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ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN SENIOR-MANAGERS IN KAZAKHSTAN: EXAMINATION OF LEADERSHIP ROLES, UPDATING EVIDENCE AND RESEARCH AGENDA

The article aims to update the evidence and to diversify the research agenda on leadership roles of women senior-managers. This research work draws attention to the essential gap in the research of women as senior-managers and organizational leaders. In the first place, it notices that while the conceptualization of leadership has expanded to define leadership from interpersonal to organizational influence, the research on women leadership has not updated accordingly. The article claims that research agenda on women in organizations overlooks examination of women as senior-managers and respectively overlooks understanding of the leadership roles that women perform to organizations. Second, the article aims to examine and update the evidence as per the interplay of gender and women senior-managers' leadership roles in organizational context. Namely, the research examines how women senior-managers perceive their leadership mandate, and whether organizations enable or constrain it. Results of the 21 in-depth semi-standardized interviews identified three distinct leadership roles that women senior-managers perceive as requisite for the roles of senior-manager. That is followed by a discussion of implications for organizational leadership theory and organizational routines.

Key words: women senior-managers, gender, organizational behavior, leadership roles.

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Қазақстандағы жоғары буын басшы әйелдеріне ұйымдастырушылық көзқарас: көшбасшылық рөлдерді зерттеу, эмпирикалық базаны және зерттеу тәртібін жаңарту

Бұл ғылыми жұмыс жоғары буын басшы әйелдердің және ұйым басшыларының зерттеулеріндегі екі кемшілікке назар аударады. Біріншіден, көшбасшылықты тұжырымдамалаудың айтарлықтай кеңеюіне қарамастан – көшбасшылықты өзара қарым-қатынастың тұлғааралық үдерісі ретінде түсінуден көшбасшылықты ұйымдастыру үдерісі ретінде түсінуге дейін – ұйымдардағы әйелдерге қатысты зерттеулердің фокусы тиісті түрде өзгерген жоқ. Ұйымдардағы әйелдерге арналған ғылыми әдебиет жоғары буын басшыларының ұстанымындағы әйелдерді қарауға арналған зерттеулерді ұсынбайды және тиісінше әйелдер басшы ретінде орындайтын ұйымдастырушылық рөлдерді зерттеуді ұсынбайды. Екіншіден, мақала гендер, ұйым жүйесіндегі басшы әйелдердің көшбасшылық рөлі сияқты құрылымдарға қатысты білімді зерттеу мен жаңартуға бағытталған. Атап айтқанда, зерттеу басшы-әйелдер өз көшбасшысының мандатын қалай қабылдайтынын және оның іске асырылуын қалай ұйымдастыру факторларына ықпал ететіні немесе шектейтіндігі туралы сұраққа жауап береді.

Түйін сөз: әйелдер жоғары буын басшылары, гендер, ұйымдастырушылық мінез-құлық, көшбасшылық рөлдер.

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**Организационный взгляд на женщин-руководителей высшего звена
в Казахстане: изучение лидерских ролей,
обновление эмпирической базы и повестки исследования**

Данная научная работа обращает внимание на два пробела в исследованиях женщин-руководителей высшего звена и руководителей организаций. Во-первых, несмотря на существенное расширение концептуализации лидерства – от понимания лидерства как межличностного процесса взаимоотношений до понимания лидерства как организационного процесса – фокус исследований относительно женщин в организациях не изменился соответствующим образом. Научная литература, посвященная женщинам в организациях, не предлагает исследований, посвященных рассмотрению женщин на позициях руководителей старшего звена и, соответственно, не предлагает исследований организационных ролей, которые женщины выполняют в качестве руководителей. Во-вторых, статья нацелена на изучение и обновление знаний относительно таких конструкций как гендер, лидерские роли женщин-руководительниц в системе организации. В частности, исследование отвечает на вопрос о том, как женщины-руководители высшего звена воспринимают свой мандат лидера, и каким образом организационные факторы способствуют или ограничивают его реализацию.

Ключевые слова: женщины-руководители высшего звена, гендер, организационное поведение, лидерские роли.

