

# **BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “FEMININE LEADERSHIP” STYLE IN CROATIAN ENTERPRISES**

*Nina Pološki\**

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*The “feminine leadership” style, characterized by cooperation, participation, sharing of power and information, teamwork, energizing others, enhancing self-worth of others, etc., is a leadership style of the future. As such, it has to be highly used in today’s organizations. Furthermore, many contemporary surveys have shown that women are primary holders of the “feminine leadership” style. That is why today’s organizations should hire more women, especially for management jobs. However, although there are many objective factors that force organizations to offer more employment to women, there are still many obstacles that have to be overcome so that more women could be taken on board. For example, prejudices about women’s status and role in society, cultural prejudices, traditional educational schemes and organizational obstacles are the serious constraints that prevent women from entering the labor and management force. Fortunately, as a result of the globalization and the development of the information and communication technologies, the organizational values and attitudes toward women are changing. The new and improved thinking and acting philosophy toward women in organizations, and better organizational policies, programs and processes concerning women have become a necessity.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The last few years in the business world are characterized by the tremendous changes in business values. A new way of doing business becomes crucial for the existence, growth and development of today’s organizations and for obtaining competitive advantages. Thick layers of bureaucracy, airtight segmentation of functions, social inequalities are all strictly optional – and

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\* Nina Pološki, Msc, Assistant, Faculty of Economics Zagreb, Department of Organization and Management, Trg. J. F. Kennedyya 6, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia, Phonw: 3851/238-3264, E-mail: ninap@efzg.hr

ruinous. Organizations that carry such burdens simply cannot compete in truly free, competitive markets. They are not adept enough, quick enough, imaginative enough, high-spirited enough, nor, in the end, rich enough to win the support of customers (Champy, 1995). More to it, every contemporary organization has to build the management of change into its very structure (Drucker, 1995). Managers have to change as well. They must learn to coach, inspire, and gain people’s commitment. They must set personal examples of excellence (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990). They must really care about their employees, for their work related problems, as well as personal problems. They have to encourage participation and teamwork. They have to share information with employees, motivate them, etc. Managers of the present and of the future have to use “feminine leadership” style (also called democratic, participative, transformational, interactive and emotional leadership style) to lead and motivate their people. Characteristics of such a leadership style are: cooperation, participation, teamwork, highly developed interpersonal skills, charismatic power, sharing of power and information, enhancing self-worth of others, energizing others, setting a positive example, etc. It is characterized as well by the so-called “soft” approach to conducting business and leading people, and that is why it is called “feminine leadership” style. Namely, women are those who are traditionally, because of their mental and working characteristics, considered to be close, complying, indulgent, considerate, tolerant, caring, friendly, open, interested in others, etc. Due to this, “caring” leadership style is called “feminine leadership” style.

Based on numerous desk and field researches, in the world and as well as in Croatia, it can be argued that “feminine leadership” style is going not only going to be desirable but also obligatory for all those individuals and organizations that intend to be successful in future. Furthermore, empirical researches have shown that women use the “feminine leadership” style more frequently than men. Thus, that is why, for the well-being of today’s companies, it is definitely urgent to give work and particularly management positions to more women. Consequently, there are two basic means of implementing “feminine leadership” style in Croatian enterprises.

## **2. TWO BASIC STEPS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “FEMININE LEADERSHIP” STYLE IN CROATIAN ENTERPRISES**

There are two main ways of implementing the “feminine leadership” style in Croatian and as well as in enterprises all around the world. Firstly, it is by promoting the “feminine leadership” style as a desirable leadership style and as

the leadership style of the future. Then, it is by employing more women because, as we said before, women are predominant holders of the “feminine leadership” style.

The most promising way of **promoting the “feminine leadership” style** is definitely theory. Namely, theoreticians and educators of all levels should, through written and spoken words, introduce and explain to present and future managers the benefits of the “feminine leadership” style for individuals and organizations. Second, and a more direct way of making the “feminine leadership” style a part of today’s organizations, is to **take more women on board**.

Fortunately, there are many objective factors that force the greater involvement of women in today’s business world. Firstly, the number of working people increases slower than the number of newly opened work places, and, as Schwartz says, there simply are not enough capable men available today to fill all of the managerial jobs (Schwartz, 1992). Secondly, a declining birth-rate, as a consequence of changed interests among women and more effective birth-control, resulted in women having more disposable time to be a part of the business world. Thirdly, the fact that people get married and have children older, enables women to enter the management world easier. Fourthly, the growing number of divorces contributes to the fact that many women turn to their careers. Fifthly, there is an increased number of single-parents, mainly women, that have to work to provide for themselves and for their children. Sixthly, numerous technological improvements and the growth of the third sector reduced women’s time devoted to household and children. Seventhly, the growth of the service sector, that traditionally employed more women, has also contributed to the increased number of women in the business world. Finally, increased wages overall in the world attracted women to work.

