



WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT OF CONTEMPORARY ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract: Despite progress towards greater gender equality, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions worldwide. This paper examines the role of women and the female management style in contemporary organisations by analysing global trends, societal stereotypes, barriers, and success factors, with a particular focus on the situation in Serbia. Using a comparative approach and an analysis of statistical data, reports from relevant international and national institutions, as well as professional literature, the study identifies key challenges faced by women on their path to leadership positions, including the “glass ceiling”, gender stereotypes, and unequal distribution of responsibilities. Special attention is given to contemporary leadership approaches and the contribution of female management to organisational performance. The research findings indicate that the presence of women in leadership roles enhances decision-making diversity, improves organisational culture, and contributes to greater business success. However, challenges persist, including societal norms, unequal distribution of family responsibilities, and limited career advancement opportunities. In the context of Serbia, institutional and organisational support remains insufficient, although some positive developments have been observed. The paper concludes that systemic changes, the integration of gender perspectives, equal opportunity policies, and support for female leadership are essential for the long-term improvement of women's status in management.

Keywords: women, management, leadership, glass ceiling, contemporary organizations

Introduction

In recent decades, contemporary organisations have faced significant transformations in the business environment. There has been a shift in the perception of business values, with organisations becoming more flexible and focused on preserving intellectual capital, fostering teamwork, embracing inclusive management styles, and prioritising knowledge, creativity, and diversity. The traditional, vertical management model is now considered outdated, giving way to horizontal management approaches.

On the labour market, the „feminine” or „soft” management style is increasingly valued. Women's managerial traits better align with the demands of the modern business environment. Despite the growing number of educated and competent women, significant barriers continue to hinder or prevent their ascent to leadership positions. These barriers include structural obstacles, cultural stereotypes, an imbalance between work and family life, and unequal distribution of resources.

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At the same time, numerous studies indicate that organisations promoting gender diversity are more successful, innovative, and resilient in times of crisis (Why Diversity and inclusion matters, 2020), (Krivkovich, Field, Yee, & McConnell, 2024). In this context, the role of women in management is increasingly becoming the subject of scientific research and business practice.

The scientific aim of this paper is to identify global trends and the necessity for a diverse leadership model in contemporary organisations, highlighting the complementary competencies provided by men and women together.

The social aim of the paper is to address the specific challenges faced by women globally and in Serbia, examining the barriers and reasons why women encounter greater difficulties than men in attaining leadership positions. Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate the importance of overcoming societal stereotypes regarding gender equality.

The paper offers recommendations for improving women's inclusion in decision-making processes.

Materials and Methods

The work is based on the analysis of secondary data, including scientific articles, reports of international organizations (e.g. ILO, McKinsey & Company, Catalyst), and national studies (e.g. Statistics Office of the Republic of Serbia). Methods of descriptive analysis, comparative approach, and critical review of existing literature were used. The data was collected from sources in Serbian, English, and other languages to provide the widest and most current insight into the issue.

From autocracy to inclusiveness: the transformation of management

In the past, organizations were autocratic, bureaucratic, hierarchical, and had a military chain of command structure (Pološki, 2003, p. 38). Such a „masculine” model of management met the needs of the industrial era, but today's modern organizations are decentralized, highly value the opinion of employees, foster trust, cooperation, empathy, and information sharing. Creativity and diversity of business skills become the value of the organization, and competitive advantage is based on people and the synergy they create, not only on products, raw materials, or financial resources, as it was in the past.

Women joined world management ten years after the Second World War, but until the 90s of the 20th century, they were in a subordinate position compared to men. They were denied decision-making, the opportunity to be part of a team, advancement, salary negotiation, and especially the opportunity to occupy higher managerial positions. At the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century, women became successful thanks to the “feminine” characteristics that were once considered unacceptable for a manager. A soft management style, cooperation, empathy, fairness, and encouragement for cooperation enabled women to be included in the management of global organizations more quickly (Bahtijević-Šiber, Sikavica, & Pološki, 2008, p. 605).

During the past decade, women have been filling management ranks in companies, public institutions and organizations. Their number in lower and middle management positions is often equal to or higher than the number of men in the same positions. At the level of senior management, women have also increased their share. Despite the increasing number of women in managerial positions of companies



around the world, the lack of women in top management confirms that the “glass ceiling” is still in effect (Why Diversity and inclusion matters, 2020).