Introduction: conceptual shift in leadership definition

This article addresses the gap in existing literature regarding leadership behavior of women senior-managers. Multiple research evidence identified that women have been linked to relational, interactive, nurturing style¹ of leadership. The explanation for such evidence was derived from a combination of social expectations that organizational participants prescribed to a woman's leadership styles and congruence of internalized preferences for relational styles by the women themselves.

This article was developed for several rationales: the societal notion of leadership has changed; organizations have great diversity in the configuring their design and work structuring; and there are ongoing transformations in the status and roles of women in organizations and wider in society. Despite of the changing social features, the research of leadership style have frequently focused on interpersonal leadership, in line with the prevalent definition of leadership as interpersonal influence. Najmaei (2017), however suggested that leaders' functions in organizations have expanded. At the level of senior-management, leadership has become charged with the performance of the entire organization, its culture, design, identity, and achievement of the organizational goals

(Najmaei, 2017; Montgomery 2008; Simsek et al. 2015; Quigley and Hambrick, 2014). Research on women's leadership from this senior-managerial perspective is scarce and fragmented. Women report that conventional perspective on their leadership behaviors remain: Women leadership behavior is being assessed either congruent or diverging from the interpersonal relational style, with no account given for the changing organizational and societal realities. This research aims to explore what leadership roles women realize in the modern organization, and discusses the implications of the findings to the trajectories of leadership and gender research.

Women leadership in organizations: identifying research gaps.

Gender is defined as a social construct which entails certain social conditions on an individual, a carrier of that gender, in regard to a self-identity, behaviors and life choices. Gender identity had established as deeply internalized, collectively shared system of beliefs and practices, which inscribe status and identity of women and men in organizations too. Research evidence suggests that women's identity in organizations is persistently viewed through the lenses of relational behavior and relation work orientation. By the end of 1990s, the leadership styles research had formed a noticeable narrative in the women in leadership research. Specifically,

¹ style =persistent pattern of behaviors

the research work focused on expressions of transformational – transactional typology, and task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviors. Burns (1978), Bass (1985), Bass and Riggio (2006) outlined conceptualizations of *transactional* and *transformational* leadership styles. In transactional paradigm, they see leadership influence as a result of a leader's application of rewards and disciplining actions. Bass (1985) concluded that transactional leadership was instrumental and did not address identity and value change of neither leaders nor followers. Transformational leaders aim to intrinsic motivation, shared values and visions, personal growth and empowerment, and addressing individual needs. Leadership then was largely understood as an interpersonal influence, thus leader's behaviors were seen in the context of leader-follow interactions. Nonetheless, at least since mid-1990s, the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research predisposed view on leadership as an organizational process: they too identified production-oriented and employee-oriented leadership approaches, but made general references between leaders behaviors and organizational leadership roles formed of those behaviors. While production oriented style aimed to clearly structure the tasks, employee-oriented aimed to facilitate group cohesion and performance.

Results of the literature on women in leadership identified gap in research of women as organizational leaders and respectively on their leadership roles. The results of the literature review suggest that in terms of women senior-manager's leadership behaviors, the existing research strongly tend to focus on relational behaviors of women leaders. Rosener's (1990) seminal work on 'ways women lead' explicitly attributed interactive, inclusive, sharing, and highly relational style to women. In line with Burns (1978), Rosener used term 'transformational style' to describe women's ways of leading. It is important that Rosener (1990) made two other statements: that not all women organizational leaders would necessarily exercise transformational style; and that women may apply relational behavior to create a 'forum for people to interact'. The latter essentially transcends the notion of what relational behaviors of women leaders mean to the whole organization. From the organizational perspective, women in that case facilitate a sort of an organizational structure, or an organizational process of certain properties which play a role in the mode of operation of the whole organization. Eagly and Carli (2012) point out that women organizational leaders have shifted away from transactional-transformational dichotomy and have

embraced complex and versatile behaviors while fulfilling organizational leadership roles. Hyde (2005), Rhode (2017), Zheng et al (2018) assert taking a well-rounded, unbiased view at women's mental and behavioral repertoires that they actually exercise as organizational leaders – would provide women and men, researchers, and society at large with better guidance as to establishing fairer and happier organizations.

