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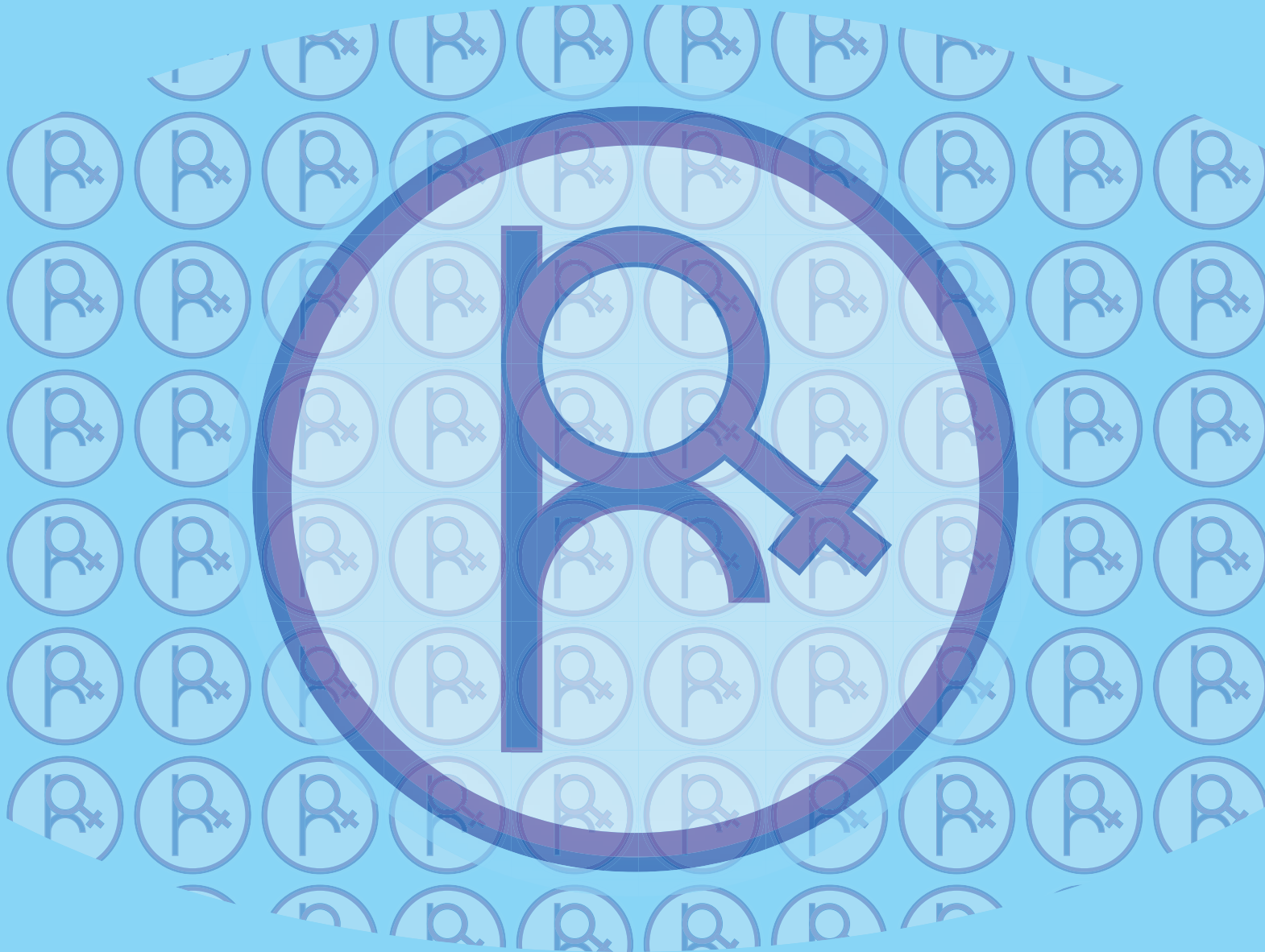
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Women in Public Relations in Spain



Cristina Fuentes Lara, Ángeles Moreno and Noelia Zurro

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By

Creative Media and Communications Research Ltd, 4 Cobden Place, LS12 5LJ, Leeds, United Kingdom
&

EUPRERA Bd. Du Jubilé 71 bte 3, 1080 Brussels, Belgium

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Women in Public Relations in Spain

Authors

Cristina Fuentes Lara

Ángeles Moreno

Noelia Zurro

Cover Page design

Christian Goodman

Layout and Formatting

Martina Topić

EUPRERA REPORT Series Editor

Martina Topić

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Authors

FUENTES LARA, Cristina is a Professor of Public Relations and Communication Management at the University Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid. Her research interests are communication management, gender and migration. She has published articles in the main national and international indexed journals and has written books on this subject. Thanks to her research work in these areas she received, in 2018, the National Award for the Fight against Gender Violence from the Government of Spain.

