

CHAPITRE 2

Profiles of female leadership. The results of the “she business” project

Carmen GALLUCCI

*Associate Professor of Marketing and Corporate Finance –
University of Salerno*

Rosalia SANTULLI

PhD in Marketing and Communication – University of Salerno

Giuliana SACCA

Consultant

Francesca SACCA

Cognitive behavioural psychologist - HR performance consultant

Introduction

“Even though progress on equal opportunities is slow, women’s lives are very different in positive ways in 1985, from 20 years before” (Marshall, 1985). Already twenty-five years ago, Marshall pointed out how the role of women in society was changing, highlighting a trend, born in those years, that has never stopped and has come down to our day in continuous evolution. Indeed, over the past twenty years, women have put beside to the role of mother and wife, the role of worker and entrepreneur, taking on increasing importance in the creation of new businesses, necessary for the development and economic growth (Acs et al., 2005; Langowitz and Minniti, 2007). The woman is the emerging power of the twenty-first century and she is revolutionizing the way of producing wealth globally. The redemption of the female figure from a position of marginality is taking place anywhere in the world. Although a true gender equality has not been achieved yet in any country,

significant results have been achieved in many areas of the world (World Economic Forum, 2005).

In Italy, women lead the 25% of businesses. The Observatory on women of UnionCamere indicates that the «pink» firms increased by more than seven thousand units, compared with 2011, and highlights that they record a growth rate of 0.7%, against 0.2% of their male colleagues. The growth of female firms is a common characteristic of all Italian Regions and, mainly, it involves service industry (UnionCamere, 2012). Firms with a high number of female managers and with a strong presence of women show profits almost double respect to a traditional company. Therefore, today women do not appear as vulnerable subjects «to be protected», but they seem ready to lead the challenge of shooting with responsibility and trust.

It emerges a picture of a dynamic reality, made up of companies that are born, grow and harden over time. However, the increased presence of women appears to be almost insignificant when compared with the presence of male heads of enterprises. Female quotas are increasing in absolute terms, but it will be some time before it is completely smooth out the gap in participation and representation of women in the labor market, management and governance. According to some authors, this issue makes it necessary the gender research. Indeed, in Italy, there is a persistent marginality (4%) of the role of women in leadership positions (Report on Progress on Equality between Women and Men, 2010). The reasons for this are multiple, related to cultural, social and legal (Greenglass and Marshall, 1993; Davidson and Burke, 1994), but also related to the processes of assessment and recruitment adopted by organizations. Indeed, Alimo-Metcalfe (1993, 1994, 2010), supported by empirical findings, argues that women are already in disadvantage before they enter the enterprise, because the evaluation criteria, the choices of relevant attributes and the selection processes are generally a prerogative of the male. Therefore, the main hamper to the growth and the entry of women in business is the belief that women are not able to occupy certain positions of power, due to their nature, (Acker, 1990; Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Heilman, 2001). This injury prevents them upward mobility (Ely and Padavic, 2007). For this reason, they often have to combat with a hostile work environment (Kossek et al., 2003), that hinders them because of accepted and shared stereotypes (Ely, 1995; Schein, 2001, 2007; Eagly and Carli, 2003).

In spite of this, women has been able to distinguish for the extraordinary creative talent, tenacity and determination, that have led to increasing attention about an economic phenomenon which can help to give concrete answers to the crisis, as

moment of rupture compared to traditional cultural models. The woman in the enterprise is a perfect synthesis of elements, which can determine the success of the business, if they are combined and focused properly. In particular, the attention to people, the enhancement of human relationships and their own working group, together with the dedication and determination to carry forward their ideas contribute to the success of the path taken. The woman is extremely flexible, versatile, and multitasking, addicted to run at different aspects of the daily life at the same time. This circumstance makes the woman suitable to work especially in small businesses, where the synthesis of emotional and relational behaviors represents the best way to manage firm and family in a “work&life balance” perspective. Nevertheless, what are the leadership styles adopted by women? How can they be improved? With the aim to answer these questions, the “She Business. Leadership & Self-empowerment” project was born. The project was carried out in collaboration among University of Salerno, Confindustria Salerno, and Commerce Chamber of Salerno. It investigated the leadership styles adopted by women in Province of Salerno (South Italy). Specifically, the project started from listening to the needs of a wide community of women leaders, and then it has implemented a training program for a select group of them. The participants were involved in 40 hours of experiential learning with the aim to train their soft skills, after which they received their personal and professional profile, drawn by a team of psychologists and experienced trainers. The entire training program allowed to measure the changes recorded by participants in terms of problem solving, organization, leadership, and communication abilities and permitted to define different leadership profiles adoptable by leader women.