“Glass ceiling”

The “glass ceiling” metaphor is a political term used to describe the inability of women and other minorities to advance in the business hierarchy to the highest management positions, regardless of their qualifications and achievements. The term was first used by the consultant and writer Marilyn Loden at a panel discussion on women in the workplace, describing the stagnation of careers for women at the middle management level, and became more widely used after the publication of the book *Working Woman Report* in 1984. The glass ceiling can take many forms, resulting in (Reiners, Bailey; Matthew Urwin, 2024):

- lower salary compared to male colleagues performing the same job
- reduced possibility of advancement in the workplace
- a feeling of isolation at the workplace and microaggressions from colleagues
- reading that women are incapable.

In the beginning, this term was used as a metaphor by which feminists wanted to point out the barriers that successful business women face, and in that context, it is sometimes used even today. In the US, this term often refers to barriers to the advancement of members of certain minority groups, regardless of whether they are men or women (Redwood, 1995).

The term “glass ceiling”, in this paper, refers to obstacles to their business advancement. Career advancement for women is, without real and objective reasons, limited to lower-paid and less responsible positions. Even if they start their careers in the same way as men, they progress more slowly. Even if they progress at the same speed as their male counterparts, that progress will be stopped at some point. The term „glass ceiling” is therefore used in cases where women, despite their abilities, cannot fight for high management positions, especially for positions in top management. “Glass ceiling” means the social and economic inequality of the sexes, which results from the following factors, we quote (Smiljanic, 2004):

- ingrained attitudes towards male and female roles in society that often determine the level and direction of young women's education
- segregation of occupations by gender (traditionally female occupations are less paid, supposedly less complex, and supposedly require fewer skills, and even in those areas where women work mostly, men are in managerial positions)
- unequal payment of men and women for the same work in favour of men, regardless of the adopted legal regulations
- different participation in unpaid (household) work
- women's difficulties in harmonizing business and private obligations.

If you look at the numbers, up to fifteen years ago, women still represented only a few percent of CEOs in the world's largest companies. Invisible barriers, i.e. elements that prevent women from advancing to the highest positions (inflexible working hours, lack of female role models, unequal employment opportunities, prejudices...) symbolized by the glass ceiling still prevent women from entering the highest decision-making processes in the business world. Women have reached critical mass in top



management positions in areas such as human resources, education, administration, public relations and communications, and corporate social responsibility (Wirth, 2011).

During the last fifteen years, there have been significant changes in terms of increasing the level of education and diversifying the areas in which women are qualified, with an increasing number of women in technical, professional, and managerial jobs and an increasing number of women running their own companies. However, these changes are proceeding extremely slowly. Experts on this topic note that it may take another eight decades to achieve equality with men in top management (Global Gender Gap Report, 2024). It can be concluded that in this way organizations are missing out on the talent, creativity and perspectives possessed by women, which can contribute to the achievement of a better sustainable global economy.

In recent years, a large number of organizations and institutions have developed strategies and programs to solve the “problem” that has caused widespread media attention and public debate, related to the participation of women in decision-making and the extent to which women are present in board structures. Quotas to increase the number of women in parliaments are now commonplace as part of the democratic ideal in many countries. However, recent moves by several countries to implement quotas or similar measures for the appointment of women to the boards of companies in the private sector have caused controversy. As a consequence, there is a rich debate in many parts of the world about strategies for the advancement of women in management (Women in business and management, 2024).

World statistics of the participation of women in managerial positions

Globally, women are mostly in managerial positions in organizations that deal with service activities, tourism, human resources, education, and less often they are in management positions in financial and technological organizations, as well as in the management of production processes.

