same year the law on administrative reorganization is adopted, whereby women receive the right to be elected in local elections. Only if they had

certain studies, they were war widows, women decorated for wartime work, or women running cultural, philanthropic or support societies at the time.

The female vote was not compulsory, however, and the presence of women in the polls was discouraged by men's irony at their expense. Ten years later, for the first time in Romania's history, women also receive the right to be elected in Parliament. As in the case of men, this right applies only to educated women aged over 30, but they were few, because most women did not even have primary education. Only the first Communist Constitution, issued in 1948, states that "all citizens, regardless of gender, nationality, race, religion, degree of culture and profession, have the right to vote and to be elected in all the organs of the State. All citizens who have reached the age of 18 have the right to vote and all citizens who have reached the age of 23 have the right to be elected ".[6]

If the first wave of the feminist movement has achieved its goal of introducing into law equal rights for women with men, the second wave aimed to put them into practice in everyday life, by annihilation of gender differences because women did not want to remain second-class citizens. The second wave of the feminist movement has been a significant gain since many of the feminist policies have turned into state policies: equal pay for work of equal value, access to professions deemed specific to men, policies to combat sexism in education and all areas.

The third-wave of feminism started in 1990's and the followers of this trend "work outside the power/victim framework, aiming to investigate the complicated picture of young feminism and to re-theorise gender". [7] Feminists from the third wave integrated in their work contemporary subjects related to immigration, class conflicts, multiculturalism, globalization and also environmental issues, human rights.[8] Romanian feminism after 1990 has a hybrid approach, representing a combination of the agenda of the second wave, missed as a historical integration due to communism, and the integration into political generation of a network located in cyberspace. [9]

## 3. Gender differences in leadership

Men played a very important role in the development of mankind because they were the ones who led the world, but the world is evolving and from one decade to another there are major changes in every respect. Thus, in a century marked by unprecedented changes, revolutions and innovations, the most visible and lasting transformation can be considered the

[5] Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, in: https://1000wordphilosophy.com, accesed March 1, 2019

[6] Ionuț Dulămiță și Ionuț Sociu, *80 de ani de când femeile pot vota în România*, https://www.scena9.ro/article/votul-femeilor-in-romania-cronica-unei-lupte, accesed March 1, 2019

[7] Jiaran Zheng, *New Feminism in China: Young Middle-Class Chinese Women in Shanghai*, (2016), p 23

[8] Rhonda Hammer, Douglas Kellner, „Third Wave Feminism. Sexualities, and the Adventures of the Posts in Women", *Feminism, and Femininity in the 21st Century: American and French Perspectives* pp 219-234, 2009

[9] Mihaela MIROIU, *Drumul catre autonomie. Teorii politice feministe* (Editura Polirom, Colectia „Studii de gen", Iasi, 2004), p 83

involvement of women in the development of humanity.

Arnie Cann and William D. Siegfried[10], professors at Ohio State University, conducted a research examining the perceived gap between men's leadership behavior and women's leadership behavior and concluded firmly that there were differences in how women and men are thinking about driving. Their belief is that men and women differ in their approach of management and therefore offer different qualities.

The theories of gender differences in leadership have started from the most varied assumptions, but at the root of all differences are probably biological differences. Biological theory starts from the premise that leadership is genetically determined, innate in men and therefore inaccessible to women[11]. Another theory, which starts from the concept of gender role, recognizes the role of socialization and explores gender-specific roles as determinants of leadership. A third perspective involves identifying other factors that might make a difference, for example women's attitudes towards leadership, women's confidence in themselves, previous experience, and the predominantly male style of the organization.

Research that compares the leadership styles of women and men can be extended. Alice H. Eagly and Blair T. Johnson of Purdue University (US) evaluated the male and female leadership styles and concluded that women tended to adopt a more democratic or participatory style, a less autocratic style or directional to the style promoted by men[12]. Another point of view would be that women are less assertive and less inclined to promote and negotiate for them, unlike men[13]. These observations and other findings are interpreted in terms of a theory of the "social role of gender differences in society"[14].