2. Leadership and gender diversity

In the vast literature about leadership, its interpretation in terms of gender has been addressed with some delay with respect to the emergence of the issue. In fact, with the expression «leadership gender» you will allude to the exercise of different styles of leadership on the part of men and women (Gallucci, 2010).

Alvesson and Billing (1997) have returned all contributions on the issue of differences and similarities between the sexes in the exercise of leadership in two distinct areas of study: no difference and gender stereotypic difference. Later, a revision of this distinction was proposed, as well as the addition of a third area, based on the studies conducted by researchers in both social psychology and management. The contributions in the area “no difference” highlighted that in

male and female styles of leadership there are not significant differences (Dobbins and Platz, 1986; Powell, 1990; Eagly et al., 1990-2003). Instead, the contributions in the area “gender stereotypic difference” underlined significant differences between sexes, supporting the value added of women’s style of leadership. Finally, the third area includes the most recent studies (Piccardo and Baiunco, 2007) and goes over gender differences. Indeed, Piccardo and Baiunco (2007) wonder about the existence of possible conditions and situations that make it different and more effective leadership styles for men and women. The intent is to detect specific organizational contexts in which leadership styles of women and men are different and / or less effective.

You go from a consideration of the role as leader exclusively male (Miner, 1993), a vision that sees leadership a variable dependent on the context and, in this perspective, the stereotypes of women that enhance the natural predisposition to collaboration, mentoring and relations could be most appropriate. Indeed, today technological acceleration and the emergence of increasingly complex scenarios, due in part to the globalization process, have revealed the presence of a dense network of relationships that is becoming increasingly important for business performance. The ability to manage this network of interconnections is often recognized as a successful factor and the most appropriate answer for this aim could be the “transformational leadership”, the style of leadership adopted mainly by the women and addressed to create trust and sharing. Instead, the “transactional leadership”, the style of leadership associated to men, is characterized by a mutual exchange and is crystallized around the status of the leader.

The existence of specific mindset associated with each genre leads to the conclusion that the «communal» peculiarities, which are considered typical of the female, should not be deemed exclusive, but can be taken by men precisely because leadership emerges, ultimately, as a highly dynamic process and subjective (Kaputa, 2009). However, very often, we tend to associate male features to the figure of the leader and, women have to deal with a difficult obstacle for this reason (Eagly and Carli, 2004). They play a dual role: the figure of a woman, which people see closer to the behaviors «communal», conflicts with the common expectation that would her «agentic» in her role as a leader, developing a series of prejudices.

The genus is a widespread and shared construct that identifies the characteristics of men and women, creating a situation of inequality that is based on these differences (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999). Moreover, gender diversity contribute to develop expectations of status, defined as the position within a social group, which is reflected directly in the relational processes and leadership. Given that

the context is the key variable in determining the best type of leadership, the origin of this bias can be searched in the fit between gender difference and the requirements of the leader (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Leadership roles, associated with male stereotypes, according to convention, represent a huge challenge for women who are perceived not suitable to hold that position. This bias sometimes restricts the possibilities for the female to access to these roles, and undermines the effectiveness of leadership because the followers are less likely to recognize the status of leader (Carli, 1999; Heilman, 2001). Sometimes, the women are forced to achieve and maintain consistent over time performance better than the males, in order to preserve this role.

In conclusion, if the gender diversity does not show large differences in the positions of leadership and does not contribute in identifying a style of leadership better than another, small elements of diversity, albeit tied to individual and occasional components, may have deeper implications and create a scenario much more complexes.