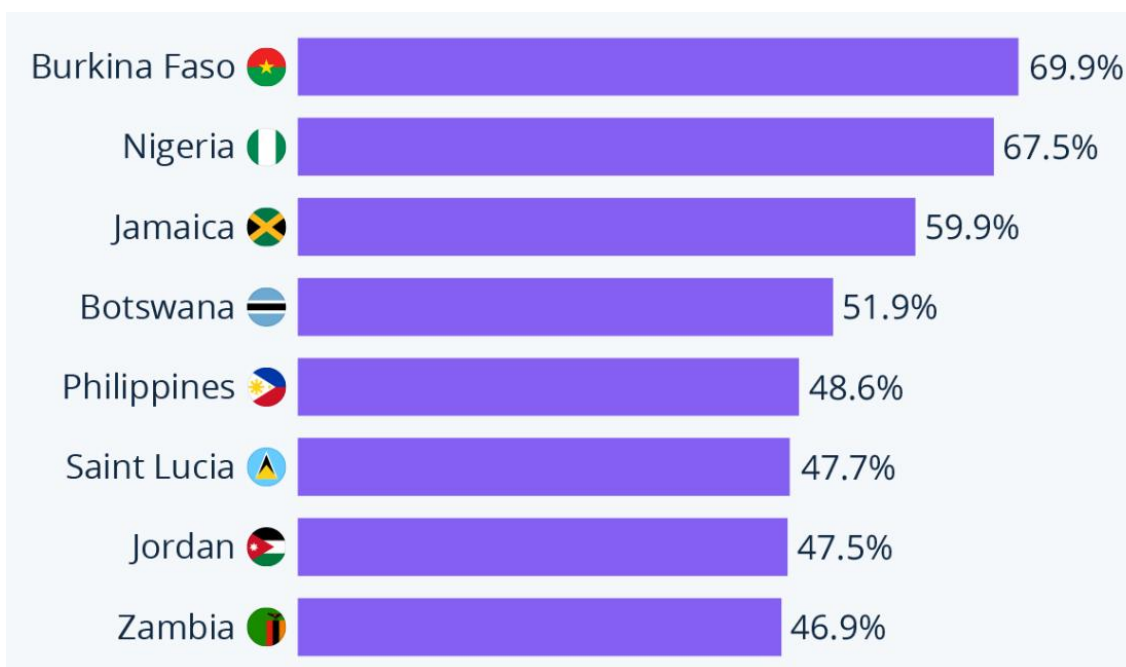
Gender inequality in the workplace has been a burning issue for years. Everyone seems to be asking the question whether women have the same careers as men, ie. were they promoted to managerial positions and demonstrated responsibility at the same rate as men? According to most reports, the answer would be no. However, if data from publicly available records is consulted, the answer would be both yes and no. Or, more accurately, it depends on what part of the world you live in (Keleher, 2016). The data is somewhat surprising.

Among the leading countries with the highest proportion of women managers, five are from Africa: Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Botswana, Zambia, and Jordan, which, although geographically belonging to the Middle East, is often included in African socio-economic discussions due to regional influences. In Eastern Europe, the share of female managers is almost 42%, while in North America it is about 40%, in Southeast Asia about 39%, and in Northern Europe about 38%. Conversely, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region had the lowest proportion of female managers, just over 15%. However, women managers are often limited to areas considered “feminine”, such as human resources, administration, finance, marketing or public relations (Buchholz, 2024). African countries like Burkina Faso are making significant progress in gender equality, thanks to strong policies that encourage women’s participation in leadership roles. Progress can also be attributed to legislative reforms, advocacy by women's groups, and increased access to education for girls. The corporate sector also plays a major role in promoting diversity and



inclusion policies. In these statistics, one should not lose sight of the fact that in countries with a less developed labour market, founding and running one's own company is often crucial for many women, which means that this form of entrepreneurship does not necessarily mean a high percentage of women's participation in the management of large companies (Chisom, 2024).

Figure 1- Countries with the highest share of female managers



Source: International Labour Organisation, 2024 (Buchholz, 2024)

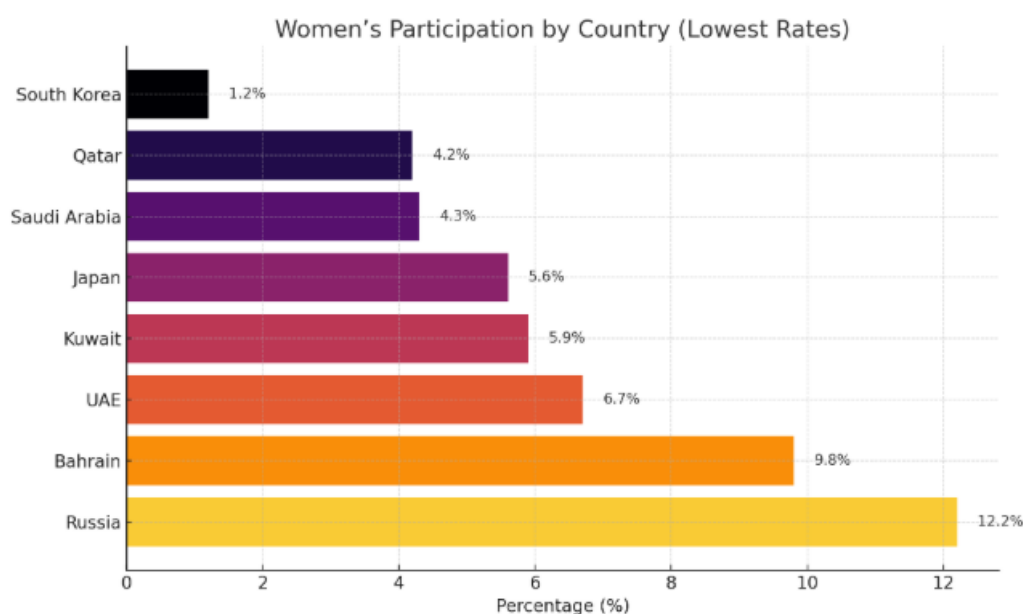
The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has the lowest proportion of female managers, just over 15%. Morocco (12.4%), Qatar (13.8%), and Egypt (14%). Among the countries with the lowest percentage are Bangladesh (7.3%), India (12.6%), and, surprisingly, Japan and South Korea (14.6% and 16.3%). As in MENA countries, very traditional gender roles in everyday life as well as in the workplace limit women in these countries (Buchholz, 2024).

