

THE CAREER OF A FEMALE MANAGER

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Abstract: The article discusses issues related to the contemporary approach to the professional career of a female manager. A special focus has been placed on the conditions influencing the shaping of women's careers. The findings of own research on the perception of women's careers at managerial positions in modern companies are presented. The considerations are complemented by an attempt to interpret the reasons for the approach to women's careers.

Keywords: career, manager, woman.

1. Introduction

Women who decide to pursue their careers are obliged to accept both the benefits and the costs of entering employment. This is reflected in their private lives. For some, a career is a chance for self-development and to increase their own abilities and skills on professional grounds. For others, participation in social reality is the essence of gainful employment. By achieving successes in the professional sector, they gain a higher social status. Many arguments that encourage women to participate in the multi-sectoral market expansion appeal to defend their gainful employment. The motives and reasons that encourage women to become active in the labour market outline a broad spectrum of topics, as well as problems, related to career and its implementation. It seems that in today's world, it is essential to earn a living by working, but in this case, it is essential to treat work properly. According to the research conducted by the **Central Economic Information Centre** (Centralny Ośrodek Informacji Gospodarczej, 15.04.2011), 37% of companies are owned by women. Psychologists emphasise women's greater resilience to stress, ability to act under pressure from multiple tasks, along with better work organisation and teamwork skills. It seems, therefore, that entrepreneurship is not lower than in the case of men, although it does not result in promotions. Women are most often owners of small businesses (they run two-thirds of them) (<http://www.gk24.pl/>, 31.01.2012), which shows that they feel better in flat organisational structures and that there are barriers to their promotion to positions in large organisations. This phenomenon has been

called the 'the glass ceiling effect' — an invisible, but significant, barrier prohibiting women from occupying higher positions. Women's careers resemble a pyramid or a glass mountain, which is impossible to climb, and the prospects indicated by the trends of recent years do not seem optimistic. Although in Poland women become managers more often than the average in EU countries (there are six percentage points more of them in these positions), we are slowly reaching the low EU average level. Over the last five years, the number of female managers has decreased by 3% (Centralny Ośrodek Informacji Gospodarczej, 08.03.2012).

The aim of the article is to draw attention to the conditions influencing the shaping of professional careers of women and to examine the perception of professional careers of female managers in modern companies.

2. Modern approach to career development

Career is a priority value in the life of most of society today and has an impact on an individual's life (Wiatrowski, 2005). A career is a way of treating work as an opportunity for self-development and, as D. Gizicka (Gizicka, 2009, p. 325) highlights, is a value that is a vital source of life satisfaction. On the other hand, M. Suchar (Suchar, 2003, p. 38) defines work as an autotelic value when it is a source of joy and satisfaction for a human being and, at the same time, creates a chance for the self-fulfilment of an individual. It is often said that work gives self-esteem and an opportunity to demonstrate oneself. Many people identify a sense of work with a sense of life. However, on the contrary, professional activity can be treated by a human being in an instrumental way and can only be a means to achieve other goals.

The transition to the era of capitalism resulted in profound changes in the performance of work, where the most important features have been flexibility of time and place, an employee's contacts with the employer, remuneration system and employee skills. The flexibility of work has resulted in millions of people becoming 'temporary' workers who have been forced to take on unsecured working methods that are not favourable to forming a professional identity. As a result of increased capitalism, relational employment contracts are now transitioning towards transaction contracts. Its very nature is to exchange the short-term involvement of the employee in the achievement of the organisation's objectives for the possibility of pursuing an individual career in that organisation. However, it should be pointed out that an employee's career development still depends to a large extent on the organisation where he or she works. The employee is, however, forced to create their own sense of security, usually independently and through their own responsibility, building up their identity as the bearer of a specific capital (Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2016, p. 146).