Research Method

In order to avoid premature assignment of theoretical frames to the research finding, the leadership behavior were studied in frames assigned by women themselves. Specifically, women were asked open ended questions focused on their leadership experience as senior-managers but not on gender. The responses were analyzed to identify the main themes and data structures, after which findings were discussed in relation to the results of the literature review. This inductive, interpretative, phenomenological method of extracting meaning authentic to the lived experience of study subjects is appropriate for developing new conceptualizations (Gioia et al, 2013). In depth interviews, recommended data collection tool for the chosen method, were conducted with purposive, maximum variation sample of 21 women senior managers from organizations in Kazakhstan.

Research Context

The literature regarding management styles and leadership practices mostly stems from cross-cultural leadership and management research. This literature locates Kazakhstan within the Eastern European cluster of countries (Hungary, Russia, Kazakhstan, Albania, Poland, Greece, Slovenia, Georgia) with similar cultural values, managerial practices and beliefs about effective leadership behaviors. This cluster was first identified in the GLOBE study (House et al, 2004) and has been reinforced by several similar studies (Chhokar et al., 2007; Javidan et al., 2006). According to Bakacsi (2002) the cluster is characterized by a high collective orientation in organizations, formal task-oriented relationship between managers and their followers, structured organizational processes, and is relatively high on performance orientation. The analyses of the world-wide evidence concerning women in organizations suggest that relations between gender and organizations are quite comparable to those

in Kazakhstan: some industries and professional occupations encourage more women, whereas others more men. The representation of women in senior-management is comparable to the global average – in 2018 women heads of the organizations comprised 23-29% depending on the sector in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2017; WEF, 2018) compared to 24% globally in the same year (Grant Thornton, 2019).

Sample profile

The sample comprised 21 interviewees. The age ranged from 32 to 64, where of 1 interviewee was of 64 years old, 5 interviewees from 56 to 59, another 5 interviewees from 44 to 49, 1 interviewee of 42, 2 interviewees of 34 years old, 1 interviewee was 32 years old, and 6 interviewees did not disclose their age. Ten women had experience as senior managers from 10 to 20 years, 6 had experience as

senior-manager from 6 to 8, 1 person had 4 years, 2 interviewees – 3 years. In the sample, no strict pattern was observed concerning the relation of age and years of experience in senior-managerial role. Although the youngest participant had the least number of years as a senior-manager and the oldest – the largest number of years, it appeared that women can enter senior-management at any age. Educational profile included 6 people with bachelor degree, 7 masters in various fields, 6 masters of business administration (MBA), and 3 women with a PhD degree. In the sample 5 women were simultaneously founders of the company and senior-managers. Industry and occupational profile was varied too: interviewees came from health sector, education, sports, mass media, beauty industry, ITC, city administration, construction, financial services, video and musical production, fashion retail, audit and strategy consulting, culture and arts, entrepreneurship support.

Table 1 – Sample Characteristics

N	Age	Years of experience as senior- manager	Education	Occupation/Sector
1	44	4; 15	MBA	Health, Media
2	34	3	MA	Sports
3	undisclosed	3	BA	ITC
4	49	14	PhD	Education
5	42	13	MBA	Education
6	undisclosed	13	LLM	International Sports
7	64	25	BSc	Healthcare
8	undisclosed	7	LLM	Public Administration
9	44	15	MBA	Finance
10	58	8	BSc, BA	Public Administration
11	46	6	BA	Housing and Construction
12	undisclosed	12	D.Sc	Entrepreneurship Development
13	34	7	BSc	Communications and PR
14	59	13	PhD	Culture and Arts
15	57	15	BSc	Construction
16	undisclosed	4	MSc	Health
17	undisclosed	12	MA	Video and Music production
18	52	8	MA	Construction
19	45	17	MBA	Investment and Commercial Banking
20	59	20	MBA	Audit and Strategy Consulting
21	32	6	MA	Fashion Manufacturing