The low representation of women in management in these countries is the result of a combination of cultural norms, legal restrictions, and lack of institutional support, as well as traditional attitudes about gender roles and the expectation that women take primary responsibility for the family. In Japan and South Korea, traditional social norms, rigid corporate structure, and lack of institutional support significantly limit women's advancement in management. The traditional expectation of a woman is to primarily be a caregiver. In Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, legal and cultural restrictions have historically held back women's professional development. Laws and customs limit the employment of women and their participation in public life. Women are often directed to sectors such as education and health with fewer opportunities for advancement in management. Although some reforms have been implemented in recent years, real changes are slow. In Russia, although the educational level of women is high, the participation of women decreases the higher the position, which is interpreted as a



consequence of gender stereotypes and fewer opportunities for networking and mentoring support (Guardian, 2024).

Figure 2- Countries with the lowest share of female managers



Source: adapted from: Nordsip, 2024 (Axellson, 2024)

The USA and many other leading countries in the world, where women have made great efforts in the field of equality, are not even in the top ten countries with a high percentage of women in leadership positions. The USA is in 15th place with a percentage of 42.7%. Canada is in the 36th position with a participation of 36.2%, and Great Britain at the 41st position. Perhaps this data is surprising, but the ranking list of countries with the lowest participation of women in management is not surprising (Axellson, 2024). Among the EU countries, the largest share of women in managerial positions in 2023 was in Sweden (43.7%), followed by Latvia (42.9%) and Poland (42.3%), while Luxembourg (22.2%), Croatia (23.8%) and the Czech Republic (27.4%) are the countries with the lowest percentage of women in management (Eurostat, 2025).

Female and male managerial traits

Our society is changing so rapidly that a diverse workforce is becoming the rule, not the exception. Organizations that want a successful future must assess the impact that diversity will have on the market for their products or services. Equalization is impossible, so the cultivation of a diverse workforce is imposed as a solution.

Women and men approach problems, solve them, make decisions and communicate in different ways and have different work styles.

The “feminine” style of leadership is defined by typically female qualities such as empathy, sensitivity, flexibility, openness, and understanding, while the “masculine” style of management is characterized by competitive spirit, rationality, risk-taking, and aggressiveness. Women collaborate and



communicate more easily in their business environment. They detect problems more easily and have more understanding and ideas for solving them. They are also more tolerant than men when it comes to cultural, social, racial, and other differences.

Table 1: Female and male managerial traits

Female managerial qualities	Male managerial traits
A concrete way of thinking	Abstract thinking
A tendency to share power and information	Command and control
Encouraging cooperation	Relying on the power of position
Risk avoidance	Risk appetite
Aversion to superficial effects	Little resistance to superficial impressions
Orientation to mutual relations	Action orientation
Network, „family“ organizational structure	Hierarchical, military organizational structure
Understanding other people's behavior and problems	Ignoring other people's personal problems and concerns
Non-conflicting emphasis and encouragement of associates	Exchange of services as a source of motivation
Intuitive and emotional problem solving	Analytical and rational problem solving
Willingness to admit personal mistakes	Hiding personal mistakes
Harmonious relationship with the environment	Propensity for conflicts and conflicts
Emotional endurance and resistance to frustration	Tendency to explode and „shoot“ in crisis situations
Greater self-control, less rashness	Less self-control, more rashness

Source: Velimir Srića, *Žene i moderni menadžment*, 2015

Women, by their nature, have a more developed social intuition and are more capable of following their co-workers and paying attention to their personal problems at the same time, and are more focused on the person themselves, and only then on their performance at work. Given the greater empathy, a woman will not perceive as a threat those persons who do not agree with her views. A man usually insists on his idea, while a woman needs to build harmonious relationships and respect other people's points of view. Due to their highly developed interpersonal qualities, women understand the importance of listening to colleagues and respecting their opinions, while men focus more on completing the task itself, on achieving the goal, and on winning, rather than on encouraging colleagues to express their ideas and create. A man considers his associates a means to an end. They rarely share praise for a job well done, but do not miss an opportunity to, in the opposite case, direct criticism. A woman's strength comes from her hard work, not formal authority and position, which is the case with male managers. Women do not like competition because it implies the defeat of one side. In such situations, they prefer cooperation and negotiation. It seems that competition motivates men to work better (Gračan, 2016).