MORENO, Ángeles is a Professor (TU) of Public Relations and Communication Management at the University Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, where she has served as director of diverse postgraduate programmes in Communication Management. Ángeles serves as President-Elect of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), Brussels. Ángeles has also published extensively internationally (16 books, 11 books chapters and 40 indexed academic papers along with professional publications) and serves on the scientific and reviewer committees of prestigious international academic journals, congresses and institutions. She has led diverse studies as the Latin American Communication Monitor and the Gendercom. Her research has been awarded funding by institutions like the International Communication Association, Public Relations Society of America or the European Public Relations and Research Association.

ZURRO, Noelia is a Research staff in training of Public Relations and Crisis Communication Management at Rey Juan Carlos University, Madrid. She is a PhD student and serves as a Professor collaborator in Public Relations Degree. She has published an article in a peer review journal, *El Profesional de la Información*. Her Master Thesis, about crisis communication, was awarded an award for academic excellence by the Public Relations International Association.

Abstract

This research aims to analyze the situation of women in the communication sector in Spain. The field of communication in Spain is a feminized sector in which gender inequalities persist, such as the wage gap, the glass ceiling and obstacles to reconcile personal and work life (Moreno et al., 2018). Although progress is recognized in all these issues in recent decades, the #MeToo movement evidenced the existing gender inequalities in all professional sectors.

This research was conducted using a qualitative methodology in which 22 women working in the communication sector were interviewed. Three different profiles were interviewed: female communication directors, female employees with a female boss and female employees with a male boss. The interviews were conducted by videoconference where the audio was recorded for later transcription. The data analysis technique was discourse analysis.

The main results of this research show the existence of a mixed communication style and a female leadership style in the field. In addition, the high level of self-demand of female communication managers stands out, which makes it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to achieve a balance between family and professional life along with the implementation of successful role models. At the same time, it is also evident that there is an imminently masculine company culture where "jokes" and sexist comments continue to be made in the office.

Keywords: gender; leadership; public relations; communication management; corporate culture; sexism, workplace.

Introduction

The "MeToo" movement constituted the media impetus that brought an elephant that had been in the room for too long to the centre of social debate. Harassment in the entertainment industry became the tip of the iceberg that hid a much more deep-rooted and widespread problem. The cultural roots of discriminatory phenomena such as harassment drew attention to the many other forms of discrimination that women continue to experience in other sectors, such as business and the workplace. Organizational cultures continue to be systems for perpetuating the status quo, with deep-rooted dynamics and power coalitions that prevent a more suitable environment for women's career development, equal pay and leadership.

In Spain, there is a pronounced gender gap in the labour world that is especially striking knowing that women obtain better results at university (García Pérez, 2018). Currently, this gap is increasing due to the effects on the labour market of Covid-19, although it is true that current data show that the sectors that have best adapted to teleworking have been IT positions and communication positions in organizations (Peralta, 2021).

Some studies suggest that some gender gaps are reduced much faster in occupations where there is a similar proportion of men and women (BBVA, 2020). This could be one of the keys in the communication management sector, which internationally has been considered a feminized sector in many countries. The GENDERCOM study (Moreno et al., 2018) was a pioneering study by the Association of Communication Directors (DIRCOM) to uncover gender discrimination in communication management in Spain. GENDERCOM revealed with empirical data treated statistically that, despite being a profession with a majority of women, or precisely because of the effects of feminization, the salary gap, the glass ceiling and the career progression of women that was strongly conditioned by the conflict of family reconciliation, especially after motherhood, were still perpetuated.

