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Depreciation of women's competence in Polish organizations

Introduction

The issues concerning depreciation of women's competences and attitudes of mistrust of their skills constitute the subject of the academic discourse and practices of occupational life. Appreciation of women's competences, among other things, is one of the challenges of the contemporary époque – diversity, multiculturalism and heterogeneity of organization. When analysing determinants of depreciation of women's competences, we must, *inter alia*, consider: the employers' attitudes towards women, their sex, motives, goals, stereotypes, organizational culture and many others. Rational, responsible recruitment is directed at evaluation of competences and personal predispositions of female and male candidates aspiring to unoccupied positions in organizations. The not merit-related reasons cannot influence the choice, and neither can sex. Polish organizations prefer men, who are beneficiaries of the top positions at work, whereas women are discriminated against because of their sex. Employers trust men's competences, while competences of women fuel mistrust, particularly on the highest positions in organizational structures. The main thesis of the article constitutes the following statement: dysfunctional depreciation of women's competences is determined by socio-cultural factors, which are transmitted onto the activities in the occupational and organizational sphere. Simultaneously, gender stereotypes strengthen and consolidate lack of trust in women's competences.

The article attempts to answer the following question: how should we build trust in competences of women?

Competent or incompetent women?

Competences comprise valuable capital, for both an individual and organization. They provide resources that may be developed, enriched and supplemented. They do not wear down; on the contrary, their value increases. "Competence, understood as the concept broader than qualifications, embrace within its scope the total of permanent attributes of a human, creating causative-effective relation with the achieved high or over average effects of work, which have their measurable dimension" (Pocztowski 2003:155). Ch. Woodruffe accentuated a behavioural dimension of competences. He classified competences into two categories: firstly, the competences focused on a person, related to the attributes of individuals and their behaviour, secondly competence directed at work connected to the fields of work in which an individual jest competent (Woodruffe 1991:32). In reference to his classification, competences are related with personality predispositions and skills adequate to a performed occupational role. If everyone in organization is appreciated for competences then the problem should not exist. However, depreciation of women's competences is a universal phenomenon. Men depreciate women's competences, but women do this to other women. The solidarity of women is a high ideal, which does not translate into the practice of organizational life.

When analysing the determinants of women's competences depreciation we may divide them into internal and external. In the first group belongs auto-depreciation, which manifests in disownment

of women's competences by women themselves. Among the second group, we include discrimination practices applied by various "social actors". The reasons for depreciation of women's competences may be analysed from the perspective of multiple points of view. One of them is patriarchal organizational order, which facilitates this phenomenon. Another one constitutes the stereotype, rooted in the Polish society, that women's competences are lower than men's. Therefore, they should not hold responsible positions involving power, decision-making and supervising other people. Men are convinced that they are more intelligent than women; they even assess their fathers as more intelligent than their mothers. Such perception destroys occupational perspectives of women, reducing their confidence in their own potential (Vinnicombe, Colwill 1999:27). Gender influences assessment of competences and analysis of individualistic predispositions. Such opinions of some men are propitious for undermining competences of women. Simultaneously they develop a belief that women are less talented than men. Obviously, the process of transformation of patriarchal social relations in real societies certainly proceeds in a different ways and at different pace depending on their political, economic and cultural specifics (Malinowska 2009:11). Among determinants conducive to depreciation of the Polish women's competences may be counted stereotypes, which place them mainly in family roles, and not in roles related to management of organizations and holding top positions. Such situation causes discrimination against women already at the recruitment stage. According to H. Domański, discrimination "is defined as maintaining inequalities between men and women (in respect to pay, professional status, positions), even when representatives of both sexes do not differ as regards various objective indicators, which could lower the position of women" (Domański 1995:89). Organizational world attributes men with a privileged status, whereas women are placed at the lowest levels in the hierarchic structure. Therefore, the employers with a stereotypical approach towards the role of a woman subscribe to the patriarchal model. The hermetic world of organization creates barriers to women's access, and leaves free entries to men. "Therefore, the kind of performed job defines the person's position in the contemporary society. It is determined by the universal mechanism of socio-occupational structuralization, which consists in shaping relatively permanent relations between education and occupational qualifi-