One should be careful of stereotypes because there are many men with “feminine” features and many women with “masculine” features.



Are women better managers than men?

About six decades ago, the international association of independent research agencies, Gallup, asked a group of employees in the US: "If you could choose your boss at your new job, would you rather work for a man or a woman?" According to the study, 66% of respondents said they would prefer a male boss, 5% said they preferred a female boss, and 25% said it didn't matter to them.

In 2012 Gallup conducted the same poll with 11,434 US adults. This time, 33% said they preferred a man, 20% said a woman, and 46% said they had no preference, leading Gallup to conclude that women tend to be better leaders than their male counterparts.

The research also found that employees who work for a female boss are on average 6% more engaged than those who work for a male manager. Female workers who work for a female manager are the most engaged of any group of workers. Further analysis of the *Gallup* survey leads to the conclusion that female managers nurture the potential of their employees to a higher percentage and care about their future. They are also better at finding challenges for their employees in the form of stimulating tasks. To a greater extent than their male colleagues, they talk to their colleagues about their progress, prefer to give recognition and praise their colleagues for a job well done. The conclusion of this survey, which was conducted in the USA, is that female managers exceed male managers in meeting the basic requirements of employees. The explanation is that female managers use their natural talents and traits more skilfully and purposefully. Regardless of the reasons, *Gallup* concludes that organizations should put more emphasis on hiring and promoting women managers (Smith, Study finds women are better bosses than men — here's why, 2015). It seems that women managers are not only the right choice, but also economically profitable, which confirms the basic hypothesis of this work.

The importance of women in management

The modern model of organizational management implies the creativity of management. It is based on cooperation, on giving more freedom to employees in making decisions, on motivation, and on supporting the development of each individual. This is, undoubtedly, an opportunity for women because they have the resources thanks to which they can, and without sacrificing their natural aspects, successfully perform the function of managers. Thanks to her natural abilities, a woman can be successful in the process of building teams of coworkers. She perfectly understands the language of non-verbal communication, which is not characteristic of men. Women depend on a good atmosphere at work and perfectly motivate employees to act and succeed, provided that the good atmosphere is not a priority over the goal (Mascia, 2015).

The data shows that companies where women are dominantly employed are more successful. One of the first studies of this type on the topic of gender equality and the impact of this factor on capital return was conducted in 1999 in Sweden. The results showed that companies in which men and women are represented in approximately the same numbers achieve a higher degree of return on capital, higher net profits, and better productivity. A 2007 survey conducted by *The Catalyst Corporation* included 30,000 companies, and the results showed that companies with the highest percentage of women in top management achieved 34 percent better results for their stakeholders, and even a 35.1 percent higher return on capital (Marković, 2013).



Ensuring equal working conditions for men and women is part of diversity management, which is more than human resource management. This represents the identification of areas in which there is unequal treatment, the search for the cause of such an occurrence, and the taking of measures to eliminate it. An essential element of the policy of equal opportunities in the workplace is to determine goals and activities for “now” and for “later”, that is, their integration into the organization's strategy. We have already said that organizations with women in management achieve better financial profits than organizations with only men in management, which means that a modern organization must not underestimate the presence of women in its management. Research shows that human capital management requires both “masculine” and “feminine” tactics: Males in terms of pressure and decision-making about changes, and females in terms of persuasion tactics (rational justification and inspiration).

It is important to have both women and men in the management of a joint organization because:

- different competencies (male and female) contribute to the quality of the entire management
- in teams where both sexes are represented, there is greater social sensitivity and personal involvement in solving problems, and employees work harder.
- the organization is perceived as ethical and as one that takes care of good financial condition
- the organization shows a lower tendency to risk, which is especially important during a crisis
- the organization is oriented towards the needs of different target groups, including women who are responsible for most purchasing decisions
- the potential of human capital is better used at all levels of activity, it is used more intelligently and the potential of the workforce is appreciated, which attracts talents

77% of the world's 100 largest brands have women in their management. Among them are: AVON, Burberry, Duracell, Facebook, GM, Google, Hewlett Packard, H&M, IBM, Intel, Samsung, Wal-Mart, Xerox, Zara. The average value of brands in organizations where women are in management is twice as high as in the case of companies where there are no women. In the period 2007-2012, these brands had an average growth rate of 66%, while the same rate in the case of brands belonging to companies that do not have women in managerial positions was 6% (Lisowska, Zachorowska, Sznajder, & Grabowska, 2014).

In this chapter, we come to the conclusion that a woman in top management is not a fashion trend but a logical business decision and that a greater role of women in the management of an organization, i.e. the diversity of management staff, can be elements of competitive advantage.

What price does a woman pay for professional success?

