



Women in Leading Role

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Abstract: *The questions related to the role of women in the world of labour and to the rate of female and male employees are issues that have been discussed since long ago. Equality of women and the fight against the discrimination of women are hot topics not only for the “weaker sex” as there are abundant research and literature dealing with the question whether feminism, the lengthy pursuit for the equality of women can be regarded successful or there are still much to do for the elimination of negative discrimination of women at workplaces. In this context, I examine in my study whether the increasing of the share of female employees, the action plans on raising the share of executive positions filled by women, and the related conferences live up to the expectations, and can women really have the same place on the labour market as men have.*

Keywords: female executives, rate of female employees, equal opportunities, negative discrimination of women

Today is beyond question that in the world of labour women should be granted the same opportunities and rights as men, but it has been a long process to achieve this. Equality of women is a hot topic in the press as well, and there is abundant literature dealing with emancipation. Emancipation as a term meaning “granting equal rights” has a long history, originating from Roman law where its original meaning was the termination of the father’s authority over a grown-up child, i.e. the individual becoming a person of his own rights.

In the fight for equal rights for women, feminism as a political concept and a movement has played a decisive role. The aim of feminism is to grant the same human rights to women as the ones men are entitled to. The first attempts to grant similar rights to women as to men had appeared as early as in the 17th century, but the first significant waves of feminism reached their peak in the second part of the 19th century. Feminists fought for the emancipation of women not only in terms of extending suffrage, but they intended to widely influence almost all fields of life, including the

improvement of the economic status of women, their physical safety and finally the elimination of their discrimination at the workplaces.

The policies to eliminate the discrimination of women on the labour market have been formulated both in international strategic programs and on the national scene, in domestic directives. The related objectives are directed towards the elimination of gender-based differences. The aim is to increase the proportion of working women with a focus on addressing the compatibility of work and family duties. Its basis was established in the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted on the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995 after several regional and world conferences. It was preceded by the Human Rights World Conference in Vienna held in 1993 where it was declared that women's rights are human rights. The Beijing Platform for Action is still serving as a basis for women's equal opportunities strategies of government policies, and today there are numerous documents, directives and conferences based on the principles of the program.

The position of women at the workplace has constantly improved over time as with the gradual decrease of gender based social differences women's roles at the workplaces changed positively as well. Earlier the salaries of women were much lower than the wages of men working in the same jobs, and they had no chance to get to higher or leading positions because of the negative discrimination. Although we notice today that more and more managerial and executive posts are filled by women, still many of us may ask whether women are fit for managerial positions and if they are indeed, what is the key to the success of leading women. Regarding career building, one may wonder – unfortunately – not without due ground what possibilities do women have today in the world of labour.

When looking for leaders who are women we should first find a definition of a leader. „Leading is an activity – based on a communicative process – influencing the relations between people and human conducts in the interest of a specific aim (objectives).” (Bayer J.: *Vezetési modellek – vezetési stílusok* (Leadership models – leadership styles) Vinton Budapest, 1995) The competencies of a leader are a set of complex attributes that we may experience not only in the business sphere but in all fields of life, either within a family, in a higher education institution or in any other social group. Since we do not exist as humans living alone, but we live our life in social transactions, the leader's skills such as the allocation of tasks, effective communication and motivation are necessary and existing phenomena even outside the world of labour.

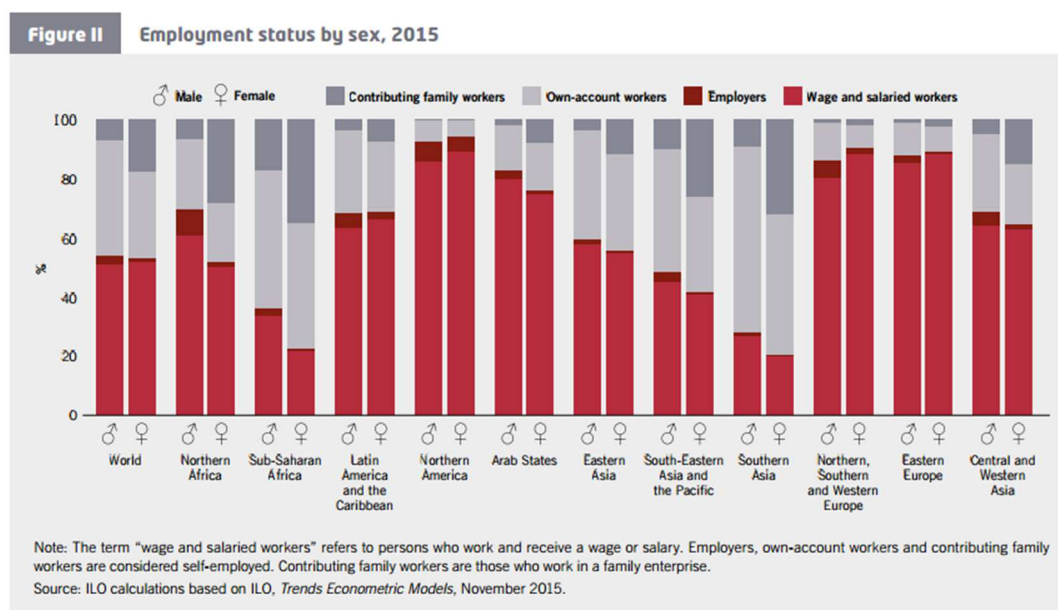
To answer the question what is the key to the success of leading women, first we must examine the basis of differences between women and men and how those differences changed over time.