cations, on the one side, and income and social appreciation, on the other" (Janicka 1995:89). "Most scientists studying the phenomenon of femininity in Poland indicates a mix of inconsistent opinions and attitudes towards the role, status and identity of women, which are the effect selective assessments of actions undertaken by women and their social roles. There is lack of consistent vision as regards the most appropriate direction of feminine roles modernization" (Giza-Poleszczuk 2000:44-74). Patriarchal semantics and rooted in the social awareness stereotype of occupational roles of women effectively consolidate traditional patterns. R.M. Kanter (1977) analysed the phenomenon of "tokenism" which means lessening the status of these employees who are relatively fewer in a particular place of work. According to the Author, women are subject to tokenism, particularly in branches, occupations and institutions dominated by men (Renzetti, Curran 2008:313). Regarding the definition of *tokenism* used by the Author, we may conclude that competences of women have a symbolic meaning in the situations which require to prove that there are women in the male-dominated branches and occupations". If a woman and a man with the same competences, occupational experience and personal predispositions aspire to a free position, and then following the stereotypes concerning women's work, the employer usually chooses a man. As a result of such situation women often undertake less prestigious jobs and lower paid jobs, inadequate to the possessed competences, which brings forth the phenomenon of depreciation of their competences, as they perform work below their skills and ambitions (Kolasińska 2011:98). "If male employees tend to discriminate women, they avoid the employers who hire or in any way promote women, or simply are women. Therefore, the employers who want to have male employees men are forced to pay them some kind of compensation bonus in their enterprises" (Kalinowska-Nawrotek 2005:22). R. Korzec pointed out the following characteristic phenomena confirming the existence of discrimination in the labour market: horizontal occupational segregation targeted at economic activity of women limited to a few areas (education, services, medicine), while in case of men it is evenly spread vertical occupational segregation meaning disproportional division of women and men in the executive suite, and a higher level of female than male unemployment" (Korzec 2000:251-263). According to P. Bourdieu, gender segregation is created by "habitus" acquired

in the course of social life and implying the ways of acting on “reproduced symbolic fields” (Bourdieu 2001:115–116). Thus, referring to him, the awareness of individuals, i.e. their “habitus” impose the fields of symbolic reproduction. Some men, but also some women, follow the rule that a competent employee is a male employee. Male world of organization creates a reality in accordance with the belief that women possess lower competences. There are two worlds in the Polish organizations: male and female. The male world includes beneficiaries of prestigious jobs and privileges, while the world of women create “social actresses” who get job offers below their competences and ambitions. “Inequality in the labour market derives in particular from stereotypes in choosing education path, training and occupational orientation. To eliminate inequality in the planning period the following actions are anticipated:

- intensification of efforts targeted at overcoming obstacles hindering women’s access to decision-making and managerial positions;
- facilitate women’s career in the hitherto atypical for them sectors in order to entire or even partial reduction of occupational segregation and
- propagating the presence of men in traditionally feminized branches.” (Kryńska, Arendt 2007:38).

The significant reason conducive to the phenomenon of depreciation of women is national culture together with organizational culture. Culture of a particular country implies the organization management style, methods of conducting business, professed values and propagated models, which, *inter alia* shape model of occupational roles performed by women and men. It is worth to remind here the selected “cultural codes” according to G. Hofstede: “power distance”, “uncertainty avoidance” „individualism/collectivism”, “masculinity/femininity”. As regards the Author’s conception, dimension “power distance” characterises the attitude of a particular society towards equality and inequality. Asymmetry of competences in relations with superiors, hierarchization and hiding emotions reveals “high power distance”. Then, “low power distance” is conducive to informal relationships and development of an organization based on egalitarian principles and diversity management. The dimension “uncertainty avoidance” is related to the intensity of its avoidance. In cultures with “high level of uncertainty avoidance” implementation of novel solutions and innovations and non-standard proceedings is easier. On the