One of the problems of gender discrimination is its denial. The discussion or denial of their existence, based on simple opinions or arguments without supporting data, contributes to the unwillingness to face the problem, not only on the part of organizations but even on the part of professional women. These situations of gender inequality, scientifically substantiated and proven, impoverish organizations in their promotion of diversity and consequently in their ability to provide innovative solutions in an increasingly complex and changing world. They can also hinder the progress and success of the communications management profession.

The international study **Women in PR** of the **European Public Relations and Research Association (EUPRERA)** had a first phase where a literature review of works written about women in public relations from 1982 to 2019 was conducted (Topić et al, 2019). However, in view of the transformations experienced in the last two years and the need to continue promoting female leadership in the profession, a second phase of the study on female leadership in communication management has been carried out. This study aims to explore the position of women in the sector from their own experiences, their communication skills and leadership styles and the office cultures in which they are leaders or led.

Theoretical Contextualization

Female presence in organizations is an increasingly frequent fact, thanks to the numerous cultural, social and legal changes that have taken place in recent decades in most countries of the world. A large number of authors have faithfully reflected this growth of women in public relations in their theoretical and empirical research (Vroman & Danko, 2020; Topić & Brugemann, 2021; Dubrowski, McCorkindale, & Rickert, 2019; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Creedon, 2009; Fitch & Third, 2010). In an explanatory study, Keohane (2020) mentions the developments that facilitated this women's access to organizations -opening up higher education for women, achievement of universal suffrage and increase of saving devices-.

Nevertheless, the most recent studies on female employment have revealed the existence of a cyclical phenomenon, in which women continue to report discrimination at work, pay gap, stereotypes, discredit and a glass ceiling that hinders their visibility in managements positions, as it happened in the 80s (Topić et al., 2020; Aceña & Villanueva, 2018; Buckalew et al., 2012; Acker, 2009; Walker & Aritz, 2015).

These studies are based on the Theory of Gendered Organizations (Acker, 1990; Acker, 2009), which lays the foundations of knowledge about the non-neutral organization structure in regards to gender. According to the authors, the logic of organizational structure is composed of a series of material and non-material forms that directly or indirectly involve all its female members. From the material point of view, there are work rules, labour contracts and job evaluation systems. All these documents contain symbolic structure indicators. Within the non-material elements, the hierarchy stands out. It is an element that generates abstract differences between the members of the organization. Organizational logic is built on the conjunction between responsibility, job complexity and hierarchical position.

Following this theoretical construct, Aldoory and Toth (2002) proposed a new theory that highlights and explain the paradox about women in public relations – why there are still gender differences in a field with a high number of women. A paradox that emerges in the middle of a work environment in which the majority of workers are women (Dubrowski, McCorkindale, & Rickert, 2019; Pulido Polo, 2012; Szymanska & Rubin, 2018), or even they are more effective in leadership (Hernández et al. 2016), but who have difficulties in ascending to high responsibility positions.

Busse (2020) realizes that role incongruity; sex role and candidate selection procedures are some of the elements that can influence the underrepresentation of femininity in executive, management and leadership positions. Based on an experiment with 288 young executives, the author found that increasing the number of women in working groups the organization would have a benefit, due to the characteristics that surround the female gender.

To better understand what those feminine characteristics are and how they can help companies with a woman in a leadership position, some authors have conducted their investigations focused on in recent years. In particular, women showed more attitude and leadership skills for some authors (Offerman & Foley, 2020; García, García & Madrid, 2018; Harjoto, Laksmana & Lee, 2020), authenticity, adaptation, power-orientation, perseverance, force, balanced personality (Esser et al. 2018) or higher emotional intelligence skills (Kaifi & Noori, 2010) than male executives. However, regarding language skills, Baxter (2015) points out that his work does not provide that demonstrates a difference in linguistic construction between genders from a conventional perspective. Place & Vardeman (2018) affirm there are also no differences in leadership skills in the field of public relations.

On the other hand, Chin (2016) points out that female managers present more leader's competence, status dominance and interpersonal skills than their male counterparts when

egalitarian organization fails. Leader's competence was composed in Chin's study by seven items-intelligent, efficient, knowledgeable, organized, capable, skilled and competent- and status dominance and interpersonal skills were created from respondents' evaluations. In summary, Chin (2016) found that when the company is successful there are no differences in the perception of leaders of different genders. However, when there is an ongoing crisis, women who succeed men in the leader position are seen as the best prepared for management and leadership (Rigolini, Gabaldon & Goldeng, 2021) because they reduce the company's risk. Moreover, their role is even more effective in eliminating gender discrimination lawsuits within the company (Dandalar & Abebe, 2020).