However, apart from the objective factors that cause organizations to offer employment to more women, if we are to take advantage of the “women powers”, we have to avoid the following barriers that prevent women from entering the workforce.

### **3. BARRIERS THAT PREVENT WOMEN FROM ENTERING THE LABOR FORCE AND WAYS OF OVERCOMING THEM**

Firstly and foremost, **prejudices about women’s status and role in society** prevent them from entering the labor market and especially management positions. Namely, women are traditionally considered responsible

for the house, children and people in general, compared to men who are considered responsible for accomplishing their goals outside the house – in war, hunting, politics or at paid work. Unfortunately, exactly because of these prejudices, women are, from their youth, discouraged to pursue higher levels of education, to work outside the house, and especially to enter traditionally male industries, to advance in their careers or to compete for management positions.

As numerous surveys have shown, there are many prejudices about women at work. For example, in a 1984 survey, The Wall Street Journal and the Gallup Organization found that 61% of females have been mistaken for a secretary at a business meeting, 60% felt cut off from social conversations or activities among male colleagues, 44% felt they were being patronized by older executives, 60% had the impression that their views were not respected as much as a man’s in certain areas, 41% felt that a male subordinate resisted taking orders from them because they felt threatened by a female boss, etc.

*Table 1. Percentage distribution of respondents’ attitudes towards the statement that “Women can be good mothers and wives, and at the same time successful at work.”*

	Working men		Working women		Male students		Female students	
	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )
Strongly agree	24.5	24.5	44.6	44.6	27.5	27.5	42.4	42.4
Agree	19.2	43.7	19.8	64.4	21.6	49.1	19.5	61.9
In between	21.8	65.5	17.3	81.7	22.0	71.1	16.8	78.7
Disagree	22.7	88.2	10.4	92.1	15.6	86.7	10.1	88.8
Strongly disagree	11.8	100	7.9	100	13.3	100	11.2	100
TOTAL	100	-	100	-	100	-	100	-

Empirical research conducted on 513 employees and 715 students in the city of Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, in late 1999, showed that the great majority of male respondents in Croatia are also full of prejudices. For example, in Table 1, we can see that only 24.5% of working men and 27.5% of male students agree that women can be good mothers and wives and successful at work at the same time.

When we compare the above results with the 1996 survey in Great Britain that resulted in 51% of men and 35% of women disagreeing and 37% of men and 62% of women strongly disagreeing with the statement that women should not combine career and motherhood (Wajcman, 1996), we can see that prejudices about women at work among Croatian men are very strong.

As well, when asked about male and female commitment to work, males in Croatia once again showed their prejudices (Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage distribution of respondents' attitudes towards the statement that “Male managers are more committed to work than female managers.”

	Working men		Working women		Male students		Female students	
	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )
Strongly agree	26.4	26.4	48.2	48.2	22.7	22.7	52.2	52.2
Agree	20.8	47.2	24.5	72.7	21.8	44.5	20.2	72.4
In between	29.4	76.6	16.5	89.2	30.5	75.0	16.4	88.8
Disagree	14.3	90.0	5.8	95.0	14.1	89.1	6.5	95.3
Strongly disagree	9.1	100	5.0	100	10.9	100	4.7	100
TOTAL	100	-	100	-	100	-	100	-

Again, when we compare Croatians, who strongly agree in 26.4% of the cases and agree in 20.8% of the cases that male managers are more committed to work than women managers, with the British, who disagree with that statement in 65% of the cases and strongly disagree with it in 21% of the cases (Wajcman, 1996), we can see that Croatians are more prejudicial; concretely, that they consider women to be less devoted to work.

The prejudice that women managers do not contribute to the working environment is also present in Croatia (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage distribution of respondents' attitudes towards the statement that “Women managers have positive skills.”