Findings: From leadership styles to leadership roles

Women perceived their leadership as of a strategic character. All women recognized the demand to provide an essential impact to organizations and their environment. They also admit the intense and increased complexity and uncertainty involved in leading the modern organizations. Women respondents perceived importance of interpersonal behaviors, especially to lead their followers' team. However, they made most essential emphasis on the strategic perspective—they perceived their leadership roles to establish an organizational culture that will encourage recognizing employees' contributions and initiatives. Unlike the stream of literature on leadership styles which mainly associate women managers with exercising 'nurturing', 'relationship-oriented' style, the respondents did not conceptualize leadership as mainly interpersonal influence. Instead, women respondents expressed a strategic view on relationship-building. They explain that human capital is a strategic asset which, in order to be competitive, has to be skillful, agile, able to learn, loyal to organizational strategic objectives and share organizational values. Women respondents see their roles as facilitators of high-performing organizations, where performance results from a combination of interconnected leadership practices and institutionalized human resource management processes. Women respondents emphasized their role as designers of work processes whereas perceived their interpersonal leadership as manifested in being a role-models. Neither transactional nor transformational nor shared paradigm applied in the way Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) conceptualized them. The data analysis suggests that extant literature pays insufficient attention to women senior-managers as leaders over organizations in all their complexity. The data analysis suggests that women realize interpersonal influence through a mixture of both transformational and transactional behaviors, whereas essential focus of women senior-manager's attention is on an organization's system-building, an organization's performance management, visioning, addressing external and internal uncertainty and complexity, strategy-formulation and achieving strategic organizational objectives. Specifically, empirical study identified three generic leadership roles as perceived by women respondents—*non-routine: leading over complexity and uncertainty, performance-oriented and partnership-oriented*.

Non-routine role: leading over complexity and uncertainty

The first emergent conceptualization identified leadership in terms of findings ways for organizations and its members to handle uncertainty and complexity. Women respondents perceived uncertainty and complexity both internal and external to their organization. Leader's sensemaking of uncertainty and complexity appeared as a key leadership role; and as a key success factor according to which women respondents assess their effectiveness as leaders and senior-managers.

In line with Zaccaro and Klimoski (2001), the sensemaking, including sensegiving emerged as a central leadership roles in order to design strategic problem-solving framework. Thus, leadership effectiveness was perceived in terms of identifying new directions, scanning changing environments and identifying goals accordingly, and meaningfully communicating those strategic directions to followers and other internal and external stakeholders.

Women respondents referred to sensemaking as both a source of ambiguity and as a strategic opportunity. The centrality of sensemaking and sensegiving function for strategic leaders is highlighted in literature. Zaccaro and Klimoski (2001) emphasized the non-routine essence of leadership, that leadership roles appear in response to non-routine organizational demands and constraints. Mumford et al (2008) also suggested that emergence of leadership roles is a responses to situations with unclear goals and unspecified path. Notably, Barkema et al (2002), Schneider and Somers, (2006), Uhl-Bien et al (2007) concluded that contemporary organizations are less structured, more fluid and transitional therefore leader's sensemaking processes become a factor of greater influence to the organizations. Whereas Weick et al (1995) suggest that sensemaking is rather a collective process where leader captures and communicate meanings emerging from the processes, Hambrick et al (2007) emphasized that leader's and top-management team's sensemaking outcomes eventually shape all aspects of the organization. The results of data analysis suggest that women respondents perceived themselves as active thinkers, who are aware of their role in shaping the leadership processes in the organizations and outcomes of such. In summary, leadership literature support conceptualization of non-routine leadership as key organizational leadership role.