This complex phenomenon, so-called "female leadership" advantage logic, has its limits in the figure of the investor, which becomes one of the many challenges that female executives still face (Gupta et al. 2018). Investors from their study were more likely to leave female CEOs under threat than their male counterparts. Along these lines, Dean et al. (2019) suggest that there is an economic structure of male hegemony that slows down entrepreneurship and business management by women. In addition, there is still a gender pay gap for female executives (Moreno et al., 2015; Moreno et al., 2017).

The Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), is a widely used theory in the study of female leadership, which argues that the main reason for gender differences in leadership is based on the traditional construction of male attributes, which leaves women as less congruent professionals with such management and executives roles.

Other substantial differences between men and women are those protected by language and the abilities of oral and gestural expression. Chistopher (2008) points out that rules of relational etiquette are different in both genders, which have diverse interpersonal styles in their communication patterns. The psychologist states that women tend to focus more on details and argued explanations, while men often synthesize information. Unequal access

to technology by managers of both genders is another element analyzed by researchers (Hardey, 2019).

Economic structures, rules of relational etiquette, access to technology, social norms and culture create gender roles that reach positions of responsibility in companies. In this way, women are seen as the most vulnerable gender, with a management style that avoids conflict. On the other hand, males are associated with a more individualistic and competitive behaviour, less affluent and more aggressive.

The behaviour is attributed to gender, believing that it is natural and desirable for each sex. This behaviour traditionally associated with men is related to an ideal of a leader constructed in a socio-cultural way. The conflict appears when a female leader performs a more competitive or aggressive strategy, acting unnaturally according to stereotyped roles. In summary, the leadership position is related to a series of behaviours traditionally associated with the male gender (Prause & Mujtaba, 2015).

Beckwith, Carter and Peters (2016) take up the problem a year later and point out directly the existence of barriers that, whether perceived or real, slow down the promotion or maintenance of women in positions of high responsibility within companies. According to the authors, the main barrier continues to be the glass ceiling, a phenomenon that becomes “cement ceiling” when, in addition to the gender difference, there is an ethnic difference (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016; Vardeman & Place, 2017). The data they provide verifies the existence of this even greater difficulty for women belonging to an ethnic minority given that, in 2015, only four African-American women held management positions in the 500 companies with the greatest fortune in the United States.

Despite this special situation, in general terms, these barriers are faced daily by women around the world and in a wide variety of sectors, in the automotive industry in the United States (Bullock, 2019), the service sector and the manufacturing industries in Korea (Bin

Bae & Skaggs, 2019), in the service sector in the United Kingdom (Davies, Yarrow & Syed, 2018; Topić, 2019) or even in the universities in South Africa (Ramohai, 2019). However, as will be seen later, most of the research on women in leadership comes from the United States.

To investigate and propose possible solutions to the problem of the promotion of women in the company, Dubrowski, McCorkindale, & Rickert (2019) held ten focus groups in their research. During the course of the study, they discovered specifically that there is a lack of mentoring and training programmes when it comes to accessing management positions. The previous authors found that this deficiency affects both genders equally, in contrast to what Tench and Topić (2017) suggest about the inequality for the women in the access to mentoring. Nevertheless, the availability of these programmes could increase training and promotion possibilities for both and, ultimately, improve integration and equal relationship between genders, by having common training and communication spaces.

The introduction of senior and other women into executive positions proved to be a consensual solution to facilitate the promotion of other women to the same positions (Sealy & Sing, 2010). But the most important solutions that attack the root of the problem remain the elimination of barriers such as sexism, discrimination, the pay gap or the glass ceiling and the attempt to develop common leadership styles to eliminate the generic association of these styles. With all these changes, the respondents of Dubrowski, McCorkindale, & Rickert's study suggest a review of the company's policies and an organizational change. But Terjesen and Sealy (2016) go a step further and analyze the changes that must be made in the quota laws.