The position of the modern woman in the family, at least in the cultural environment of patriarchy that is in force in most countries of the world, is similar to her position in previous generations. Women today are, admittedly, employed in large numbers, but they still have a traditional role in the home and family, as they did in the past. It is still believed that her life should primarily be focused on home and family. In this sense, it is assumed that it is not easy for a woman to have a successful career at the same time.

Until recently, the function of a manager was unequivocally associated with the male gender. Women appeared in that role relatively recently and have a problem with defining their own identity. Women try to imitate the business patterns of their male counterparts. In that role, is the woman in danger



of having to give up her femininity? It is a fact that women are adapting to high positions in organizations more and more quickly, that they are in these positions more than ever, and that they are receiving more and more social recognition for their work. If we start from the assumption that the male type of manager is dominant, the question arises as to how much women, in their desire to gain the respect of their colleagues, are forced to give up their nature and pay a high price for professional success. There are enough reasons for that. Large organizations that were almost dominated by men have developed a masculine corporate model based on typically masculine traits and professional competition (Szkoła Coachingu Relacyjnego, 2015). For women, success at work is not a high salary, an expensive car, and big bonuses, but a good atmosphere, a quality team, good relations with co-workers, which were impossible, undesirable, and unnecessary in the “hard”, autocratic management regimes of the organization. In this regard, a woman is often frustrated and in a dilemma between “I want” and “I can” or she risks being unpopular among her male colleagues who will see these qualities as a lack of professionalism.

The difference in the psychology of women and men

In communication, women are more focused on relationships and their quality than on conveying information. They are sensitive to criticism and, if it occurs, they withdraw and become reserved. Due to their communication style, they are more susceptible to emotional injuries than men. Women use more words and phrases to describe their mood and feelings – their language is emotional. In their address, they primarily pay attention to the sender-receiver relationship. They are sensitive to hidden messages and messages of non-verbal communication. Women have more sensitivity than men when it comes to interpersonal relationships. They are careful in formulating proposals – usually, they are in the form of questions, because their priority is to achieve the goal, not personal gain. Women are cooperative and want to create an atmosphere of cooperation and experience defeat emotionally.

Men, on the other hand, are more precise and direct in communication than women. They accept opposing viewpoints more quickly than women. They care more about their government than the problem itself. In conversation, they care most about presenting themselves as well as possible. They often see themselves as lone warriors. For them, the most important are facts, figures, and results; they don't pay attention to the atmosphere. They try to solve problems in a rational way - analytically. In statements, they usually use impersonal forms or the pronoun “we”, to create the appearance of objectivity and importance of their statement. They precisely separate professional from private life. They formulate their statements categorically and decisively (Lipman, 2015).

Women say that men speak loudly, in a dominant tone, aggressively, directly, simplistically, often interrupting others, less emotionally, in short sentences, with more confidence even when they are wrong, often using the imperative to ensure or confirm hierarchy.

Men claim that women speak recklessly, chaotically, that they have a desire to get emotionally close to the interlocutor, passively, cautiously, that they use expressions such as “maybe”, “in fact” and “I would suggest”, that they speak more quietly, more openly, politely, pay attention to different aspects of the topic, seek confirmation from male colleagues, take into account both positive and negative aspects of the problem, do not dominate the conversation, do not interrupt the interlocutor and are better listeners (Szkoła Coachingu Relacyjnego, 2015).



How to overcome gender stereotypes

At work, people also engage emotions. Work efficiency is not only affected by economic factors, but also by factors related to the quality of communication with colleagues, and the language used by women and men differs significantly. Maybe that communication space between man and woman is not so far and will undoubtedly decrease if these differences are understood and accepted.

Men and women are taught different communication behaviours from an early age. In most cases, such models of different behaviour are more and more expressive during life, and they are especially noticeable in the business environment. As long as similar styles communicate with similar styles, problems rarely arise, while communication between two different genders can cause problems. This fact may impose a solution to choose one style of communication to be used, but such an approach would practically exclude one gender, as well as talents, thus limiting the options.

The first and most fundamental step toward mitigating the problems caused by the interaction of these different styles is to acknowledge that there are differences. The second step is to recognize the value of those differences. In their mutual communication between men and women, there is certainly a tendency to adopt at least some communication strategies of the opposite sex. In this way, mixed gender communication is improved and the repertoire of communication strategies is expanded. Male and female managers must work to overcome these gender stereotypes, because only that is a winning combination. Modern women in the business world must not be dependent and without their own opinions. They should, both in the private and business environment, prove themselves with their knowledge and education and the skills that are inherent in it.