A Giddens[15] draws attention, however, that there is a clear distinction between the terms "sex" and "gender". If the first term refers to biological aspects, more specifically to physical differences of the body, the second term refers to the psychological, social and cultural differences between men and women. In his opinion, the distinction between gender and gender is fundamental. According to his theory, the main differences between men and women are not biologically determined, as we are tempted to believe most of us, but rather the results of social-cultural processes, the outcome of a learning process that begins early in childhood. He argues that learning gender roles through all the influences of the social environment (gender socialization) is a process that starts right from the birth of the child. According to his opinion, through "gender socialization", the child learns the behaviors considered appropriate for his or her sexuality and teaches the values accepted at the cultural level with respect to what is specifically male and specifically female. Gender socialization therefore contributes not only to gender awareness, but also to the social recognition and acceptance of gender social stratification in any society, and to the perpetuation of the inviolability of male-female dichotomy. So the male-female dichotomy and all the differences (including inequalities) that it implies are highly naturalized.[16] This also results in practices that are "appropriate" or "inappropriate" for a given genre, as well as prohibitions. These gender differences, which appear to be natural, and which may appear in the form of skills, skills, behaviors, practices, activities, shared knowledge, etc., often take the form of stereotypes that give each gender a number of cultural representations. They have both a descriptive component - traditional concepts of how women and men are, how they behave and what characteristics are specific to each gender, and a prescriptive component - the generally accepted rules on how women and men should be and how they should to behave[17]. Socially shared expectations of an individual's behavior, depending on their gender, have often been conceptualized as "gender roles". Gender roles are different from one culture to another and refer to those behaviors deemed appropriate or acceptable to members of each gender (men and women) respectively. What is typical and therefore "normal" for each gender is learned early in the life of each individual through the socialization process.

Extending these theories in the sphere of leadership, we begin to understand that gender differences lead to an erroneous assessment when one category is supposed to be superior to the other, but research shows that these discriminatory attitudes and behaviors have brought inconveniences to both organizations and societies, and individuals by the limits imposed on how people can contribute to the evolution of society on the basis of the uniqueness and particular characteristics they have[18], therefore, starting from pragmatic arguments, figures and verified results, there is a growing awareness of the need for gender balance and diversity.

As far as leadership styles are concerned, there are researchers who say that women's leadership style differs from that of men, in the sense that women are

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[10] Arnie Cann & William D Siegfried „Gender stereotypes and dimension of effective leader behavior", in *Sex Roles* 23(7):413-419 , 1990

[11] A. Popescu, *Diferențe de gen în leadership*, (București, 2006) pp.1-3

[12] H. A Eagly & T.B Johnson., „Gender and Leadership Style: A Meta-Analysis", *Psychological Bulletin* by the American Psychological Association, Inc. 1990, Vol. 108, No. 2, pp. 233-256

[13] S.Sandberg & N. Scovell, Lean In: *Femeile, munca și dorința de a conduce*, (București, Editura Litera, 2015)

[14] Idem 6

[15] Antony Giddens, *Sociologie*. (București: Bic All, 2000)

[16] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy*, Polity; 1 edition (April 22, 2005)

[17] Thomas Eckes, „Geschlechterstereotype: Von Rollen, Identitäten und Vorurteilen". in Ruth Becker; Beate Kortendiek (coord.). *Handbuch und Geschlechterforschung. Theorie, Methoden, Empirie*. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004) p. 165–176.

[18] J.S. Hide, „The Gender Similarities Hypothesis". *American Psychologist*. 60(6), 2005,581-592

willing to collaborate and cooperate more with others, and encourage subordinates to self-valorisation.[19]

The research of Eagly, Wood and Diekman[20] shows that men leaders have more agentic characteristics: they are aggressive, ambitious, dominant, powerful, independent, self-confident, competitive characters. In relationships within the organization, men struggle to attract the attention of others, influence others, distribute tasks. On the other hand, women leaders have more communal characteristics: interested in the well-being of others, understanding, interpersonal sensitive. In the relationships within the organization, women do not want to focus on themselves, accept the directions given by others, support their subordinates and colleagues, guide their subordinates, help solve relational and interpersonal problems.