	Working men		Working women		Male students		Female students	
	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )
Strongly agree	29.1	29.1	59.7	59.7	32.2	32.2	62.4	62.4
Agree	29.6	58.7	23.5	83.2	28.5	60.7	20.2	82.6
In between	30.5	89.2	13.8	97.0	29.0	89.7	14.2	96.8
Disagree	7.2	96.4	1.9	98.9	6.1	95.8	1.5	98.3
Strongly disagree	3.6	100	1.1	100	4.2	100	1.7	100
TOTAL	100	-	100	-	100	-	100	-

As it can be seen from the above table, only 29.1% of working men and 32.2% of male students in Croatia strongly agree that women managers have positive skills. Compared with the 1996 British survey that showed 41% of men strongly agreeing and 56% of men agreeing with that statement (Wajcman, 1996), we can comment that men in Croatia have still a lot to learn. The next table also shows negative attitudes toward women at work.

Table 4. Percentage distribution of respondents' attitudes towards the statement that “There should be more women managers.”

	Working men		Working women		Male students		Female students	
	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )	P <sub>i</sub> (%)	F <sub>x</sub> (x <sub>i</sub> )
Strongly agree	9.6	9.6	35.5	35.5	8.7	8.7	39.9	39.9
Agree	13.5	23.1	24.7	60.2	17.4	26.1	24.9	64.8
In between	45.0	68.1	32.6	92.8	45.9	72.0	28.9	93.7
Disagree	20.5	88.6	4.0	96.8	14.2	86.2	4.3	98.0
Strongly disagree	11.4	100	3.2	100	13.8	100	2.0	100
TOTAL	100	-	100	-	100	-	100	-

Namely, Table 4 shows that only 23.1% of working men and 26.1% of male students strongly agree or agree with the statement that there should be more women managers, and this is a rather unfavorable result.

There are also many other prejudices about working women, not only among men but also among women. For example, many surveys have shown that both women and men think that women are not successful managers because they are less aggressive, authoritative, independent or physically fit because they are passive, not logical, prone to weep, emotionally unstable and not interested in management positions. In addition, women are considered to lose their interest in work after they have children, regard taking business trips and overtime work as a great burden especially when they have little children, to be less devoted to their organizations and work than men, and less likely to be successful managers.

However, to the benefit of women, things are changing. Prejudices are fading because of highly significant learnings about women: (1) personal learnings within women, (2) organizational learnings, (3) learnings about women, and (4) socially relevant learnings (Ferguson, 1995). Such learnings are inspired by the fact that “successful women in a variety of fields demonstrate

that mothers can and do perform multiple roles very successfully” (Ferguson, 1995).

Consequently, what Croatian and foreign organizations and societies in general should do to overcome prejudices about women at work is to educate their people and employees, both men and women, about women’s contribution to the working environment.

**Cultural prejudices** in masculinity cultures demotivate women to work outside the house. Namely, societies distinguish themselves by relating to the masculinity-femininity dimension (Hofstede, 1991). Masculinity pertains to societies in which social gender roles are clearly distinct (i.e., men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life); femininity pertains to societies in which social gender roles overlap (i.e., both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life) (Hofstede, 1991).

Fortunately, for women living in masculinity countries, globalization, better transportation facilities, information linkages, etc. globalize values and attitudes around the business world, and women are more and more considered to be a resourceful help in the business environment.

**Formal educational institutions** also used to discourage women from entering the labor market and management positions. According to a major 1992 study by the American Association of University Women on gender differences and educational opportunities, teachers unwittingly but consistently shortchange girls (Heim & Golant, 1993). Research has shown that teachers force boys to work out problems they do not understand but tell girls what to do, particularly in subjects such as math or science for which girls traditionally are perceived to have little affinity. In addition, girls were rewarded with attention and praise for nonacademic achievements, such as neat penmanship or getting along with others and were given the erroneous impression that tidiness or congeniality would stand them in good stead in the world at large. The message is clear: men are predetermined to “fight” in the competitive world market and women are predetermined to be good mothers, wives and housewives.

As well, for many years women, were not encouraged to pursue careers in natural and technical sciences. They were directed toward social sciences (music, languages, health services, education, etc.). Likewise, they were not

encouraged to be interested in pursuing higher educational levels. Fortunately, in the last 40 years, women’s educational level has risen significantly. In 1975, women received 11.7 percent of the MBA degrees granted; in the ‘90s, they received 33 percent (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990). Even better, in Croatia in 1997, women received 46 percent of postgraduate and 37 percent of doctoral degrees.