other hand, cultures with “high level of uncertainty avoidance” characterise principality, formalization of social relations and schematised functioning. In turn, “collectivism-individualism” means focusing on cooperation or individual performance, which imply, *inter alia* the character of work in an organization and beyond. Finally, the dimension “masculinity – femininity” divides societies into those where social roles related to gender are clearly defined, i.e. there are expected assertiveness, toughness and focusing on material success from men, whereas from women – modesty, tenderness and care of life quality and those where social roles of both sexes intertwine (Hofstede 2007:140). There is also worth to refer to R. Gesteland (2000), who analysed international cultures from the point of view of business behaviours and economic relations. The Author specified pro-transactional and pro-partnership cultures, ceremonial and non-ceremonial cultures, monochronic and polychronic cultures, expressive and reserved cultures”. The culture sphere and organization sphere penetrate and determine each other. Awareness of relations between these areas allows understanding positives and negatives of heterogeneity and multiculturalism. Cultural determinants imply organizational functioning, dominant role models, or adopted ethical organizational standards reflect cultural norms of a particular country. In the Polish society, consolidated stereotypes of feminine roles do not provide models how to be a competent boss or manager. The vision of a woman as the Mother-Pole anchored in the Polish culture is not propitious for taking responsible organizational roles by women. However, attributing women roles mainly to family ones presents an archaic approach, which is destructive to both women and Polish organization. The female style of managing organizations significantly differs from the male one. However, it is still worth to apply in order to promote diversity. A competent woman will cope brilliantly with managing an organization. Appreciation of women’s competences also confirms modernity of an organization. Modern organizations are the ones targeted at equality, diversity and appreciation of the employees’ competences.

Instead of presenting successive discourses concerning depreciation of women’s competences, it is better to move on to effective action and change the *status quo* through development of right attitudes and reducing inequalities. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy launched a project “Gender mainstreaming as a tool of labour market changes in”,

carried out by the Department of Economic Analyses and Forecasts and financed with the means of the General Programme PROGRESS for employment and social solidarity. Gender mainstreaming means systematic implementation of the perspectives sensitive of gender-related issues into the mainstream of political, economic, social activities. The gender mainstreaming policy is a current that will be conducive to reduction of depreciation of women's competences in organizational structures. Promoting equality norms and appreciation of women's competences is only a half way to success. The great significance gains implementation of international models and cultural diversity. According to R.W. Griffin, the ideal model of multicultural organization characterise the following attributes: pluralism, full structural integration, lack of prejudices or discrimination, lack of gap in organizational identification and low level of intergroup conflicts (Griffin 1996:723).

The experience of Scandinavian countries may be indicated here. The last *Global Gender Gap Report* (2011), concerning gender equality in the following areas: economy, education, power, health, and the top positions were taken by Norway, Finland, and Sweden. The first place belongs to Iceland, whereas Poland took 42 place among 135 countries included in the survey. Poland did not score well in the economy sphere, where the principles of equality between women and men, i.e. remuneration, participation and access to higher positions (*Global Gender... 2011:8–11*). Norway enjoys the highest percentage share (42%) of women on boards of stock market companies (*Progress Report Women, 2012:17–18*). International models are worth implementation in the Polish conditions in order to harmonize management of the Polish organizations with the standards adopted in other countries. Diversity of competences is embedded in advanced management of organizations in the turbulent internal and external environments. Therefore, appreciation of heterogenic competences of women and men is not only a noble ideal, but also the indispensable practice of action. Diversity management in organization means recognition of differences between employees, as well as building management style, organizational culture and friendly atmosphere at work on the base of these differences. Employees' competences are appreciated, while their dignity – protected. Diversity and competence uniqueness are mainly advantages and not a vice.

Developing trust to women's competences

Developing trust in women in Polish organizations is a long-standing and multidimensional process. Gender became a determinant of trust in competences. Men are granted trust and appreciated for competences. Female competences foster distrust. Development of trust in women's competences gains a particular meaning in building social awareness and propagating the principle of equal chances in organizational and economic life. Trust in competences regardless of sex facilitates positive social relations, shapes culture organizational and image of "institutions with principles". It is the key to effectiveness, competitiveness and reputation of organization. R. Hardin states that trust is, similarly to knowledge, a cognitive category because it is evoked by the expected motivation from other people. Then, being a cognitive notion, trust cannot be a matter of choice (Hardin 2009:25). The less formal regulations and more trust are there, the more involvement and effective efforts. Awareness of the individuals that respecting formal and informal rules will results in considerable effects is the most effective form of trust building (Kolasieńska 2011). The relation between trust and rules is inversely proportional: the more we follow the rules in human relationships the less we trust each other and *vice versa*" (Fukuyama 1997:256).