In terms of the five types of leadership types mentioned in specialty literature, Eagly et alii, attribute to each kind of typology a genre. So:
- Autocratic leaders are rather men leaders
- Democratic leaders are women leaders
- Transformational leaders - with many communal charasteristics, are closer women leaders
- Transactional Leaders are rather men leaders
- Laisser-faire – more likely to be men.

Summarizing, leading women have a behavior oriented towards interpersonal, democratic and transformational relationships, while leading men are self-oriented and autocratic.

By studying the literature, we have established that there are gender differences, and we have also clarified where they come from, so it is natural for women and men to behave differently and obviously to adopt different leadership styles. So, which of these styles is more effective? A woman leader, who helps subordinates, who pay attention to their development needs, which is available and friendly, or the a man leader - task-oriented, which requires and expects employees to abide by rules and procedures, that sets high performance standards and maintains the subordinate relationship?!

Of course, we can not say which of the two variants provide the recipe for success, but we find that in recent years organizations have promoted a new leadership style, regarded as visionary, charismatic, inspirational, which led to the emergence of transformational leadership. It involves monitoring and increasing the performance of subordinates, agreements between the leader and subordinates about objectives and tasks, but also rewards for valuable employees. Female characteristics appear to be more appropriate to transformational leadership.[21] New

values (sometimes called feminine values) are starting to arise in the business environment, values that contrasts with the competitive and authoritarian approach traditionally associated with masculinity, and are based on consensual relations. Therefore, the success of the interactive leadership style of women has led to a tendency to adopt it by men as well. Organizations begin to appreciate the leadership style that includes behaviors such as: encouraging employee participation, sharing information and power, promoting others and motivating them, which has given leaders flexibility to survive in a competitive and diverse business environment.

## 4. Women liders in figures

Transformational leadership in organizations seems to be the key to success for many women who want to hold leadership. However, although the number of women in leadership positions in companies is increasing, women are still under-represented in managerial positions. In Poland, for example, in 2016 only 10% of women had leadership positions.[22] In addition, their earnings are even lower today by 20% compared to men. Even in Romania things are not better. In 2016, the number of women serving in large companies was 37%, of which 10% held management positions, 12% had a non-executive role, and 15% were in the supervisory board.[23] The opposite case is Denmark, where women occupy 23% of all managerial posts and over 70% of women have jobs.[24]

A recent research of *The Economist* [25] shows that in the field of scientific research - men dominated, women have begun to gain ground. Thus, in the European Union and in eight other countries researched, the proportion of women authors increased from about 30% in the late 1990s to about 40% at present. In Japan, on the other hand, only a fifth of the researchers are women, with women being best represented in health-related topics. In fact, this area and that of psychology are the only examples where women are more numerous than men in many countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom. In contrast, less than a quarter of researchers who publish papers in physical sciences are women. Probably as a consequence of this, inventors who register patents are still almost all men. Such large imbalances suggest that there are innumerable physical discoveries and innovative products to be made, because the scientific world do not take full advantage of the intellectual capital of women.

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[19] E. W Book, *Why the best man for a job is a woman*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2000)

[20] A. H. Eagly, W Wood, & A. B. Diekman, "Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal." in T. Eckes & H. M. Trautner (Eds.), The developmental social psychology of gender, (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000) pp. 123–174.