Except formal education facilities, there are many other ways of enhancing women’s knowledge that enable them to enter the world’s labor and management market. For example, there are many university programs designed especially for women, where they learn about the “feminine leadership style”, about problems women encounter in the working environment, etc. As well, there are many centers for Women Studies (International Training Center for Women, Institute for Women and Leadership, Rockford Network, etc.) and specialized courses aimed primarily at developing women’s leadership skills (Leadership Development Workshop – Women Risk-taking Initiatives to Develop Executive Resources and Skills, etc.).

Internet, as a new way of communication, also helps women to gather all kinds of helpful information (Women-related Web sites: WWWWOMEN!, BIZWOMEN, CYBERGIRL, WOMEN’S WIRE, GIRLS IN TECHNOLOGY, GIRLS AND WOMEN IN SCIENCE PROJECT). Women organizations (for example, the International Women’s Forum – IWF established in 1982, “Krug” – Croatian association of business women established in 1995, various women alumni clubs, etc.) also help women to better educate themselves and become a significant part of labor and management spheres.

**Organizational obstacles**, as is the unfavorable organizational climate toward women at work and various organizational policies and programs that prevent women from entering or staying in organizations and especially on higher organizational levels, are definitely the most limiting forces for working women. Fortunately, there are many effective ways of overcoming these obstacles. Firstly, organizations could change their thinking and acting philosophy toward women. Secondly, they could implement new policies, programs and processes for resolving women issues.

### **3.1. New thinking and acting philosophy toward women in organizations – women as a competitive advantage**

It is evident that today’s organizations have to change their thinking and acting philosophy toward women. Namely, organizations employing a good



proportion of women will be perceived as having caught the “Zeitgeist” and be viewed as progressive and responsible. This will undoubtedly make them more attractive to future employees, both women and men, and probably also to customers and shareholders (Vallance, 1995).

Moreover, due to their better understanding of different interpersonal relations, women produce a more pleasant working atmosphere, less confrontations, less competitive struggles, cooperation among departments, better service to the customer, team work, better manager-worker relations, emphasis on the power of consensus, etc. As a consequence, the work satisfaction among employees rises and results in increased organizational productivity. Thus, from the corporate side, it is easy to realize that the most successful companies in the future are going to be those that would aggressively employ, train and promote women.

Namely, as Sally Helgesen said, organizations of every variety – business, educational, governmental, legal, medical, religious – were being pressed to explore new styles of leadership, new structures, new ways of motivating people, and new ways of strengthening relationships of every kind. At the same time that this was happening, women in substantial numbers were beginning to assume positions of real authority and influence within the public sphere. As historical outsiders to such positions, women often had fresh eyes to see what was no longer working and to identify new solutions. In addition, women were bringing into the workplace talents that had for years been considered of value only in the private, domestic sphere. Thus, women comprised a great resource for organizations seeking to adapt to dramatically altered circumstances (Helgesen, 1995).

### **3.2. Organizational policies, programs and processes that help women to become a significant part of the labor force**

Obstacles on the organizational level that obstruct women from being a relevant labor force segment are: job characteristics; insufficient education, training and specialization of women; rare mentorship programs for women; and similar. However as well, things are changing.

#### *3.2.1. Changing job characteristics*

Since women have to coordinate work with family responsibilities, inflexible working time, overtime, business trips, etc. are factors which make it difficult to harmonize those two. However, as the nature of work and working

places change, women have the possibility to be both – successful managers and good mothers and wives.

Thanks to information technology and modern communication facilities women *telecommute*. *Flexible working time*, *part-time jobs* and *job-sharing* become conventional. *Equal opportunity policies* and *equal opportunity programs* become the inevitable part of organizational statutes and organizational practices while employing, compensating and promoting women. *Maternity leave policies* are improving because companies realize that the cost of losing a worker and retraining a successor costs more than the women’s salary while on maternity leave. *Career breaks* are included into human resources planning processes because companies became aware that this would likely work to their own advantages over the long term. Finally, as to help women to be able to focus on their work, many organizations organize *day care* and *eldercare* inside their premises or in cooperation with various specialized institutions.

### 3.2.2. Education, training and specialization of women

Practice shows that employers are less likely to provide women with education and training programs, and that they invest more in younger men than in younger women. The rising problem is that those with lower educational levels are less likely to obtain higher management positions. Thus, the number of women managers is not going to be equivalent to the number of male managers until the amount invested in women’s and men’s education and training is even. Practice also shows that socialization programs for women entering organizations are not proportionate to the diversity and quantity of gender prejudices they encounter at work.

As a result, organizations should *equally invest in women’s as in men’s education and training*. Furthermore, they should organize special training programs for women, such as assertiveness training and management skills training, to raise the women’s self-confidence and confidence into their position in the organization.

