Good example of thesis proposal on women in leadership positions in private organ...

Introduction

The modern times and the increased participation of women in the labour market formulate a consistent discourse for gender equality that shapes the social, economic, political, legal and technological spheres across the world. The prevalence of the feminist discourse currently focuses on equal organizational opportunities between men and women in the workplace, targeting equal payment and equal career development opportunities. Although women work shoulder to shoulder with their men counterparts in public and private companies, there are still visible discrepancies, mostly related to the leadership positions, which are still considered more suitable for men, since they are dominating the occupancy of the managerial roles. In fact, in European Union the business environment shows that only one in six women are members of boards in the top publicly quoted European companies, while only 4% of them are part of board chairpersons (" Gender Balance in Decision-Making Positions", 2014).

Research Question

As the feminist discourse becomes more consistent and effective every day, what stays in the way of women having an equal presence with men in private companies' leadership positions?

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research proposal is to outline the discussion that will be developed within the research paper, on the women in leadership, in a private organization perspective. The research paper's aim will be to identify

the challenges and difficulties that women face in their quest for landing leadership positions within private organizations from EU and specifically from United Kingdom. Aligned with this aim, the objectives of the research paper will focus on:

- Discussing about leadership in the organizational context;

- Evaluating consistent data, reports, available legislation and business procedures that promote or hinder gender equality in leadership roles in EU in general and UK in particular;

- Identify why there are currently less women than men engaged in the leadership roles in EU in general and UK in particular;

- Present a vision on how women's presence in the private companies' leadership positions can be increased in the upcoming period;

Literature Review

Studies on leadership suggest that leaders are persons who have the power to motivate, persuade or influence the behaviours and actions of the followers (Hogue-Werhane and Painter-Morland, 2011). In the light of the current discussion about women's sub-representativeness in the leadership roles within private companies a discussion is required for understanding whether leadership is gendered.

Studies indicate that women are more likely than men to exhibit transformational leadership qualities (Kruglanski and Tory Higgins, 2007). This implies that women are more driven towards achieving organizational change and towards challenging the traditional structures, imposing creative and innovative working solutions (Isaksen and Todd, 2006).

Recent studies indicate that companies which allow higher representation of women in the senior organizational levels register improved financial performance (" Women in Economic Decision-Making in the EU", 2012; " Women on Boards, 2011"). A logical argument for this situation stays in the fact that 60% of the university graduates nowadays are women, who gained knowledge and skills that qualify them as reliable professionals for the business environment (" Gender Balance on Corporate Boards", 2014). A UK study indicates that taking advantage of the female talent is a matter of adjusting to the rapidly changing market demands and of maintaining corporate competitiveness (" Women on Boards", 2011). However, not many companies take advantage of the skilled women human resources to increase their performances. In many developed countries, the senior executive leadership roles are still guided by the traditional perception according to which leadership is a manly trait, emphasizing qualities such as physical and emotional toughness, self-reliance or heroism (Vinnicombe, Singh, Burke, et al., 2009).

Therefore, a significant barrier standing in the way of women moving up the corporate ladder is the traditional perception according to which men are more suited for the leadership positions due to their toughness, while women's soft skills are more associated with the execution roles. Or, as Hogue Werhane and Painter-Morland (2011) indicate, it seems that the reason of the male dominance in the leadership positions in private companies throughout the world stays in the fact that the global society is still entrenched in gender stereotypes; according to social gender stereotypes, the man is the " bread-winner", while the woman is the wife

and mother caring for the domestic space. This gender stereotype perpetuates gender discrimination in the workplace, blocking women's advancement in the leadership functions. In fact, Kruglanski and Higgins (2007) explain that women are exposed to biased perception and treatment in their leadership roles, according to which they are either expressing soft skills specific to women or they are changing behaviours becoming manlier. The authors explain that in both situations women tend to be criticized for either being unable to address the organizational matters with toughness, as men do, or for losing their femininity (Kruglanski and Higgins, 2007). In this context, women negotiate their leadership qualities and behaviour, while coping with the biased treatment coming from their male counterparts.

For combating the biased and discriminatory behaviour that private companies apply on women who aspire at the leadership positions, there have been issued legislative and political acts to encourage a fair recruitment process, allowing women real opportunities to land leadership roles. As such, in European Union the following legislating pressures were made upon organizations to ensure a gender neutral recruitment process for leadership roles:

- Strategy for Equality between Women and Man 2010 – 2015 issued September 2010, produced an increase of women's representatives in leadership positions reaching 11, 9%;

- Call for Self-Regulation Women on the Board Pledge for Europe placed on March 2011, achieved 13, 7% women representation in EU states organizational leadership roles;

- The Progress Report Self-Regulation (2012) indicates no visible results, as

only 0, 1% increase is achieved within one year;

- Legislative Proposal ensuring that women receive a fair chance in the recruitment process for organizational leadership roles, issued in November 2012, generates visible results; in October 2013 the women's representation in the leadership positions within EU states' organizations reaches 17, 8% (" Gender Balance", 2014).

Aligned with these efforts to increase women's representativeness in private organizations' leadership, UK studies recommend establishing of a policy meant to delineate measurable objectives regarding the boardroom diversity, which to be included in the UK Corporate Governance Code (" Women on Boards").

Methodology

Research Design

The study will be constructed on a qualitative research design, developing a literature review based research, investigating the political and legal guidelines, recommendations and regulations issued at EU and UK level regarding women in leadership roles. Likewise, the literature regarding leadership behaviour, traits and expected outcomes will be assessed in order to evaluate women's suitability with this role. The investigated documents and reports will be summarized and illustrated in the actual research paper, allowing for the elaboration of a structured field of knowledge regarding women in leadership positions in EU in general and in UK in particular.

Analysis

The gathered data will be submitted to an epistemological analysis, allowing the proponent of the research paper to draw a conclusion regarding the challenges and barriers that women face in increasing their representativeness in the private organizations' leadership roles across EU in general and UK in particular. The sociological discourse analysis method should be applied for investigating the increasing gender equality formal activist efforts and the outcome of pressuring the private companies to increase the women's representativeness in leadership roles.

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