2.1 *Cognitive and behavioral aspects*

Over the years, a lot of studies have shown that men and women are intrinsically oriented to think and behave differently; in this sense, neuroscience have provided and continue to propose detailed material in spades. The conclusions, drawn from large number of scientific studies, reveal that intelligence has no gender (Manzelli, 2004), but that the differences between men and women are qualitatively interesting. These differences give an explanation of how certain brain functions are differentiated to characterize a complementary behavioral production in the male and in the female, and not only to make them merely different; this means that the brain of men and women may have the same capacity, but they «process» the information in a different way (Battaglini and Bianco, 2002). Internalizing inclinations and capacities is shown that it is more «equipped» to deal with the changes that need for adaptive behaviors and at the same time proactive and anticipatory, in order to be managed effectively. It is possible to understand how and how much the study of the differences between the sexes are aiming to investigate what are the areas more activated in men, as in women, to establish that there is a real dislocation skills, using neuropsychological, biological, medical, cultural and sociological compasses. Even today, in many areas, when you think about women, their contribution is not meant as a stand-alone, characterized by its uniqueness, but is conceived as something opposed and to diversify the provision of man. The identification with a

range of behavioral patterns of male (not the emergence, not being respected as men) has become the benchmark for evaluating the performance of all professional women. They are strongly influenced by this constraint, especially in the world of management, where women have brought a repertoire conative cognitive, and emotional unlike that which the male world was accustomed to. Over time, the weakness of women are been transformed in strengthens and consequently the female emotionality, the tendency to a high level of involvement in the problems, the active listening skills, emotional capital, a verbalization attentive to people and details are become election, almost indispensable for the transformation and improvement of organizations.

These skills, linked to women have been the subject of ongoing study by scientists, sociologists and psychologists. A different type of intelligence has arrived in the firms; personal awareness and self-management, social awareness and management of interpersonal relationships (Goleman, 1997) compose it. Many of these skills, called "transverse", found a thorough explanation even by neuroscience, and showed a better performance when performed by a woman. In women, the frontal lobes, brain areas delegated decision-making processes that coordinate the short-term memory, planning and evaluation procedures to achieve a goal, are affected by intense brain activity, and have a thickness greater than that recorded in men and is also well connected to the limbic area, the seat of emotions. Therefore, the processes of decision making in women can boast a better and greater connection with the emotional aspect, willing to use, predominantly, a region larger than the cortex. All psychological orientations recognize the emotions are an integral part of the rational mind and not foreign to it. Leaders must learn to trust intuition to access your personal and professional baggage, in light of the fact that the circuits involved in more complex decisions are not those of the areas that govern the verbal skills and rational, but those that affect our feelings (Goleman et al., 2002).

Decision-making style of women is more independent of the context; women test situations more emotionally and are more easily new strategies (Goldberg, 2010). According to the neuropsychologist Ruben Gur, the female brain, in a quiescent state, has an activity of 90%, confirming that women receive and constantly analyze information coming from the outside world. They have the ability to carry out multiple tasks at the same time, because the thickness of the corpus callosum in the brains of women is more complex. This would allow the two hemispheres to communicate with each other more easily, allowing the woman to make more mental operations in parallel (this typical function of the right hemisphere). In addition, women in the distribution of gray matter is more symmetrical, and the white matter

has a higher amount of fiber connection between the two hemispheres, which again suggests a better transmission and functionality of the two hemispheres (Battaglini and Bianco, 2002).

3. *The “She Business” project: concept, methodology and aims*

Following extensive reflection about the female leadership style, the “She Business. Leadership & Self-empowerment” project was born. At a preliminary stage, the project aimed to investigate the current leadership styles adopted by women leaders of Salerno, and then it developed a training program that involved, in plenary and individual mode, a part of them. The purpose of the training was to enhance the inner resources of the participants, through improved knowledge and self-awareness, facilitate the capitalization of the strengths and help them to define an image consistent and effective. Specifically, the training enabled the participants to train the soft skills and pack a proper balance of skills through assessment activities, training and coaching.

The project was articulated in two phases:

- The first one, conducted on field, had the aim to analyze the leadership orientation of women leader in Salerno;
- The second one, designed to impact directly on empowerment staff, was implemented through a learning program, divided into ten meetings.

The first phase was in preparation for the planning of training, it has served to better understand the needs of learning, in terms of strengthening the self of the subjects investigated, to outline paths of development through intensive and innovative formulas to which the interviewees could take side.

The second phase involved the participants in the experiential learning program in 10 meetings. The first and the last were structured as assessment. During these two meetings, the trainers dispensed to participants some tests (questionnaire on Emotional Intelligence and Social – Negotiation test– QMSL - Leadership test to multiple sections - POLC test). The aim was to detect the level of possessed and act soft skills, with a particular focus on the leadership at time 0, before participating in the course, and at time 1, at the end. The psychologist trainer prepared the entire kit of tests; she was able to proceed with the dispensation in the classroom and with the next phase of exploration of the findings, then creating a detailed critical analysis of the results.