Organizations should *broaden* their *employees’ knowledge and horizons about women’s contribution to today’s organizations*. Many organizations already organize work-groups, seminars, management gurus’ lectures, etc., about gender issues, gender roles and their contribution to the working environment. As well, organizations work on sexual harassment problems, dual career problems and similar.

Furthermore, because regardless of whether a woman is hired from outside the organization or promoted from within, she faces a new environment and must learn to behave effectively in that environment (Terborg, 1977). ***The specialization process of women has to be carefully planned and implemented.*** Namely, women must be socialized properly if they are to fit in with the established functioning of existing work units and if they are to develop into contributing members of organizations.

More to it, to continue the process of socialization, organizations should encourage and enable ***women’s networks***. Namely, women networks form and should be formed to address three problem areas (Catalyst, 1999):

- ❑ First, the overall company environment often includes built-in assumptions that are more of a burden for women than for men. Women need to join together to bring these assumptions into the open and help the company adapt to the real requirements of modern life.
- ❑ Second, company social structures tend to isolate women, making it hard for them to rely on each other for advice and support. Women need to come together to share strategies and help each other overcome this isolation.
- ❑ Third, established career paths can sometimes exclude women. Women need to get together to focus on their own career development and the development of women at other levels in the organization.

The reason for forming women’s networks is obvious. As you improve the environment for women on an individual basis, you improve the environment for women overall, and, of most interest to the company, improving the environment for women improves the environment for all employees. Women’s networks can be seen simply as one more tool – a highly effective, fresh and innovative tool – for improving the bottom line (Catalyst, 1999).

### *3.2.3. Mentorship programs for women*

Organizations should establish and practice ***mentorship programs for women***. Namely, as a mentor is an important aid in the personal development of an employee, women need mentors to understand the realities of the male-dominated business culture and to be identified for promotion (Powell et al., 1992).

The essence of mentorship for women is that experienced women managers direct and advise younger women how to behave, what to learn, what is important to know about the organizational culture and organizational values, etc., so they can prosper and advance in the organization.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

As the “feminine leadership” style is untraditional, it is considered to be typical for women since it is appropriate for the turbulent and uncertain conditions that characterize today’s business environment. Companies which intend to stay alive, develop and expand should aggressively search for women employees.

However, today’s organizations have to be aware that there are still many obstacles that inhibit the employment of women. Prejudices about women’s status and role in society, cultural prejudices, formal educational schemes and organizational obstacles are only the most common and most influencing constraints.

To overcome those obstacles, companies should adopt and exercise a new and improved thinking and acting philosophy toward women, and they should use better organizational policies, programs and processes concerning women. Specifically, they should treat women and their leadership style – the “feminine” leadership style, as a main and extremely valuable competitive advantage. As well, they should realize that changed job characteristics, which enable women to successfully accomplish both work and family roles, and educational, training, specialization and mentorship programs for women, are not organizational drawbacks but only benefits.

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## **PRETPOSTAVKE ZA USPJEŠNU PRIMJENU "ŽENSKOG STILA" VOĐENJA U HRVATSKIM PODUZEĆIMA**

### **Sažetak**

"Ženski stil" vođenja, koji karakteriziraju kooperacija, participacija, dijeljenje moći i informacija, timski rad, poticanje drugih i njihovog vjerovanja u same sebe, je stil vođenja budućnosti. Upravo zbog toga organizacije današnjice moraju taj stil vođenja više koristiti. Nadalje, mnoga su suvremena istraživanja pokazala da su žene prvenstveni nositelji "ženskog stila" vođenja. Proizlazi da je na organizacijama današnjice da zapošljavaju više žena i to pogotovo na managerskim pozicijama. No, bez obzira što mnogi objektivni faktori prisiljavaju organizacije da zapošljavaju više žena, mnoge su prepreke na putu brojnijeg uključivanja žena u svijet rada. Na primjer, predrasude vezane uz status i ulogu žena u društvu, kulturne predrasude, tradicionalni obrazovni putovi i organizacijske prepreke, ozbiljan su teret ženama pri pozicioniranju u svijetu rada, a pogotovo u managementu. Na sreću, kao posljedica globalizacije i razvoja informacijskih i komunikacijskih tehnologija, organizacijske vrijednosti i stav prema ženama u organizacijama se mijenjaju. Nov i poboljšan način razmišljanja i ponašanja prema ženama te bolje organizacijske politike, programi i procesi vezani uz žene postaju nužnost.