Performance-oriented role

Second conceptualization of leadership roles by women respondents emerged as managing organizational performance. Despite that extant literature did not attribute transactional and task-oriented style as characteristics of women managers – the empirical study suggest that all women respondents perceive goals and task accomplishment as a critical indicator of leadership effectiveness. According to them, a leader who is not able to accomplish specific goals and tasks does not qualify as neither leader nor senior-manager. Women leaders perceive they are responsible of ‘make organizations perform’ toward achieving of organization’s strategic goals. Women suggest that they realize this role through strategic management that is structuring organizational processes and resources; setting performance standards and enabling people to perform effectively within those structures and up to those standards. In this way the role perceived of a strategic level, and is equally transactional and transformational. Women respondents emphasized that human capital plays an important role in maintaining high-performing organization, thus they emphasized (a) importance of their personal skills and the ability to adjust behavior to the demands of the situation: and (b) their role in facilitating their continuous learning as well as continuous learning of all organizational participants.

As concluded, unlike literature on leadership styles (Eagly et al, 2003; van Engen et al, 2001), the results of data analysis suggest that women respondents apply relationship-oriented, task-oriented and any combination of them depending on the demands of the situations. Analysis of the extant leadership literature identified Performance-Maintenance (PM) Leadership theory by Misumi (1995), Misumi and Peterson (1985) who concluded that leader’s effectiveness in some organizations was understood in terms of facilitating organizational structures for collective performance. The leader realized both of the following dimensions with equal importance attached: maintenance role called for leader’s efforts toward achieving managerial objectives, whereas performance role characterized leader’s effort to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the whole organization. Misumi (1995) confirmed that those two leadership roles emerged universal in all organizations in his international studies, thus implying that conceptualizing of leadership in organization was not bounded to two forms of leader’s interpersonal

influence. Charbonnier-Voirin et al (2010), Liao and Chuang (2007), Yukl (2012) suggested to explore transformational leadership as multilevel construct, where the nature of transformational influence is not conditioned by interpersonal leader-member exchange only. Transformational leaders operate at interpersonal and collective levels, and even facilitate organizational structures to ensure transformational effects of followers. The data analysis results came out as highly supportive to such a levelled approach to transformational leadership. Women respondents perceived that they realize transformational influence through direct leader-member exchange to their supervisors, other senior-managers in top-management teams, and their direct subordinates. Whereas in relation to other organizational participants transformational they lead by being a role-model and by facilitating appropriate organizational processes.

Partnership-oriented role

Respondents perceived the demand of engaging stakeholders that women respondent strongly associated with their leadership roles. Women tended to seek both internal and external stakeholders in form of establishing collaborative partnerships. Women respondents perceived collaborative partnerships as a mutually beneficial exchange practices where mutual accountability and respect is emphasized. External stakeholder management was emphasized as a peculiar leadership role of senior-managers. The particular challenge was perceived due to the increased sophistication of intra-organizational arrangements.

Two aspects on which all respondents agreed – effective stakeholder management is one of the key indicators of leadership effectiveness; as well as a critical area where leader’s development efforts had to be undertaken. Overall, women conceptualize partnership-building in more strategic frames such as collaboration of strategic stakeholders in order to advance the organization’s performance and competitiveness. In this way, the data analysis supports literature positing collaborative stakeholder management as an increasingly important leadership role of the senior-managers (Bass, 2007; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001; Christensen et al, 2014; Waligo et al, 2014; Reypens et al, 2016).

In relation to internal stakeholders i.e organizational participant in addition to mutual accountability and mutually beneficial relationship women respondents highlighted teamwork where everyone’s contribution is recognized, co-

development and greater inter-connectivity. Women respondents associated partnership as important enablers of effective leadership.

In relation to the internal stakeholders the emergent partnership-oriented conceptualization combines behaviors identified with transformational and shared leadership paradigm (Pearce and Conger, 2003; Arnone and Stumpf, 2010; Carson et al, 2007; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Similar to Reypens et al (2016) women respondents see their leadership roles as establishing better connectivity in organization.

Of three emergent conceptualizations, the partnership-oriented conceptualization appeared the only one to address the effects of gender socialization as described by Eagly et al (2003). The results provided mixed responses regarding whether women senior-manager tend to be more comfortable with relationship-oriented behavior or indifferent to it. Overall, respondents perceived partnership-oriented as a strategic leadership roles of senior-managers, where leaders are seen as facilitators of mutually accountable and beneficial collaborations with external and internal organization's stakeholders.