Women and men are different not only in their physical appearance, but they have a different mindset as well, caused by differences how their brains work. Our brain regulates and directs our apperception and sensation, finally resulting in emotions, logical and cognitive responses. Women tend to sense the world in a more refined way, making them more emphatic, flexible and more effective in building communication networks. With less competitiveness and quick decision making, they tend to avoid risks more than men as they are ready to analyse the same problem from different angles.

If our brains work in different ways, do we also follow the behaviour forms prescribed for the social statuses? Socialisation plays the biggest part in the development of our gender roles and it has many scenes: family, school, peer groups and media to a growing extent. They provide us with examples of what the expected form of behaviour is, and what is expected from the individual.

Women must fulfil more than one role: lover, wife, mother, housewife and a woman living for her profession. As in the past they had to fulfil – almost exclusively – only first four roles, this has changed in the 20th century and the “lack of men” caused by world wars forced the society to tear apart women from their earlier roles and include them actively in the world of labour. The emancipation movements of the second part of the century accelerated this process and today in the western societies the role of women living for their profession has gained more emphasis. The following recent survey by ILO shows what kinds of works are pursued by women who “take on a profession”.

Figure 1. Employment status by sex

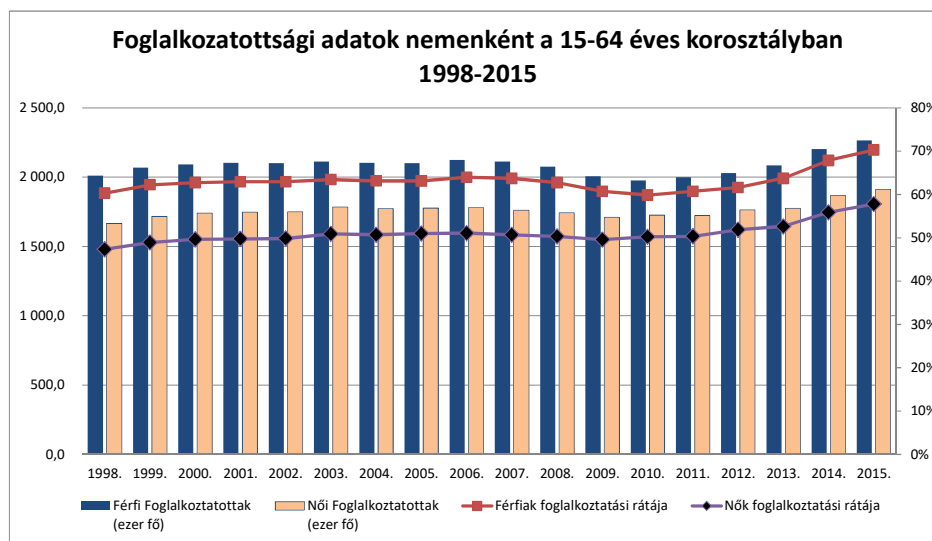


(Source: ILO.com – Women at Work Trends 2016)

Let us keep on examining the how the differences and the social bounds appear in the work. Do women have the same chances when they’re up to start looking for a job? Can they fill the same positions? How the gender proportions of employment have changed in the past years?

On the Hungarian labour market there is a significant difference of 12% between the employment ratios of women and men. There was a slight change in the first years of the crisis between 2008 and 2012, when the number of employed men fell.

