

Chapter 57

Analysis of Gender Equality in Higher Management Levels: A Study Model

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this chapter is to undertake a critical analysis of the current situation concerning the equal treatment of female managers in Spain. In this chapter, the authors analysed the dynamics of business behaviour in order to understand why inequality of women managers for gender reasons persists in spite of the anti-discrimination measures recommended by the legislative framework in place. This analysis has allowed proposals for measures to be drawn up to be taken into account in designing human resources strategies, based on systems of management by competencies and assessment of managerial performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The economic participation of women is essential in shaping the economy of a country, not just for reasons of equity and equality, but also as a strategic question. According to the resources and capability based view (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1985; Rumelt, 1987; Conner, 1991), the human

capital of business organizations, comprised of a combination of people's skills, knowledge, and reasoning and decision-making abilities, constitutes the main competitive value of firms (Grant 1996). Societies that do not use the talent of half the population carry out an allocation of resources that is not efficient, grow less and put their competitiveness at risk.

However, the inequalities between men and women continue in the business world, related

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to their access to employment, vertical segregation (“the glass ceiling effect”), (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990), differences in pay or inequality in working conditions.

In Spain, Law 3/2007 establishes a regulatory framework that obliges organisations to adopt equality of opportunity as an objective to be pursued. Nevertheless, in spite of this initiative, statistics show that the problem persists. Paradoxically, since this law came into force, there are some cases where the percentage of women has stabilised or even diminished. In addition, three new matters for concern emerge:

- According to Amuedo (2007), it is becoming extremely difficult to find women willing to belong to Boards of Directors, for fear of being regarded as “quotas”¹. This phenomenon could spread to the rest of the organisation, self-exclusion appearing for certain promotions in level, because of identical reservations.
- The confusion between “equality” and “positive discrimination” has popularised the idea that the current context offers opportunities to women *at the cost of men*. In the words of Gómez-Mejía the “*beaten man syndrome*” (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007). As a consequence of this situation resentment arises, anxiety increases and prejudice grows amongst those who feel threatened. A greater proportion of men perceive these measures in terms of a threat than do women. They believe that currently they are discriminated against by measures favouring women, that they have fewer employment opportunities and that they are paying for the consequences of a situation in which women suffered from discrimination in the past.

In these conditions it seems clear that the Law, even though it may help to correct certain

deficiencies, is not as effective as it aims to be. It is necessary, therefore, to understand what the dynamics of business behaviour are that can cause the phenomenon of the “glass ceiling” to appear in promotion to management and, on the basis of this understanding, propose policies for action that allow organisations to exploit all their managerial talent, independently of whether this talent is possessed by men or women.

2. DIAGNOSIS OF THE SITUATION

The inclusion of women in paid employment is one of the great achievements of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the situation in which women have been included on equal conditions is yet to be reached.

A longitudinal analysis shows the progressive inclusion of women into the labour market. In Table 1 it can be seen that the female employment rate has increased by more than 20 percentage points in recent years, in a clear trend towards convergence with the male rate.

Nevertheless, trends and scrutinising data are different things. It is true that, in percentage terms, women have been entering the labour market in an increasing proportion, but it is no less true that their numbers continue to be below those of men (Table 2).

It can be seen from the data in Table 2 that the activity rate as well as the occupation rate is lower in the case of women, while the only figure that is higher is the unemployment rate.

This difference between trend and reality is a common denominator in the analysis of the labour market at the moment. Generally, it can be said that different inequalities persist: (1) at entry level (2) in promotion and (3) in salaries.

1. Inequalities at entry level, or horizontal segregation. Data gathered by the latest survey of the active population warn us of the persistence of this inequality at the

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