Women, Gender and Organizations

Findings of the research have been insightful in revealing the effects and roles that organizations can have on transforming gender in societies. Respondents expressed that in their view organizational processes and culture tend to become more employee-centered in generally, with more attention given to the entirety of employees' demands. Women suggest they found useful presence in organizations of such practices as flexible work time, provision of sport, cultural and health services to an employee and a family, individual development plans and mentorship programs. Their experience provided mixed opinion as to how the programs are responsive to the specific needs of women and how women themselves and organizations can avail themselves to these opportunities. Women express similar opinions regarding the managerial, leadership, professional and soft-skills development programs. In majority, respondents were in favor of all-genders format, without differentiating for special training for women-only. Having positively assessing this developmental focus, women respondents pay attention on the need for more nuanced approaches

as to how to implement them. Respondents suggest that on part of the women themselves clarity is needed as to what their priorities are and initiative to realize those priorities. On the part of organizations, in addition to formal policies for fair treatment, actions to ensure humane communications, inclusive and just mode of interactions have to be taken.

All respondents noted that the societal attitude to the professional women who are senior-managers has been transforming: There has been more positive and appreciative narrative about women in management, and professional women overall. It has been noted that not only media coverage but professional forums and public conferences have become more inclusive and seek women stories and expertise too. All respondents observed that the public perception about women senior-managers as role-models have amplified. Especially, the respondents reflected on the public resonance of Sheryl Sandberg's and Nell Scovell's book *'Lean in: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead'* (2013) and subsequent initiative of operating lean-in cycles. In the book Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook COO, draws on empirical evidence and on insights from the personal experience in order to deliver some advice to professional women how to accommodate their work and non-work choices. Not being strictly a research work, not claiming any theoretical validity, Lean-In has elevated in public eye the challenges that women in organizations face while becoming and sustaining as organizational leaders. Respondents noted that women leadership roles of senior-managers in the ongoing societal context has become strongly connoted with being a role-model, a mentor, a spokesperson. Respondents' opinion is mixed – whereas some of them consider this role as authentic and important to their identity, other respondents suggest that they prefer to stay distant from a gender discourse. At the same time, all respondents agree that the societal notion on women in senior-management have become more approving of leader's integrity and authenticity, as well as leader's visionary and transformational abilities. Overall, more research is to be done, as women suggest that whereas organizational approaches to gender have been marked with progress in terms of gender equality, the societal processes of gender construction are increasingly fragmented and ambiguous.

Table 2 – Summary of findings

	interpersonal domain	strategic domain
leading organization	gaps in conceptualization	non-routine sensemaking performance-oriented partnership oriented
leading people	nurturing, transformational interactive (Rosener, 1991) adaptive (Rosener, 1991)	Adaptive empowering role-models
social expectations and expected role congruity	operational relational	lean-in purposeful effective role-models

Conclusions

The study supported the claim that women senior-manager perceive their leadership behavior as a strategic, entailing a diverse range of performance oriented, sense-making and partnership oriented behaviors. The study generated unintended insights as for changing expectations of women as leaders by organizational participants and by women senior-managers themselves: while expectations of women senior-managers as a role-model for other women have become more pronounced, women senior-managers have mixed opinion on acting as role-models. Last, the findings support the claim to expand theorising on women leadership in organizations: Exploration of women senior-manager's performing organizational leadership roles have revealed that research on women senior-managers will have to account for the organizational approaches to (a) ways of construction or deconstruction of gendered influences and (b) construction of the senior-

manager's mandate including a mandate for leadership roles.

Appendix 1 – Interview questions

- Can you please describe your typical day at work?
- What are the leadership components of your role? /How do you experience your role as a leader?
- Do you perceive any differences in your responsibilities /accountabilities, supports and constraints in capacity of senior manager as compared to those of entry level manager?
- What are essential demands in your leadership role and essential behaviors to meet those demands?
- What are essential constraints in your leadership role and essential behaviors to overcome those constraints?
- Could you please give short assessment of the impact you have created to the organization? By which criteria do you evaluate your effectiveness as organizational leader?

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