[21] A. Popescu, *Diferențe de gen în leadership*, (București, 2006), pp.1-3

[22] A. Górska, „Gender Differences in Leadership", *Studia i Materiaïy*, 1/2016 (20)

[23] R. Moldoveanu, „Inegalități de gen pe piața muncii", *Revista Română de Statistică*, 12, 2015, pp 42-43;

[24] European Commission Report, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database, accesed at 20 February 2019

[25] „The gender gap in science. Scientific research remains male-dominated—but women are catching up", The Economist, No. 10 mart., 2017

In another study, Gender Differences in Leadership, conducted on 353 companies in the world, it was found that the highest financial results were recorded by companies where the number of women in senior positions is higher, as opposed to companies where they are less represented.[26]

The International Labor Organization, concerned with the issue of gender differences, has found an explanation for the slow advancement of women in leadership positions, especially in male-dominated departments. Thus, the Organization believes that "women lack adequate leadership." From women managers in male-dominated environments is expect a style of leadership that suits the "world of men" to get a status. The so-called "male modes of management"[27] are characterized by competition, hierarchical authority and focus on control. Loden argued that there is a man type of management characterized by qualities such as competitiveness, hierarchical authority, high leadership, and solving analytical problems, arguing that women prefer and tend to solve problems, relying more on intuition and empathy than on rationality.

## 5. Some considerations about public leadership

Leadership is not an activity that mobilizes only the resources of an institution or organization to make progress with the difficulties it faces, but also the resources of people, countries[28]. At the same time, we are talking about a process of influence within which a person receives the trust and support of others and, without taking advantage of the formal position or the authority of the function, guides the group towards accomplishing one or more tasks[29] Therefore, leadership plays an extremely important role in achieving public reform of a country, being a precious tool for promoting and managing change for all peoples who have engaged in public sector reform.

Leadership is the most powerful and important weapon that any form of government can have. Poor leadership will direct governments and institutions of a country to failures, while strong leadership will lead any form of government to remarkable results. The need for leadership in this area is largely determined by the nature and scale of the reforms. Countries that have chosen the path of progressive reform are less inclined to mobilize a larger number of public leaders at the same time to drive change, but countries that have chosen the path of profound reform, both socially and administratively, need higher leaders in the public domain. The success of a public administration reform is conditioned by organizational aspects, a strategic

planning capacity, a leadership change capacity, an ability to promote and coordinate the development of the organization, and the leader is extremely important when it comes to relations between members of the organization motivation of staff within the public organization.

The public leadership, associated by some researchers in the theory of new public management, refers to the ability of public managers to have an intuitive understanding of development, an understanding of the challenges and the changes needed in order to adapt public organizations to the permanent future[30]. Leadership is, in fact, the basic component of good governance, and politically responsible leadership is extremely beneficial to a state, because it will cope both with global changes and with day-to-day problems a government has. That is why a true political leader needs a strong personality, an ethical and cultural character, the ability to mobilize the crowds, bargaining skills, maximizing and streamlining resources. Understanding this concept, politically involved people can help both the development of the public and the private sector.

Political scientists argue that good political leadership requires a combination of charisma and integrity, as well as the ability to assess a situation and make a decision based on what would be best for the greatest number of people. Above all, being a political leader means more than just being a politician, because in order to lead at political level, integrity and desire to sustain what is good are needed, even if this could lead to the loss of a position in a government or the loss of elections for important positions in the state. Political leadership requires focusing on the long-term good evolution of a country, beyond any personal gains. In Hsin-Yi Cohen's opinion[31], a good political leader is: someone who serves as an example of integrity and loyalty to the people he or she represents, for both the public and other political leaders, someone with good communication and interpersonal skills who can work with a series of other people, irrespective of party or political opinion, in order to obtain the greater good for the general population, Also someone who can withstand the various temptations and baits of the political arena, someone with a strong character, with conscience and charisma, someone willing to listen to the needs of ordinary people and to represent them with faith, someone with the courage to stand up and say what it needs to be said - rather than tell the general public what it wants to hear, someone who is willing to make difficult (and possibly unpopular) decisions for the greater good. Therefore, a true political leader needs a lot of qualities and most of them can be acquired.