The process of bridging gender differences in the business environment is long, but not impossible. It is necessary to do the following (Deloitte, 2012):

- **The combat against stereotypes** in the form of a workshop in which both women and men would participate, because the presence of men is necessary so that women do not feel isolated.
- **Professional development of women.**
- **Assertiveness training** in the form of psychological preparation of women for high positions.
- **Adjustment of the workplace** in terms of greater flexibility of working hours and the workplace itself, so that women can more easily balance family and business life.
- **Networking** – personal contacts and connections are of great importance, considering that unknown persons are generally not brought to the highest managerial positions. Given that women have less time to socialize after work, the organizations themselves would be able to mediate women's networking.
- **Career tracking**, which means support and monitoring of young staff.
- **Mentoring** – providing professional assistance in the form of knowledge, experience and contacts to women who are on their way to high management positions.

Advice for women in business

In the book *Hardball for Women* (Heim, Tammy, & Golant, 2015) written with the intention of being of great help to both women and men in understanding both their own and men's communication styles, the authors give female managers ten tips on how to deal with their male colleagues:



- Men value powerful people more. Show your power.
- The meeting does not take place at the meeting itself. Be prepared in advance.
- If the interlocutor interrupts you, continue speaking. Do not look into the eyes of the person who interrupted you.
- Do not change the pitch of your voice, it shows a lack of self-confidence. If you don't know the answer, do your best. Improvise.
- At the end of the statement, lower your tone instead of raising it.
- Do not look at the interlocutor from a lower perspective. Either stand up or ask him to sit down.
- Accept criticism and move on. Do not demand perfection from yourself.
- You should only use the expression "I'm sorry" in a situation where you really made a mistake.
- Choose a good supervisor rather than a good job.
- When another woman is recognized, support her.

The position of women in the management of the Serbian business world

According to the data of the Agency for Business Registers, women make up 33.7% of the total number of entrepreneurs in Serbia, while men make up 66.3%. Only every fourth woman is a founder, member, legal representative, or director of a company (Agencija za privredne registre, 2023). The Republic Institute of Statistics states that women are represented in smaller numbers in management positions, most often in micro-enterprises (Biznis.rs, 2025). In 2023, the number of employed women increased by 29,300, whereby the employment rate of women was 43.8%, while it was 57% for men (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2024). According to United Branch Trade Union *Nezavisnost* research, women in Serbia earn up to 20% less than men for the same jobs (Agencija za privredne registre, položaj žena u srpskom društvu, 2023).

Data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2023) says that women make up 51.4% of the population of Serbia, but they are still underrepresented in leadership positions. In the private sector, only 32% of women hold managerial positions, while in state-owned enterprises, that share is 28%. In top management (CEO, members of the board of directors), the representation of women is even lower – only 15% in the largest companies on the stock exchange in Serbia (Belgrade Stock Exchange, 2023). The situation is similar in startup companies where only 18% of the founders are women (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2024).

Although the Law on Gender Equality, around which a broad social consensus was built, and which defines the use of gender-sensitive language as one of the mechanisms for strengthening gender equality, is binding from May 2024, it has not been fully reflected on the position of women in the management of Serbia. There are still prejudices in domestic organizations, while foreign companies operating on the territory of the Republic of Serbia take care of the gender balance. The use of female forms of occupation contributes to greater visibility of women in professional life, although the practice of applying this law is still uneven. And while some believe that this violates the language norm, others point out that it contributes to social equality.

In Serbia today, women are educated on the same level as men. To some extent, there is still a division between "male" and "female" occupations, but this division is also undergoing positive transformations in favour of women. Sanja Bratina, a psychologist and psychotherapist, points out that



the tide of female emancipation shook our patriarchal society. The reason for this is certainly that the labour market is no longer dominated by occupations that require physical strength, but rather education. Considering that women are on average more educated, it is not surprising that they conquer the labour market. There are fewer women in top management positions and among general directors in Serbia. The sectors in which women in Serbia are in leadership positions are healthcare, social work, education, that is, in those professions that are less well paid. A position in top management implies commitment exclusively to a career. In that position, a woman in Serbia is forced to balance work and family. Positions of power are still predominantly in the hands of men who, for the most part, do not want to see women as their business competition. To get into that "business class," women must have a lot of money, good social connections, or a family history of doing business. That is why they are prone to compromise, which means settling for a middle management position, in order to be able to meet the expectations of their family.

Psychologist Sanja Bratina claims that on a deeply intimate level, the average man has a hard time getting along with a woman whose profession is very highly positioned in terms of status and materially, and points out that a typical man would rather be with a woman who earns an average income and who is dedicated to her family, "because super successful women are also super demanding, and what they expect from themselves, they also expect from their partner (Đorđević, 2011).

