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Women Participation in Latin America: Mexican Women in Managerial Levels and Board of Directors of the Organizations

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Abstract

This article pretends to spread the evolution of women participation in the work market. Latin America's and specifically Mexico's situation is analyzed by exposing some obstacles and limitations which women can find during their professional careers. Female leadership is described as an option to participate in managerial levels and boards of directors in the organizations, with a possibility to exercise an influence on culture configuration, hoping to gain representation that helps to promote family-work conciliation.

Keywords

Women, Leadership, Management, Latin America, Mexico.

Introduction

Every time becomes more and more transcendental and important to consider the theory of gender in order to analyze social processes. This is due to the interaction and collaboration of men and women in activities and development of experiences, that integrate and make the structures and situations of the actual world.

Brigida García (1999), quoting G. Rubin (1975) (pioneer developer of the concept of gender), sustains that gender is “the social and cultural construction of sexual difference, speaking about a set of symbols, representations, rules, norms, values and practices that every society and culture builds collectively starting from the corporal differences between men and women”. (P. 23)

It has been established in a very precise way that gender is made and produce not only by symbols and regulatory elements, but also through institutions and social organizations, such as labor market, education, politics, etc.

The concept of ‘gender’ has been defined as a social construct, and derived from it men and women do not have the same rights and obligations because of their differences. Therefore the concept of gender equality is removed and

replaced by the concept of equity. The objective should be to search for key elements that allow us to have more equal coexistence rules; a life together where sex differences are recognized and not used to generate inequality.

Women participation has increased derived from cultural changes due to globalization, and also due to acquired knowledge among different countries about equality and gender equality. It's very noticeable that there is a greater level of women participation in different fields such as education, politics, cultural and work market in general.

Nevertheless women participation in work market has its greater share in middle management and below, instead of high level management. This situation is constant in the case of first class countries and also in developing countries, but in the case of developing countries this is worse. And the Mexican case makes a good example.

There are many reasons as to why women do not have a bigger participation in high level management. We can't affirm the existence of some inherent discrimination in organizations structures and processes that women come across during their professional development. Not many women have been able to access high level management positions, which makes relevant to identify the cause.

Factors that limit and promote the participation of women in the work market have been identified through the evaluation of their professional careers. Almost 20 years ago there were very few written references about professional success of women. Theories about performance were based only on men working experiences, which suggested the definition that professional success is obtained only through an uninterrupted professional path.

At present this theory has been evolving and specific characteristics from the female gender have been considered <marriage and maternity>. These characteristics must be considered as present throughout the whole development of women professional career, because women combine personal and family goals. (Lirio, et al., 2007).

Gender Theory

Gender theory¹ sustains that differences between men and women, their functions and roles, do not come from their sexed nature but from social constructions created artificially through culture influence. Actually this could be one of the causes for women discrimination.

Theory of gender has a great influence to analyze problems outside the biological ground, and understands differences between genders from a symbolic point of view. Questions postulates about women subordination, shows its mechanisms and allows to delimit clear and precisely how these differences come into a dimension of inequality, games of power and counter power. (Cazés, 2004).

By the end of the 60's – first in psychology and then in the field of social sciences, it was accepted that sex is a biological reference upon which is built the inequality between men and women. The concept of gender became a

¹ Gender implies the roles and responsibilities that women and men have which are determined socially. Gender relates to the way in which women and men are perceived and are expected to think and act, due to the form in which society is organized and not for their biological differences. (Cazés, 2000).

necessity and it was created to designate whatever was built by societies, and in their cultures to structure relationships between men and women.

Due to the fact that the first approach came from feminism, the term gender was used to avoid the word feminism because it evoked very radical postures for some persons and entities. In this way government and management speeches began to assume that whenever gender was mentioned it was in reference to women and certain actions directed to improve situations lived by them. (Vega, 2006).

Women have made intellectual and political interventions in the last decades. These interventions have created conditions and possibilities to resolve strategic needs and transform the foundations of inter generic and intra generic relationships. (Which mean relationships among men, among women, and relationships among women and men)

Theory of gender allows to present societies and cultures as a whole, and at the same time every person involved in its processes, women and men. This is also the starting point for gender perspective by undertaking research and change actions. This is a theory that searches to understand the world of gender relationships and also to transform it. (CEIICH [UNAM], 2007).

Gender equity

The development of the theory of gender has evolved from the necessity of equity among men and women, to the necessity of equity among themselves.

OCDE (1998) defined gender equity as “the equal joy of men and women upon socially worth goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. The purpose is not to make men and women equal, but that their life opportunities become and remain equal”. (COSUDE, 2003 p. 9).

Gender equity is a human right. If social structure and power relationships are not equal cause that women and men do not enjoy the same socio economical and political rights.