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[26] A. Popescu, *Diferențe de gen în leadership*. (Bucuresti, 2006;

[27] M. Loden *Feminine Leadership. How to Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys,* (1985)

[28] Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2009)

[29] Walter Ulmer, *A Military Leadership Notebook: Principles into Practice* (2017)

[30] Marius Lazăr, „Dezvoltarea leadershipului public, o resursă pentru modernizarea guvernării", in *Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative*, 1(10), 2004, pp. 62-68

[31] Hsin-Yi Cohen, *A Political Leader* in: http://www.leadershipexpert.co.uk/political-leader.html, accesed at 15 February 2019

## 6. Methodological design. Case-study: women leaders in Romania

The qualitative research of this paper, based on the focus group method, aimed at identifying the main characteristics of female leaders in Romania and started from two research questions:

‒ - What distinguishes women leaders from male leaders?

‒ - How are the leading political women in Romania perceived?

The focus group was defined by researchers either as a group interview[32], a rigorously planned discussion group to obtain information on a subject proposed by the researcher[33], or any discussion between selected individuals on a particular topic as long as the researcher promotes and is mindful of participants' interactions[34].

The present paper used focus group as qualitative research method because it is based on the plurality of responses, the objective being to obtain data through perceptions, feelings, attitudes and opinions of a group of people, stimulate the participants' creativity and the sense of co-participation, with specific interactions between the moderator and the participants (in the form of questions and answers), but also among the participants (debates).[35]

The focus group was of semi-structured type, meaning that discussions were held around the pre-set theme, but the theme and the questions only had the role of guidance.[36] The questions were clear, in order not to create confusion for the participants, open (to produce elaborate answers), univocal (they referred to a single subject).[37] The focus group was an advantageous method of research because communication was more natural than in the case of an individualized interview, the moderator was able to see how opinions were built and how the interviewed people interact. The research obtained a variety of views and opinions on the debated issue and the focus group has favored the spontaneity and opportunity of each participant to express themself within the limits of availability and competence.

The objective study group was composed of eight participants, both women and men, with different social statuses and different age categories, being selected primarily for their leadership subject interest - they are graduates of a leadership course titled "Leadership. Motivation, Recognition and Success" taught by former minister and ambassador Cristian Diaconescu. As for the professions and occupations of the eight participant, they are: business woman, economist, political communication specialist, engineer, manager, esthetician, doctor in economics - former general manager of a company, philologist. The focus group took place on 4 March 2019 and lasted 45 minutes.

The interview guide contained the following questions:

1. Do you know women in leadership positions in international or Romanian organizations / companies?
2. Are there differences between the way women and men lead an organization?
3. What Romanian female political leaders do you know?
4. How do you feel about the proportion of women and men in Romanian politics?
5. What should women politician do to get more leadership positions?
6. How are the leading political women perceived in Romania?

Regarding the first question related to leading women in Romanian or international organizations, the participants at the focus group have appointed leading women from their own fields of activity, women who were related with their profession and, at national level, they distinguishing names such as: former head of DNA, Laura Codruta Kovesi, Princess Margaret, Prime Minister Viorica Dancila and Mariana Gheorghe, Petrom's first general manager. To note is that most of the names mentioned by the participants are public figures, highly publicized.

Concerning how leading women lead, the second question, focus group participants unanimously agreed that the leader has no gender, in the sense that women leaders and men leaders, once at the top of an organization, must achieve the same goals. Women leaders are not better than the men leaders and vice versa, but different and equally good at leading. There is no stereotype. However, in an in-depth analysis of the way women lead, the following directions of intervention have been noted:

‒ Employee valorisation is much stronger in leading women. Women have a more human approach, focus on the added value of the team, do not have an approach that stimulates differences between team members, do not encourage competition.

‒ Men leaders are efficient, quick decision-makers and communicators. The leading women are more personal, much more nurturing.

‒ Women leaders communicate better than the men leaders.

‒ Leading women are more emotional, they react emotionally in relation with their subordinates. Leading women treat their employees and work as their own child, with the same love and care.