There is no proverbial "golden mean" how to develop trust in competences of women. However, some actions facilitate development of trust on the plane: organization – women. Among these actions are relations based on the fundament of equality and appreciation of competences irrespective of sex. We must not forget about reduction of stereotypes concerning women's competences. Women want to be valued for their competences. According to Fukuyama the satisfaction we draw from contacts with the others during work, arises from the basic human pursuit of appreciation. Each person wants his or her value appreciated (Fukuyama 1997:16). Women want employers to trust in their competences and appreciate them for their effects in work. However, building trust in women's competences in organizations will bring considerable benefits, only if it is a complex practice, based not only on formal norms but also on informal ones.

The fact that men manage most of Polish organizations does not mean that reality cannot be changed. Some employers do not want to make a step

towards women, while women cannot accept lack of trust in their competences. Such pattern cannot be consolidated. According to Giddens, the bases of trust, be it in particular institutions, people and systems, or the more generalized ones, have direct connection with psychical security of individuals and groups (Giddens 2007:28). Trust is a significant value in individual and organizational dimension. It constitutes a core of subjective treatment of employees in organization and translates into their well-being. S. Covey and R. Merrill specify the following waves of trust, including: trust in oneself, trust in others, organizational trust, trust in markets, and social trust (Covey, Merrill 2008:32–36). A dichotomy trust in/distrust of women's competences shapes particular actions on the side of various "social actors". Trust builds and strengthens social relations in organization, increases labour effectiveness, shapes culture interaction and teaches to respect dignity. Distrust, inter alia, facilitates dysfunctional hostility, disavowing of skills, discriminative practices and lowering work efficiency. Trust in women's competences presents valuable assets for an organization, which should be developed because they translate into other resources, such as the organization's reputation, development of a positive image, gaining new employees and customers.

A woman as the boss – an idea or reality?

In the Polish reality, women holding intermediate and top positions in organizations are still a rarity. The most often fair sex takes occupational roles placed at the lowest level of management. A female supervisor is often poorly perceived by men, as well as women. Men depreciate her competences and do not trust in her style of executing power. Women perceive her as a careerist who instead of looking after her family enters the area intended for men. Male monopoly of power is so strong, while solidarity of women so weak that even women favour men. Women are somehow anchored on the lowest positions; irrational determinants deprive them of promotions. Women who do not "toe the line" or aspire to executive suites do not pose a threat to men. Gender relations' models are strongly "rooted" in systems of cultural values and their norms. Social actors – collective or individual – are socially embedded, as in their functioning they take into consideration behaviours of other actors and act according to

the mental vision of the world they acquired in their life (Morawski, 2001:31). The status of women in organizations is a derivative of various cultural determinants. Occupational roles of women reflect traditional approach of our society towards the fair sex in organizational structures. The highest top executive level is reserved for men, while the lowest is the women's sphere. Male world comprise decision-makers endowed with power and privileges, while feminine world consists of subordinates deprived of power and privileges. The division between these two worlds is a solid line, which consolidates male domination and subordination of women. According to L. Brannon the main determinant of discrimination is a gender role associated with a particular occupation – in case of a "male" job, male candidates are favoured, while women are granted lesser chances (Brannon 2002:402). There is a stereotype that male world of power and responsible managerial roles is ruled with tough laws, therefore, as women are such "delicate creatures" they cannot hold top positions in organizations. P. Bourdieu wrote in the book *Male domination* that androcentrism is constantly legalised by practices, which it instigates itself, because dispositions for practical actions resulting from incorporation of the prejudices inscribed into the order of things condemn women to the endless confirmation of these prejudices. The same dispositions that incline men to entrust women with worse jobs, insignificant and unappreciated, excuse them from behaviours threatening their honour (Bourdieu 2004:45, 125–126). Women who are supervisors must constantly prove their competences and fight against distrust. If they hold positions on a par with men, they earn less. "Lower earnings of women are a generally known phenomenon" (Domański 2002:37). According to G. Becker (1971), employers discriminate women and offer them jobs when they can pay them lower wages as compared to men. R. Siemieńska stated: "if an occupation loses its attractiveness, men leave it" (2005:3–39). Referring to the Author's conclusion, men apply a rational calculation whether a given job includes prestige, lucrative earnings and privileges adequate to their competences. Referring to J. Coleman's *rational choice theory* (1988) men pursue maximisation of profits respective to the performed occupational role and minimisation of costs. Women are not paid adequately to their competences and skills. Simultaneously, women experience the phenomenon of the so-called *glass ceiling*, which became popular term for the barriers faced by women