According to P. Bohdziewicz, an employee functions in the social space in its broad sense and should create a personal reputation as a professional in a given field. The three major

directions of change describing the process of transition from a traditional to contemporary career, which are based on entrepreneurial individuality, include (Bohdziewicz, 2010, pp. 41-42):

- the development of loyalty, referred to as a professional type, instead of organisational loyalty,
- the person's focus on achieving internal rather than external awards,
- reliance on oneself during the process of career progression, not on the hiring organisation.

New trends in career development theory seem to be based on constructivism and social constructionism. These theories relate to the subjectivity, the agency of the individual, the attribution of meanings, the mutual relations between the individual and the environment (McMahon, 2014).

In light of discussions on globalisation, internationalisation and indigenisation, which also apply to career theory, a criticism of the current most leading career development theories is being made, pointing to their limitations. They include (Leung, Yuen, 2012):

- focusing on personal variables, without taking into account contextual and cultural variables,
- considering self-fulfilment and job satisfaction as objectives of professional choices,
- highlighting the significance of free choice and opportunities in decision-making,
- development of culturally ingrained practices and measures that are difficult to adapt in other contexts.

As M. McMahon points out, one of the dominant trends in career psychology is that it takes little account of the values of "social justice" (McMahon, 2014, p. 15). This approach means that the careers of women and ethnic minorities, for example, are not sufficiently taken into account and that this trend in psychology cannot therefore be widely adopted in other cultural contexts. Critics of such approaches to career psychology stress the underestimation in theories of the influence of factors such as gender, social status, environmental context, family conditions or cultural characteristics on the course of individual careers (Blustein, 2011, p. 19).

3. Professional career and gender

The gender of an employee has an impact on the development of a career. Most careers are gender specific. This group includes stable, conventional, unstable and multi-faceted careers. There is, however, a set of careers that are specific only to women, where one can distinguish between home, dual and interrupted work careers. They are largely dependent on biological aspects, i.e., starting a family, giving birth to children, as well as social aspects, such as

involvement in the family, dealing with the household, raising children. The characteristics of the above-mentioned careers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Work career patterns by gender of employees

CAREER PATTERNS	CAREER DEVELOPMENT
A stable career	For men, it is an early start to a full career, with no preparatory work period. Maintained successively for the following years is characteristic for professionals, managers and officials. In the case of women, this is about taking up a job after graduation and looking at work as a role to fulfil in this stage of life.
A conventional career	It is a career shaped from temporary employment, through probationary periods to stable employment. At this point, the activity belongs to managers, skilled manual workers and officials. As far as women are concerned, this is about taking up a job after graduation and is an escape from staying at home.
An unstable career	For men, this career development provides for alternating probationary employment, and possible stabilisation should be treated in the short term. It is typical of semi-skilled workers and lower-level officials. As far as women are concerned, it is related to those who represent workers with a low socio-economic status, and it is also related to taking up and leaving work according to their financial situation.
A multi-faceted career (many attempts)	In the case of men, it refers to unstable employment, consisting of constant changes in employment. It is typical for unskilled people. In the case of women, family needs are among the causes of frequent changes in employment.
WOMAN-ONLY SPECIFIC WORK CAREERS	
A home career	A career that is determined by the requirements of the home and a job that is secondary and not successful for a long time. It is where a career ambition has been reflected in the family field.
A dual career	It is a characteristic feature of women who achieve successes in the professional field, and starting a family has limited the development pace and found stability between work and involvement in the family.
An interrupted career	In this case, the family situation forces women to stop working or to be less engaged in work. However, if the conditions are favourable, the woman can return to employment again.

Source: Bańka, 2000, p. 314.

Due to changes in the nature of the psychological contract, strengthened by the character of modern careers, there is a significant development of new types of careers. These are mainly concepts related to, e.g., intelligent careers, boundaryless careers, protean careers and kaleidoscopic careers. A mutual characteristic of these is the attribution of responsibility for one's professional career to the employee. The conditions that are distinctive of capitalism affect the preferred attitudes of employees towards their careers (Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2016, pp. 146-147).