The promotion of equal rights for women and men do not try to impose a universal model for gender relationships that comprehends all societies and cultures. Its goal is simply to allow women and men to define gender equity, for which they aspire in an individual context. (López, et al., 2003).

Gender equity through empowerment for women and men can be the key for good government. So that women and men have the same rights they must be able to participate in the decision taking process.

By supporting equal participation of women and men in the decisional structures is allowed the definition of priorities and development strategies, and this will contribute to reduce underlying inequality. By recognizing the

contribution of women and men as individuals and economic players in society is obtained a key element for sustainable development. (COSUDE, 2003).

Female Direction

The challenge face by women to participate in the work field starts at the end of the 60's and beginning of the 70's. The importance of this challenge resides in it being the origin of women's actual challenge: to win representation in fields that give them the opportunity to take decisions that transcend to business and political fields.

En 2008 the European Union [UE] informed that in the most advanced countries of Europe and continental countries, 50.8% of women work outside their home, according to the information provided by 2006 census. The goal established in Lisboa's agenda is that by the year 2010 all countries that belong to the UE reach 60% of female work presence.

Italy is ranked in the last place of female work presence. Some countries that give opportunity to women to work half days like Holland present 36% female work presence, 21% in Germany and 15% in Italy. (Biffi et. al. 2008)

Considering that women's participation in the work market is a trustworthy fact, it's important to comment that their collaboration in the organization can't be limited to middle management. The access to high level management positions for women must be nurtured, and this should include positions of greater scope, size or importance.

There is a great variety of academic and intellectual capacities that can make a contribution, for example women sensitivity working together with men practical style of traditional leadership. A combination like this could be a good decision designed to improve results. (Müller & Rodney, 2007).

There is certain management competencies that are related among them which reflect success, this performance can be seen in different positions and in different kind of projects. It's very important to make the analysis of competencies for the selection process of people that will fill the high level management positions.

Different styles of managerial leadership are adapted to multiple situations. Each type of leadership is considered and analyzed in order to adapt it for a specific context and performance, female leadership should be considered and analyzed in the same way. There has been a lot speculated for female leadership, the objective is to identify what makes it different from masculine leadership.

Authors like Loden Marylin (1987), state that some persons consider the term management and female as opposite, even excluding. The concept of female management has been taking form since a few years. It was necessary to rescue individual capacities from many women managers that have had a great performance in some organizations and have given their subordinates a sense of membership.

So that the women's effort was recognized and they had the possibility to develop themselves to the fullest, there was a transition period. Women's capacity was well known but still they have to prove it through results in the organizations.

Each leadership style (masculine or female) has its own strengths which can contribute to the success of the organization. When they are used together represent an integral system of management that is able to take advantage in a better way from all human qualities.

According to Juddy Rossener (1990), after making a study and perform interviews to a group of women executives in E.U., women described themselves as transformational leaders, which means, they bring their subordinates to exchange personal interests for those of the group.

Another characteristic is that women justify their power in organization by their personal skills more than by their hierarchy in the organization, this is the so called 'interactive leadership'. On the other hand men identify their leadership by the way they see their own work, this is defined as 'transactional leadership', interaction with subordinates is done through a series of operations. Normally transactional leadership uses the hierarchical level and the authority that comes with it in the organization. (Taracena, 2006).

News about women in positions of power are more and more frequent, expectations about women arriving to positions where they have the opportunity to obtain power and authority are greater. Also is more frequent that women arriving to these positions are observed as normal, and are not demanded to be the best.

In many occasions the demands towards women are greater than those demanded from men. This is a fact that can be used as an indicator for gender equity in leadership, as this perception is exceeded we can maintain that in society in general and specifically in the organizations equity is being achieved.

Female management is very relevant, valid or meaningful, represents a different style of leadership as known in society and this is the very reason that women face so many problems. Women presence in high level management can promote flexibility and settlement for family-work politics. Only if there is a representative number of women in the organizations they can work as change promoters. (Mayo, 2007).

In some organizations there is conscience about female management as an alternate managerial style. Women do not try to compete with men and succeed, if women try to act using the traditional masculine leadership style they could stop being efficient as leaders.

The advantage of women consists in reinforcing their inborn qualities, instinct and natural female characteristics. The real challenge which was spoken at the beginning is to win places and positions by promoting the female style of leadership. Showing the unique way in which they can be recognized by their performance and their achievements, in addition to the fact that this could be seen as an achievement of gender.

We have to admit that could be a variety of leaderships, which will allow the organizations to find the flexibility needed to adapt to an environment more and more competitive. Actual board of directors are better informed than in the past, and possess a broader criteria to evaluate high level management actions. Therefore is even more urgent to include women in this management circle to provide a complementary style 'female management' that will help and serve to better face commercial and organization demands.