The other eight meetings were aimed to strengthen, through learning by doing, participants' soft skills: problem-solving, organization, leadership and communication skills, by using the P.O.L.C. method (Saccà and Saccà 2010). The P.O.L.C. method (acronym of Problem-solving, Organization, Leadership, Communication) configures as a logic of continuous improvement for personal and professional development. The adoption of this model assumes that the achievement of personal and professional objectives should take away from the adequate definition of the problems (problem solving), passing through a functional allocation of tangible and intangible available resources (organization), ending with an efficient team building, or construction of the working group (leadership), and effective team working (communication).

Specifically, the experiential training program devoted two meetings in every single area of POLC. Each meeting provided the front steps and stages of active listening and interactive applications and followed the same pattern of activity. In particular, in every meeting was provided to the participants a packet of theoretical study (She Room), in which trainers summarized the main issues and the main techniques, useful for training in each skill. A scene from a movie was projected (Form-Film) to facilitate the understanding of the salient features of a skill and its proper management. The FormFilm aimed to solicit the attention in the delicate transition from the theory to the practice, in order to increase the active involvement of participants. The participants were involved in laboratory activities (Workshop), dedicated to the implementation of the presented techniques, through individual and group tests in team building and team working mode. Each participant applied the lessons learned, competing in the simulation of real situations and enhancing their skills, putting into play and exceeding their limits. The tests were also carried out in role-play mode to simulate real situations in an ideal environment, for example, the proper organization of a meeting or the appropriate management of conflicts and objections. It was a way to meditate on their company and identify the critical decision-making and creative problem solving. Moreover, during the training, the participants were involved in Brainpower activities, for enhancing brain through mental training. The participants were lowered into the almost surreal situations to enhance the awareness of participants compared to the level of «multiple intelligence»: logical/mathematical intelligence, linguistic/verbal intelligence, visual/spatial intelligence, kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, inter-personal intelligence (Gardner, 1994). Finally, at the end of each meeting, all aspects covered were collected in the «tool box» for the ongoing monitoring of their level of experiential learning and to allow participants to the memory

of their activities. The toolbox symbolizes a wish to «bring along» the upper value of the meeting, to implement it immediately in daily work.

Based on the full path of the participants, it was possible to draw a personal and professional identikit, able to return the results and the redemption effects achieved as a result of participation in the project.

3.1 *Characteristics of participants*

The sample undergoes training consisted of 29 participants. In relation to marital status, it appeared well balanced between married and unmarried, the latter had 1 child on average, in line with today's trends related to births and the average number of family members, which allows the woman not affect his working career in the family name. The sample recorded a high educational profile, as many as 83 % said to have at least a degree. The high level of education becomes a tool for a mature awareness with respect to the ability to create the right balance between personal and professional life. This balance has enabled the participants to gain a managerial role in their firms. Indeed, the main positions held, on average by a number eight years, were «function manager or CEO of a company», career profiles that certainly can not disregard a maturity of role and an identikit personal - professional integrated. A balanced profile is certainly the result of a key orientation in lifelong learning that characterized all participants, as witnessed respect to the viability of the variable «professional development». According to this variable, the 72% have attended training courses, manifesting a predilection for the following areas of interest, with the respective percentages of satisfaction: team working and team building 86%, 57% outdoor and communication, skills assessment 46%, 32% experiential training, time management 25%, 7% creativity.

3.2 *Profiles at time 0 and time 1: A Comparison*

The participants had a mature profile even before taking part in the project. Indeed, they recorded a redemption rather than positive POLC * Test time 0, (Problem Solving 75%, 69% Organization, Leadership 69% Communication 69%) and were maintained at Time 1 (Problem Solving 77%, 67% Organization, Leadership 70% Communication 70%). The differences between time 0 and time 1 are in the order of unity, a change in the normal-value, considering starting such high scores. However, the average percentages have shifted from one area to another of self-empowerment. The figure that has received much interest is the -2% in the organiza-

tion, in favor of areas more focused of intra-and interpersonal intelligence, such as leadership and communication, both with a +1%, demonstrating that participation in the experiential format is in strengthen the group dimension. The participation to “She Business” project allowed the participants to strengthen those areas that generally the classroom training sacrifices in favor of a more targeted training for skills acquisition techniques that the enrichment of so-called soft skills.