[32] Iluț Petru, *Abordarea calitativă a socioumanului, concepte și metode, (*Editura POLIROM Iași, 1997), p.92-98;

[33] J. Smithson, (2008). „Focus groups" in P. Alasuutari, L Bickman, & J Brannen, *The SAGE handbook of social research methods* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd doi: 10.4135/9781446212165, 2008), pp. 357-370

[34] Jenny Kitzinger, „Qualitative Research: Introducing Focus Groups". BMJ (Clinical research ed., 1995). 311. Pp. 299-302 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/1556638

[35] Idem 34

[36] Idem 32

[37] Richard A. Krueger, Mary Anne Casey, *Metoda focus grup: Ghid practic pentru cercetarea aplicata,* (Iasi: Polirom, 2005) pp. 58-66;

– Woman by definition is the leader, because she is the de facto leader of the family.

– Leading women treat women employees more coldly.

Also, during the discussion, it was stressed that in order to succeed in the organization she leads, woman leader should be supported by her life partner, meaning that he takes over the family responsibilities. This is because Romanian society still perceives women as being primarily responsible for maintaining the family core and taking care of children.

Regarding leading women politicians, whom the participants at the discussion know, among the mentioned names were: Elena Udrea, Olguta Vasilescu, Alina Gorghiu, Monica Macovei, Corina Cretu and Raluca Turcan. During the discussions on the above question, an idea unanimously accepted by all the participants was outlined, namely that there are no women political leaders in Romania, but women who gain a position at a certain moment, but who do not really have leadership qualities.

As far as the proportion of women and men in Romanian politics is concerned, all respondents agreed that women have a low representativeness, women are not listened because there isn't a strong voice of a woman leader and, ultimately, this reduced participation of women in political and public life is closely correlated with the level of education and social culture of the people. For example, at the local elections of June 5, 2016, the number of men mayor's mandates was almost five times higher than the mandates earned by women. Thus, 3040 men and just 147 women became mayors, the share of the latter being 4.61% of the total number of 3187 elected mayors (Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority 2016). Also in the Parliament voted on 11 December 2016, the people mandated 90 women out of a total of 465 deputies and senators, which represents almost 20 percent.

Focus group participants have failed to identify the way how women can get more positions in the Romanian political space.

At the last question, related to the way in which the women political leaders are perceived in Romania, all the respondents highlighted the preconceived and outdated ideas that the Romanian people in general and the voters in particular have about women in important political and public positions, the cultural filter of the Romanians, the legacy of the inequality between women and men remaining from the Communist era. Also, the focus group participants reiterated that citizens' preconceptions are fueled by the fact that there is still no strong female voices in Romanian politics. The respondents underlined that the general questions of the public when a woman reaches a political position are not related to her competencies but to how she obtained this position and which man leader helped her.

## 3. Conclusions

Leadership has no gender. Competence should be the only factor that recommends someone to take a leadership role. As the participants at the above presented focus-group stated, women leaders are not better than the men leaders and vice versa, but different and equally good at leading. There is no stereotype. However, by analyzing the differences between the way women and men lead, the focus group presented in this paper verified the theory that Eagly, Wood and Diekman argued in their research from 2000, meaning that women leaders have more communal characteristics than men leaders. Among this characteristics, based on the focus-group analysis, this research highlights: dedicated to valuing their employees, a more human and personal approach of problems, more nurturing with their team, better communicators, more emotional and interpersonal oriented. In other words, women leaders are have a more democratic leadership style than men.

Another idea that emerged from the case-study was that in Romania there are no political women who have leadership qualities, there are no women political leaders or powerfull voices of women in this public field, only women who gain a position at a certain moment. The underrepresentation of women in Romanian political scene is due to the level of educationin gender equity and social culture of the people, to the general perception that women are primarily responsible for maintaining the family core and taking care of children.

Also, this research states that, in Romania, leading women from politics are still seen with preconceived and outdated ideas, through a cultural filter tightly bound of the legacy of the inequality between women and men remaining from the Communist era. Women political leaders are not perceived in terms of competencies and leadership style, but in terms of how they have gained a certain leading position.

It is clear that in Romania women leaders in all fields are at the beginning of their journey to make their voice felt in the public space, but also in the popular mind, political space being a particular case, especially because of the deep masculine rules governing this field.

A future line of research regarding the subject of political feminine leaders in Romania could be how they respond in terms of communication at crisis situations, differently or not from men in similar positions.

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