Faced with a choice between participating in professional life and starting a family, twenty-first-century women choose to be professionally active (with such a high divorce rate as nowadays, the opposite choice would be financially unjustified) (Wittenberg-Cox, Maitland, 2010, p. 44).

Additionally, these studies (Hewlett, Buck, 2006, p. 13) have shown that women feel unwell when they are financially dependent on their spouses. Whether or not their relationship is successful, most of them do not like asking for money. Nearly half of the surveyed women (46%) admit that having one's own independent source of income is an important factor encouraging them to work.

4. The career perception of female managers

E. Lisowska (Lisowska, 2009) claims that a woman has a limited life choice, which is already culturally determined. In Poland, values such as home and family are respected, but this is a key reason why Polish women are still overshadowed by men, despite increasingly better education.

When analysing the reasons for combining a career and motherhood, it is worth drawing attention to opinions concerning women's work. According to the figures, more than two-fifths (44%) of those surveyed believe that working women have greater social respect than housewives who are only involved in housekeeping and childcare. The opposite opinion is expressed only by 5% of respondents. It is also worth noting, though, that despite quite frequent beliefs about the greater social role of economically active women than those who take care of children and work in the household, almost three quarters of respondents (74%) do not differentiate respect for women depending on their professional status (CBOS, 28.09.2016).

The author conducted her own research in Polish companies in the years 2013-2016 in order to examine the perception of women in managerial positions. The survey included 228 randomly selected respondents whose task was to estimate the degree of acceptance (on a scale of 1-4) of the statements (Table 2).

Table 2.

Statements concerning the perception of women in managerial positions

NO. OF THE STATEMENT	STATEMENT	POINTS 1 - definitely not 2 - rather not 3 - rather yes 4 - definitely yes
1.	Women are more interested in their jobs than their careers.	
2.	A high level of challenge and job satisfaction is more important for women than promotion.	

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the research, taking into account the number of respondents' answers, are presented in Table 3, while their interpretation is presented in Table 4.

Table 3.*The number of respondents' answers*

NO. OF THE STATEMENT	RESPONDENTS' ANSWERS			
	definitely not	rather not	rather yes	definitely yes
Statement 1	29	71	86	42
Statement 2	18	51	104	55

Source: own elaboration.

Table 4.*The interpretation of research results*

THE PERCEPTION OF WOMEN IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS	ACCEPTANCE OF THE STATEMENT	INTERPRETATION WITH PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
1. Women are more interested in their jobs than in their careers.	DEFINITELY NOT and RATHER NOT	Women are not more interested in work than in careers according to 44% of respondents.
	DEFINITELY YES and RATHER YES	Women are more interested in the job itself than in the career according to 56% of respondents.
2. More attention paid to high level of challenges and job satisfaction than to promotion.	DEFINITELY NOT and RATHER NOT	According to 30% of the respondents, women do not attach more importance to high level of challenges and job satisfaction than to promotion itself.
	DEFINITELY YES and RATHER YES	According to 70% of the respondents, women are more attached to high level of challenges and job satisfaction than to promotion.

Source: own elaboration.

The research conducted by the author shapes the image of a woman as more interested in her work than in her career. This opinion is confirmed by 56% of respondents. In addition, according to 70% of respondents, managers pay more attention to high level of challenges and job satisfaction than promotion itself.

Seeking the reasons for such an approach to a woman's professional career, the question arises: what is the reason for perceiving women as those who attach more importance to work, high level of challenges and job satisfaction than to career and promotion?