The results of the Questionnaire of Emotional Intelligence and Social, compared at time 0 and time 1, comforted the fact that the participants had focused effort of the entire change on strengthening the soft skills that best spend the relational dimension, after their participation in the learning experience,. All co-factors related to emotional intelligence (self-awareness, managing emotions and self-motivation), together with those relating to social intelligence (relationship management and management of other people's emotions) result enhanced.

The negotiation test has indicated that the area of interpersonal skills, where you spend traits related to leadership and communication, seems to have been greatly affected by the change generated against the participation to the format. The number of participants characterized by a high profile negotiation is almost double, and more specifically from 43% (time 0) to 84% (time1).

The QMSL made it possible to investigate the levels of stress of the participants, in order to understand possible variations of the same before and after the learning process. In general, there has been a reduction, albeit small, of the levels in almost all intrapersonal indicators, considering the starting levels recorded at time 0, below the threshold of restraint-stress that is not functional. As a result of the learning participants have been shown to govern effectively the factors related to relationships with others and the factors related to career development, as well as those related to the organization of work. In general, we can say that the participants do not seem to be affected by stress resulting from role nor by stress factors intrinsic to the job, though with small distinctions emerged in each case.

Finally, the Test of Leadership in multiple sections has investigated the privileged dimension of observation by studying the attributes, skills and competence with respect to the general style of leadership acted. Compared to the 19 dimensions aimed to investigate the profile of leadership possessed and acted, the classroom, calling on them to express in self-assessment, expressed in time «0» an average score of 76%, which reflects the value of self-efficacy than remarkable. Self-efficacy at time 1 is improved by 7% with an average score exactly equal to 83%, demonstrating that experiential learning paths favorably effects on the personal

and professional change. In particular, areas «open-mindedness» (the level of accessibility to new ideas), «integrity» (intellectual honesty and loyalty), and «energy» (strong dedication to work) have achieved higher scores. They are all dimensions predictors of skills and abilities in preparation the formation of a leadership profile integrated. In particular, the profile of leadership possessed and acted was found to be mainly of a strategic (as opposed to the operational and / or team) to 96% of the participants. A strategic leader that is characterized by 10 key skills, ranging from long-term planning for the proper management of resources, focusing on the results from the ability to drive change through a strategic thinking. These skills have been added and enhanced as a result of the training, ones own operating a leader or an effective business orientation, the ability to act on attitudes and behaviors of employees in general management and people development, as well as itself.

A further observation is achievable on the ideal vision that the participants had to have completed at time 0 and time 1 with respect to the idea of an authoritative and effective leader. The participants were asked to identify, with respect to a checklist default, the main keywords matched to the figure of the leader. «Charisma, decision making and responsibility» represent the prevailing associations to outline the profile together to «encourage, listen, delegate,» intended to be the main activities in which the leader is called. A leader qualified to be «intuitive, coordinator, collaborative, encouraging, and reliable». An analysis of these cross-terms, whereas those who received more preferences in the three main categories (nouns, verbs, adjectives) can ensue an accurate identikit: a trusted leader, relying on the charisma that knows how to listen and delegate, and facilitate decision-making. Interesting is to note that in the face of the route took place, ideal-typical dimensions such as charisma, are complemented by dimensions that are more pragmatic. «Control» comes out which keywords privileged to witness how this learning can promote a greater awareness of their own role, to ensure that it is interpreted with a more keen sense of the government. Equally interesting is to note that if at time 0 the preferences with respect to adjectives related to the profile of the ideal leader is distributed on more ideal-typical characteristics, at time 1, they acquire a more tangible aspect. Indeed, 54% of participants selected the keyword «agent for change», returning to its role as an orientation, not only strategic, in terms of the leadership of the group, but operating. In conclusion, the "She Business" project seems to have strengthened the sense of leadership of the participants, making them more aware of the tasks related to the role and linking them to a more human dimension of caring people, that case did not favor

the keywords «attention to the feelings of others. The leader becomes the one that empathy is gained by leveraging the legitimacy of the role that allows him to be an agent for change and check the orientation.