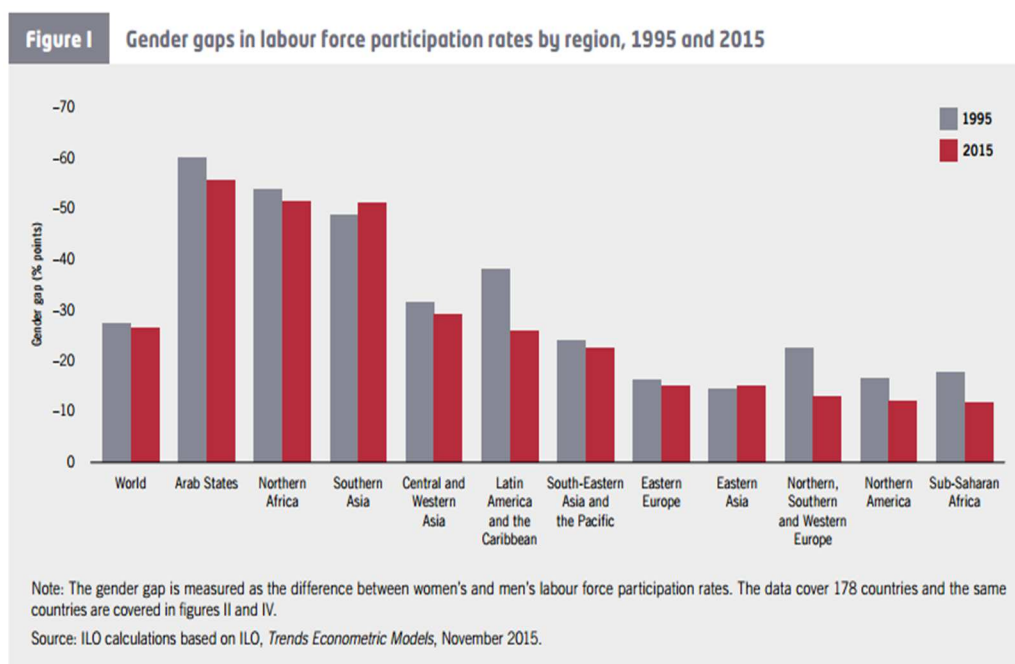
Figure 2. Labour activity by genders in Hungary



(Source: KSH, Budapest)

According to the international trends between 1995 and 2015, the global activity rate of women fell from 52.4% to 49.6%. In case of men the same ratio changed from 79.9% to 76.1%.

Figure 3. Gender gaps in labour force participation by region



(Source: ILO.com –Women at Work Trends 2016)

In line with the representation of men and women in different fields, jobs and the hierarchical levels within the above we may distinguish between horizontal and vertical segregation.

According to research dealing with the segregation of the labour market, significant differences concerning employment can be observed. There are lower and higher paid jobs that belong to different segments of the labour market, and transit between the segments is dependent upon strict conditions.

To demonstrate horizontal segregation, we may recognise that some professions are generally considered more masculine, while other are held more feminine. For example, positions in the field of IT are regarded as masculine, while the share of women in teaching jobs is much higher. According to one of the theses of segregation, the prestige and the value of feminine professions is lower than that of the men's work. Another stereotype is that women's jobs are easy and routine-based while the men's professions are challenging, creative and demanding.

Vertical segregation refers to the proportion of women and men in the hierarchy of professions. There are more men in leading and decision-making positions with more responsibility, and we may find more women in administrative or assistant jobs. Regarding the place of women on the labour market, most of them can be found on the lower hierarchical levels of employment, in less prestigious and lower paid jobs. Unfortunately, we can find less and less women as we climb upwards the ladder of employment.

According to the theory of the glass ceiling, women tend to encounter a barrier in their career as they try to fulfil higher and higher positions: at a certain point they have no chance to get higher without any objective explanation. The term explains itself: it is an unseen and elusive barrier. The glass ceiling is there, not only for women but also for those persons who belong to minorities. The limited possibilities of women are sometimes explained by certain stereotypes, such as the extra burden taken up by women when they have children.

The leadership styles can be classified into 3 big groups, but none of them exists alone. Autocratic leaders operate with the tools of power and authority often accompanied with constant control. The liberal style of leadership is the lack of leadership as it does not apply leading measures other than setting the tasks and the objectives. The democratic leadership style can be regarded a very modern one as compared with the other two. Democratic leaders typically count on the community they lead: they rely on the proposals, experiences and the opinions of the community. This way, democratic leaders can assess the developed alternatives before deciding upon an issue and on this basis, they can probably make the best decision.

Examining the general characteristics women leaders have, one may conclude – in addition to the gender-based differences mentioned above – that they are more resolute, they can better motivate their colleagues and they have creative ideas.

To sum up, the labour market position of women is still worse than that of men all around the world. Men still fill most of the leading and executive positions. Consequently, women have to do more to achieve recognition, therefore career building is a bigger challenge for them. However, today we see more and more women in leading roles, proving that career and family can indeed be balanced.