Feminism versus female management in Latin America

Woman freedom consists in accepting and founding her differences with man. There is a real contrast between woman and man, which is seen from the perspective of life in their reciprocity and collaboration. Future for man and woman is based on these differences and person evolution. (Lobato, 1995).

The old biological determinism that stopped so many women from developing their talents has been eliminated. Nevertheless the objective should be to avoid the promotion of official feminism that promotes gender destruction, women do not need to change and give up themselves, but keep on making things in her female way. (Conde, 2000).

The rise of women participation in the work market of Latin America has been an important factor in the last decades. Some of the reasons was the economic crisis that affected Latin America during the 90's, due to the effect that this crisis had upon family income, besides increasing urbanization and feminism penetration of the third sector of the economy. (López et al., 1992).

Starting in the 80's we can notice a new tendency in women participation in economic activity. In the last three decades the number of women economically active grew 120.2% which exceeds by much the growth of economically active women seen across the world. (OIT, 1980).

There is a study trying to explain which causes motivated women massive incorporation into the work market for Latin America and the Caribbean. As an answer to this questioning, in an investigation conducted by the ECLAC in 1986, it is recognized that many achievements were the result of exogenous processes of strategies aimed specially to include women in the benefits of development.

Change processes that favored women in health areas, education and well-being started before than the plan for regional action approved in the Habana in 1977. This plan represented Latin America and the Caribbean awareness about the necessity for government and organizations participation in favor of women integration.

The advance towards equity has been considered as one of the principal axis in economic development for Latin American (Daeren, 2001). Equity is defined as "equal opportunities to participate in the acquisition of well-being, positions and social possessions". (López et al., 1992, p. 25).

In the tenth regional conference on woman of Latin America and the Caribbean, Ecuador (2007), participant countries spoke about subjects like the necessity to evaluate and undo negative effects of structural adjustments for paid and non paid work. Two subjects of strategic importance for the region were analyzed: a) Politic participation and gender equity in process of decision taking at all levels; and b) women contribution to economic and social protection. This was considered especially in relation to non paid work, by recognizing that equity is one of the main promoters for democracy. The aim of democracy is to analyze equity in the exercise of power, in the decision making process, in the participation mechanism, and in the social and political representation.

Women participation in the work market of Mexico

Women participation in the work market is considered one of the main revolutions of XX century's second half. In Mexico the proportion of women inside the working population doubled in the last 25 years, from 20% in 1970 to 40% for the year 2006. (Zabludovsky, 2007).

Equal opportunities and gender equity is one of the main challenges of Mexican society, this is established in the national plan for development 2006-2012, and this is also a main goal in the business area. This challenge has an even greater importance in this globalize world where knowledge, talent, experience and vision are pieces fundamentals to be more competitive.

Women incursion into the work market has given rise to many changes in attitudes and behavior in social, economical and political circles, as in the organization of work, social and family life.

Table 1 shows the participation of women in the work market according to the pay received. In the year 2005 daily minimum wage [MW] in Mexico City was of \$46.80 (CONASAMI, 2008), which represents approximately 4.29 USD (CEFP, 2008). It is presented also the percentage of women that held high level management positions in 2005 and their pay for such positions.

	% Women	% Men
Working women population.	39.5	60.5
Men and women that earned less than a MW.	63.2	36.8
Men and women that earned more than 5 MW.	28.7	71.3
HIGH LEVEL MANAGEMENT POSITIONS		
Employees and managers	28.9	71.1
Employees and managers that earned more than 5 MW	24.8	75.2

Source: Adapted by Zabludovsky Gina. (2007) Mexico: women with high level management positions in the private sector. Academia, Latin American Magazine of Management, 38, p. 9-26 and the INEGI National survey of occupancy and employment (2005). ANUIS (2005), Statistic Yearbook.

TABLE I. Percentage of women participation in the work market in Mexico and the percentage in high level management positions.

In agreement with Jennifer Cooper (2005), women discrimination is perceived since the moment of hiring. Wage discrimination, in spite that law establishes that men and women should perceive equal wage if they perform equal jobs, in real life it is very rare to see it fulfilled.

It has been confirmed one of the most common positions in which women earn less than men are government positions. Women are discriminated the most in these positions, but also in the private management and industrial supervisors. There is a big wage difference of up to 45% percentage in relation to men's wages that hold the same positions, according to the INEGI² in the survey 'Occupancy and employment' made in 2002.

It's important to mention two huge achievements that women have conquered in the last two decades which will play an important role in history. Besides women's participation in the work force, women participation in education; this is evident because of the level of formation that women have reached. Women participation in the work market has been determined in a very important way thanks to this formation.