4. Results and conclusive discussion

The objective of the research was to understand the style of leadership acted by women leaders in the Province of Salerno. Through the aid of a matrix that intersects on the X axis the size of the behavior and on the Y axis the dimension of attitude (the first corresponding to an action, the second to an intention), it was possible to delineate different profiles for each quadrant in which to place the individual participants.

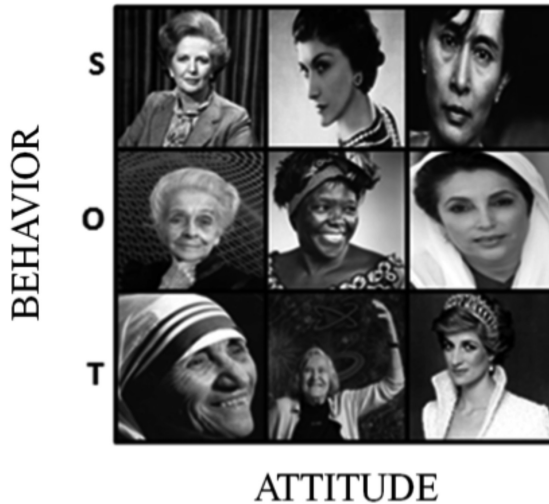
The two variables arise from the administration of the test of leadership in multiple sections, It allowed to identify three different styles of leadership (strategic, operational and team) which are associated three different levels of empowerment.

By crossing the two dimensions could be identified nine different profiles:

- 1.** Madre Teresa* : A woman working on long-term development of the capacities of employees, helping them to identify the size and dimensions of excellence for improvement. It has the ability to interpret the needs of the group and channeling energy, to promote relations between members and the connections with the external environment, respecting the individuality and taking upon himself the responsibility for their actions.
- 2.** Margherita Hack: A woman who works with others in order to get the best and use multiple skills to make sure that people have enough tools and skills to develop performance wait;
- 3.** Lady D: A woman who, in the short term, proposes friendly and pleasant, where collaborate becomes motivating as the work itself. She focuses on the emotional needs of individuals, and considers them priority over quality standards. In the long term, she creates involvement and consensus, sharing objectives and decisions.
- 4.** Rita Levi Montalcini: A woman who knows how the company works and what are the processes that lead to the achievement of objectives; she gives people a leading role in organizing project, sharing information and values. She has ability to catalog, sort, program schedule according to a method developed and tested; shows a great tendency to transform the action plans in concrete behavior.

* Each profile has been associated with the name of an important woman in history, politics or science.

- 5.** Wangari Maathai: A woman who has the ability to identify individual elements of a problem distinguishing them according to their importance and proposing solutions, preparing business plans and organizing resources and procedures; she assists the whole assigning tasks and responsibilities and using properly and efficiently available resources, while respecting the constraints of time/cost.
- 6.** Benazir Bhutto: A woman who has the ability to use resources in the most efficient way to achieve the goals set. She draws attention to the organizational climate, demonstrates corporate values by example, maintaining a harmony between all stakeholders. She has skill of active listening and guidance to the empowerment of others.
- 7.** Margaret Thatcher: A woman who gives directions and precise guidelines on how to carry out the work, exercising strict control over the activities; she defines priorities and schedule resources to achieve the strategic and economic objectives; has an excellent overview, backed by the ability to make timely decisions under uncertainty and sometimes with the presence of constraints also important.
- 8.** Coco Chanel: A woman who gives the team a long-term orientation. She is able to interact with the community outside and inside, due to some key skills: vision, dialogue and trust. Manages the complexity of the organization by focusing on the goals. Knows how to manage the change with open-mindedness. Achieves the goals with high standards of excellence personally intervening and acting as a model.
- 9.** Aung San Suu Kyi: A woman with credibility and consistency. She has known the concepts of urgency and importance. Is able to assume the risks of a typical business, is tenacious in achieving the goals, and is able to influence his vision with others.

Fig. 1 – The nine profiles of leadership

At the end of the “She Business” training program, the participants are placed mainly in the upper part of the matrix, appearing as strategic and minimally operative leaders. Instead, the three quadrants referring to team leadership were empty. This circumstance was not surprising because “She Business” worked a lot on strengthening the self, with the objective to define and upgrade for each woman a style of leadership acted knowingly. The training program intended to train the abilities of each, strengthening their problem-solving organization and communication skills. It postpones to a future path of experiential learning the strengthening of the leadership of the participants in teamwork.

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