The answers to this question can be found in the results of research conducted by B. Budrowska, D. Duch and A. Titkow (Budrowska, Duch, Titkow, 2003, pp. 88-91), who, in their report, published the barriers and limitations related to the development of careers of Polish women. These are:

- the omnipresent assignment of women to traditional roles — women and men, representatives of business and politics, share the view that motherhood is the cause of women's reduced availability;

- stereotypical views on women's nature — men emphasise and uphold the cultural pattern of femininity as delicate, gentle and sensitive and treat their rapid decision-making as impatience;
- men's attitude towards women in the context of mutual cooperation — different assessment of their own and men's work. The assessment of women consists of two assessments: the assessment of the cultural shaping of femininity and the assessment of substantive work. Women also feel protectionism from men, disrespect, envy and jealousy about achievements;
- beliefs about women and men as bosses — a female boss is more concerned about work organisation and teamwork. Some women cannot imagine 'managing a man'. Women also often use non-substantive arguments and psychological games, which makes some women prefer male bosses;
- the status of male and female solidarity — there is often strong male solidarity and a lack of female solidarity, which may be due to the lack of women in positions dominated by men. And if there is already a group of women, rivalry begins instead of building solidarity.

From another perspective, perhaps it is the women themselves who are to blame? Observation shows that the key barriers to women's job promotion are a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as submission to opinions and prejudices of the environment. Well-known surveys show that almost half of men consider themselves to be exceptionally or very ambitious, with only one-third of women thinking so, although this percentage is growing consistently, especially among those working in business, where 43% of respondents admit to having a high level of ambition. In the race to the top, they therefore lose out to men, even though they are well educated and have the knowledge and skills to hold key positions in companies.

5. Conclusion

In the recruitment process, and later when applying for promotion, a woman will hear that it is not a role for her, that women are not good leaders, directors, etc., or that such a role will make it worse for her to function as a mother, there is a great risk of launching a negative autostereotype. Indeed, women will be worse off in competitions or assessments, because there is stress that they will confirm this stereotype, and they will not be good enough as managers, and at the same time, they will become worse mothers. It may also be a desire to prove to men that in a managerial role, they are as good as men are. This willingness to prove their competence, as well as additional pressure, results in less concentration and attention to the task. In such cases, women do in fact perform worse, because additional thinking about the

difficulties arising from their role reduces their ability to process data. It is, to some extent, women's own responsibility not to let themselves and others run a stereotypical pattern of their gender in an emotionally difficult situation, but to concentrate on their achievements and successes — trying not to think of themselves as simply a woman but as a person who has experience and will cope with the task ahead of her (Raport..., p. 14).

Due to the above, there is a lack of consistency and ambiguity in the approach to a professional career pursued by women in managerial positions.

The results of research conducted by Deloitte, supported by numerous analyses, indicate that stereotypes and lack of understanding of the benefits of their participation in management have a significant impact on the poor position of women in company management. However, the research also shows that men are better promoted as those in power — due to the extortion strategy they use to build their careers in companies. Even in top managerial positions, men do not stop applying pressure, fighting and breaking resistance. On the other hand, in relations with subordinates and co-workers, chairwomen and female board members behave differently — they use consultations to inspire the team and use methods of rational justification. They apply them much more often than men in similar positions (Frańczak, Georgijew, 2012, p. 17 & next).

In recent years, a new phenomenon has been observed with regard to those women who have already taken up top positions in a company. However, these successful managers often leave the company despite being at the top and start their own businesses. This escape from the highest levels to their own business is called a *careerpreneur*, *corporate incubator* or *corporate climber* (Terjesen, pp. 246-259). The most common reasons for women leaving a company are wage inequality, frustration with organisational restrictions and the need for greater flexibility (Vinnicombe, Bank, 2003).

When considering the professional career of women, it is worth noting that they are often assigned to support functions jobs and are rarely in positions directly linked to executive decision making. Women are assessed on the basis of professional skills, not managerial skills, and this is the direction in which their careers are most often shaped from the very beginning. At present, a number of measures are being undertaken in order to equalise the rules of functioning of women and men in business. The evolution of the management approach will make it possible to achieve an effective balance in managerial positions, which will save a lot of frustration for ambitious and successful women not wishing to lose their femininity.

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