Results

The analysis of the collected data showed that, despite education and competence, women are still not equally represented in management positions, especially in top management. In most countries, including Serbia, women are more often present at lower and middle managerial levels, while their chances for advancement are limited by a number of factors such as gender stereotypes, prejudices, inflexible work environment and traditional division of roles.

However, it was established that the problem of gender equality has not been neglected and that overcoming social stereotypes on the topic of gender equality is not impossible. The inclusion of women in management is not only a correct choice, but also a logical business decision and economic profitability. A greater role of women in the management of the organization, i.e. the diversity of the management staff, can be elements of a competitive advantage. Comparative analysis showed that companies with a greater participation of women in management achieve better financial and organizational results. Also, in companies with gender-balanced management, higher emotional intelligence in leadership, openness to dialogue, and a higher level of employee engagement were observed. The findings also showed that women more often use inclusive leadership styles, based on empathy, teamwork, and joint decision-making. It has been observed that these styles contribute to a better organizational climate, greater employee loyalty, and more effective conflict resolution.

In the business hierarchy, it is more difficult for women to advance to the highest positions than men due to entrenched attitudes towards male and female roles in society. Companies in which men and women are represented in approximately the same number achieve a higher degree of return on capital, higher net profits and better productivity. Men and women are different by nature and there cannot be equality between them in the true sense of the word, but equality is necessary. In the end, the research



shows that despite the existence of legal frameworks, such as the Law on Gender Equality in Serbia, its practical application in the field of management still does not bring significant results, which indicates the need for additional measures, education and institutional support.

Discussions

The obtained findings confirm that women possess key competencies that contribute to the modern model of leadership, but they are still faced with many obstacles. Such obstacles are often not formal, but are the result of deep-rooted norms, cultural patterns, and implicit prejudices. Global comparisons show that countries with greater participation of women in management have more advanced equality policies and higher indices of social development. In Serbia, although the legal framework is improving, policy implementation remains fragmented. The discussion also points to the need to redefine the criteria for success in leadership - with an emphasis on emotional intelligence, inclusiveness, and sustainability. Also, the results suggest that mentoring programs, manager training on unconscious biases, and flexible forms of work are the most effective measures for improving the position of women in management. Perhaps, over time, intelligent organizations will develop such forms of management that will allow women to implement their management style following their nature and needs, which could benefit everyone to reduce conflicts and increase the effectiveness of the organization, as shown by world research. In this way, the woman will be less frustrated and more professionally fulfilled, without having to give up her family and her role as a mother and wife. Perhaps soon the process of evaluating what is "masculine" and what is "feminine" will end, and in its place will come the assumption of equal importance of these two aspects.

When we say "male manager", it sounds clear, active, decisive, and indicates a vertical management style, while a female manager sounds darker, more vague, complementary, and indicates a horizontal management style. Contemporary management science theory is more in line with the female model. A female manager has an advantage thanks to her interpersonal skills. They encourage their employees to get involved in the affairs and decisions of the organization. They selflessly share their knowledge with employees and create a creative atmosphere at work. In this way, women carry out mentoring, which is characterized by mutual trust, and work on the development of all employees. Their emphasis is on careful listening and carefully asked questions, on counselling and informal exchange of information, not on instruction and limitation. In addition, women attach less importance to hierarchy, establish and maintain relationships more easily, cooperate more than compete, and, above all, build their success based on the common pursuit of a goal. Women, fewer than men, fight for dominance, for power, and feel less rivalry. For them, the most important thing is the cooperation and partnership treatment of employees.

Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the worldwide research on the success of women in the world of management, on the success of companies in which managers are women, and look for the possibility of greater use of potential women in management positions. Perhaps it is necessary to remember the *Myth of Androgena*, a deity who had both male and female characteristics. In this way, we would reach our archetype and pay less attention to social stereotypes. Equality does not mean that men and women are equal. By their upbringing, and above all by their biology, they are not. Equality, first of



all, means equal opportunity to reach the same positions, regardless of their different methods and ways of working.

Conclusions

It seems that male dominance in business is slowly becoming more flexible in the face of an influx of smart and capable women. Their path to leadership positions is not easy, because in the public's perception, everything that is capable and business-like is associated with men. Often, even in a situation where a woman is recognized in a high position in the organization, there is a conflict with male colleagues, which usually resembles a battle of the sexes. That struggle mostly looks like an unhealthy rivalry between women who want to prove that they are as good as men in business and men who are fighting for their position and will not lose it. Given the obstacles they face in their organizations, the assumption is that women do best in their own firms where they implement their own, feminine style of management. They choose their own employees, take care of the atmosphere they care about and set their own working hours, so that they can fulfill their work obligations, as well as their roles as mothers and wives. In this way, they create their own comfort zone in which they achieve both business and financial success.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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