moving upward the positions hierarchy. For women promotion to managerial position is decidedly more difficult, their career usually stop at lower levels (Renzetti, Curran 2008:304). A. Titkow wrote: "this notion symbolises a perspective of promotion with its simultaneous unavailability" (2003:376). Gender segregation in occupational structure refers to do the level of domination of one sex in a particular occupation – a significant dominance of men or women. The generally accepted segregation indicator is dissimilarity index, called segregation index (Renzetti, Curran 2008:313).

Systemic counteracting depreciation women's competences is the to step towards indispensable changes. The best practices of gender equality may constitute the normative model for all "individual and institutional social actors". U. Beck concluded that equality of men and women could not be implemented in institutional structures that assume gender inequality (Beck 2002:169–170). Ideological support of the change in the situation of women without any practical actions is either manifestation of populism or hypocrisy. Declarations do not bring or change anything; only practical actions are conducive to a change in the *status quo*. M. Fuszara (2000) concluded that "its worth to remember that quotas (both normative and voluntary) are the mean to reach the goal (which is the mentioned actual equalisation of chances of women and men), and not the goal itself. Pseudo equality or declared equal chances of women and men in organizations comprise a dysfunctional practice, which is counted among "pretended actions, i.e. such actions that because of their real course or direct goal are different than they seem" (Lutyński 1990:105). Employers may undertake ostentatious "pretended actions" showing equal treatment of all employees for marketing or medial purposes. Image creation and public relations do not mean just retouching of vision; building reputation requires time and efforts. Credibility cannot be achieved in one day. If operations of a particular institution do not meet social interests, the best public relations will not manage to hide the truth (Goban-Klas 1997:35).

Non-standard organizational structures and dysfunctional practices towards women result in their exclusion from top positions. According to Z. Bauman, transformation of some organizational forms and hybridisation of structure reveals a grim face of early-modern ruthlessness and lack of compassion for those who cannot attempt initiative because of lack of means (Bauman 2000:377). Determination

of women in their struggle against men for evident rights not always guarantees because of deficit of capital, both material and non-material.

Conclusion

When analysing a discourse of equal chances and practical actions, we do conclude that it remains only a declared idea, not a reality. Reducing depreciation of women's competences requires change in mentality, permanent education and redefinition of feminine roles. And such should be the approach towards the canon of the obligatory in Poland education system, socialization to occupational roles and practices applied in the labour market. "The arrangement where women take lower social position does not crystallise within family but in the labour market, where women concentrate around less exposed positions yielding to men the places at the top level of power hierarchy, they are evidently less paid than men and have lesser, as compared to men, promotion opportunities" (Domański 1999:14). If the education system and social awareness do not change, then all declarations will be only a noble ideology not applicable in practice. Changing social perception is only the beginning of transformations, the next step are changes in education system, from the early learning to adult education. The necessary actions involve changes in the Polish education system and effective socialization of women to occupational roles at the highest level of management. Moreover, it is also important to carry out a thorough analysis on actions of "social individual and institutional actors", who either consciously or subconsciously depreciate competences of women in organizational life.

Development of trust in women's competences is a long-distance process, particularly in the Polish institutional conditions dominated by men. However, some actions are propitious to construction of trust in competences of women. Firstly, they are principles of *fair play* in socio-organizational life obligatory for all, secondly, shaping organizational and national cultures on the base of equality, thirdly, reducing gender stereotypes in evaluation of competences. The next action establishing trust in women's competences is propagating transparent organizational policy and ethical norms. Other actions comprise, *inter alia*, propagating the principle of diversity in recruitment and humanitarian treatment of all employees regardless of sex. Neither modern organizations nor

civilised society can be developed without the trust in women's competences. However, legislative solutions constitute only formal guarantees, which will prove insufficient when they are not respected. Future belongs to organization whose strategy reflects the formula: equality, trust, and diversity.

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