Work force and education are the two important fields where women have gained a significative presence. Women have been granted with the opportunity to show their capacities by performing activities of greater importance and transcendence in public life, and not only in the private field.

At present, some women find themselves in the process of climbing to higher positions. This makes urgent to satisfy the necessity of identifying and evaluating the reasons that make only a minority of women to occupy high level management positions.

Women that have reached these positions and overcame all obstacles can provide us evidence and knowledge about the capacities, values and varied factors that have made possible their professional development.

There are some answers as to why women do not reach the highest executive level. For example the crystal ceiling³; but other studies like the ones made by Eagly & Carly (2007) confirm that the answer goes beyond the crystal roof, and added the sum of many obstacles along the way.

This means that women are not being rejected at the very end of their race, but in several points along the way that should bring them to the highest executive level.

There are other reasons that have contributed to the slow development of women inside organizations. For example some studies suggest that there is little work flexibility. Most managers limit their professional activities to their

² Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI). National Institute of Statistics and Geographic Information.

³ The term «crystal ceiling» "is used to illustrate the fact that if there no objective reasons for women not reaching higher positions, and men reaching them instead, we can speak about discrimination within the structures and processes. This discrimination would be present in the organizations as well as in society in general. Women that are prepared and are very competent can not but look through this crystal roof, they can see what they are capable to achieve, but unable to pursue it due the invisible barriers that stop them". Wirth Linda (2002)

office schedule, which in time yields a full surrender to their jobs; but this is in counter position to the double life that some women must live.

In spite that women learned to organize themselves and became more efficient to finish their tasks earlier and find time for their other responsibilities we could still speak about two kind of women segregation in the organizations. As was spoken in Ecuador in the tenth regional conference about women in Latin American and the Caribbean (2007) there is a horizontal segregation when women are separated from some production sectors, and a vertical segregation when women are separated from higher levels of responsibility in the occupational hierarchy.

Horizontal segregation is important for the representation of women in several economic sectors, this implies women preparation in different specific areas and their presence in every field; but all of this achieved without losing the woman essence.

Vertical segregation can be included in horizontal segregation speaking about hierarchy positions in the participation sectors. But the most important is the evidence of difficulty that women find to get promotions, which is translated in lack of female presence in high level management positions where women could demonstrate their competence through role fulfillment.

In order to define competencies we need to speak about education, learning implies knowledge that will render new behavior focused on goals acquisition (Alles, 2000). When we transpose these new behaviors to management women could contribute to success if their personal goals are aligned with the organization goals.

Some organizations are proposing to evaluate an equal number of female and masculine candidates in order to evaluate competencies before deciding who will be hired for a responsibility position in the organization.

Women are making big efforts to achieve high levels of preparation, and the good news is that every day there are more means to accomplish it. In Mexico during 2004 women represented 50.9% against 49.1% of registration for a management degree. This could make us think about the level of demand that women impose on themselves, and about the great wishes that women have to participate and grow in a work environment. (Zabludovsky, 2007).

1 Conclusions

- 2 Women participation in the work market is an underlying fact. Women have conquered important positions at an international level, and the participation of the female gender in the decision taking process has contributed to greater levels of development.
- 3 Some countries (depending on context and culture) have taken conscience in different proportion about the importance of female gender participation. Women's performance in various management positions has provided credibility and confidence to assign them tasks of greater importance and transcendence.

Information access allows the female level of preparation to grow constantly, therefore yielding better preparation and training to perform in specific positions of high level management. Even if women have all the knowledge required to participate in public and economic activities, they are still a minority compare to masculine participation. Therefore the proposal consists in discovering the causes and reasons for which female management can not be considered a substantial element in high level management positions.

In a specific way for organizations, this means to give women the opportunity to access positions of greater responsibility. This also means that an organization will understand gender categories as a part of management exercise, including all relations derived from genders, power exercise and organization structure.

The road to professional development for women has and has had obstacles and limitations. But this hasn't been an obstacle for some women to achieve professional success, at present we want to promote the possibility of participation in the board of directors and high level management positions, establishing gender equity as a principle to achieve better results.

Lack of equity and inequality between men and women of Mexico represents a permanent source of family and community conflict, which is a real obstacle for social and economic development. In the last two decades there have been several studies that have contributed to close the gaps for issues like gender discrimination, maternal death toll rates and women participation in the work market.

Considering all of these, the main objective for organizations that are guided under strategic management and an efficient management control should be to institutionalize contribution of female gender to economic development. Any sign of discrimination and any obstacle base on gender should be eliminated in order to guarantee equality and equity of opportunities, in this way all women and men should reach their full development and exercise their rights equally.

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