This call for egalitarian change by employees and company leaders is based on a conclusion evidenced in the research's findings on the subject. Only in gender-diverse-normed contexts with lessened gendered self-restraint can leader women operate being themselves

(Dzubinski, Diehl & Taylor, 2019). It could be a utopia of the ideal organization, seen as a space in which both men and women can work in an environment that facilitates their own personal and professional development. But to generate these changes in a solid way, it is necessary to universalize the study of the subject and to a greater extent in a century characterized by globalization and the growth of multinational companies.

Methodology

The study applied a qualitative methodology. The qualitative approach aims to investigate a social reality from the direct approach with the subjects under study (Fuentes-Lara, 2017). This research aims to directly approach the female managers or communication directors and employees in public relations and communication management in Spain. The data production technique was the in-depth interview considered as a "face-to-face dialogue, direct and spontaneous, of a certain concentration and intensity with a logical and affective discourse" (Ortí, 2010: 272). The purpose of the semi-structured interview is the construction of theory, by providing dense descriptions that favour the interpretative work of the researchers (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), which fits perfectly with the objective of the research.

Previously, a semi-structured script was designed, divided into different thematic blocks: education style; communication style, leadership, office culture, cost of leadership/discrimination experiences and sociodemographic. This research was carried out taking into account three professional profiles: communication managers, female employees with a female boss and male employees with a male boss in public relations and communication management. In such a way that the script was modified according to the profile of the interviewee, resulting in a script for female communication managers and another for female employees. In both cases the structure of the script was similar, only a specific block on the female employees' view of their superior was introduced.

The selection of the sample was indicative, recruited by the Engagement Committee of the Association of Communication Directors (DIRCOM) in Spain. The process followed was a previous selection by the Commitment Committee. The committee approved the instruments, contacted the participants and got their agreement to participate. The research team contacted each of the selected participants to explain the project through an

information document, request a signed agreement and set an appointment for the interview. Although these interviews were planned to be conducted in person, the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions forced us to apply a contingency plan to conduct the interviews through registered video calls. The computer software used for the interviews were: Skype, Zoom and Team; and the selection of the software was left to the choice of the interviewee. In all cases, all the interviews were audio-recorded with the explicit consent of the participants. The duration of the interviews ranged from 17 minutes to 42 minutes. The interviews were conducted between the months of June and October 2020.

The total sample was 22 women divided between 12 female communication managers - 54.5% of the sample - and 10 female communication employees, of which three of them were employees with a male boss - 13.6% of the sample - and seven employees with a female boss - 31.9% of the sample. The sociodemographic profile of the interviewees corresponds to a majority age range of 40 to 49 years (59.2%) followed by 31.8% who are between 30 and 39 years old; while 4.5% of the sample are between 18 and 29 years old and the same percentage between 50 and 59 years old. With respect to academic training, 68.2% have a master's degree (postgraduate), 4.5% have a doctorate and 27.3% have a bachelor's degree. It should be noted that 68.2% of the women interviewed said that they have dependents (i.e. children, eldest) in their care.

Regarding the professional environment, 63.6% of the interviews work in private companies listed on the stock exchange, while 18.2% belong to private companies not listed on the stock exchange and, with the same percentage, work in communication agencies. More than half -54.5%- of the interviews have more than 15 years of experience in the communications sector. 27.4% have between 11 and 15 years of experience; 13.6% have between 6 and 10 years of experience and 4.5% have less than 5 years of experience in the communications sector.

Due to the private and sensitive content that the interviewees expressed in their interviews, they preferred anonymity. Therefore, in the textual quotations of this report a label appears with their job position - differentiating between communication director under the label of Dircom (Communication director or communication manager) and employee-; and age.

The data analysis technique of this research has been discourse analysis, which is a technique that allows a description of the structures and strategic points of written or spoken discourses (Fuentes-Lara and Quesada-Herrera, 2019). For Van Dijk (1981) the importance of discourse analysis lies in the fact that it is "a communication event (...), people use language to communicate ideas or beliefs and do so as more complex social events" (p. 46). The analysis of the expressions, syntax, gestures and silences from the in-depth interviews, added to the observational data, has provided the data set presented in this research (Trinidad et al., 2015).

For the data analysis, it was supported by the computer software Atlas.ti version 9 and the steps described by Muhr (1997) were followed, from the first step that the creation of the hermeneutic units, subsequently the transcripts of the interviews were related to the notes of the observation and other primary documents; and then proceeded to the categorization or coding of the same (Valles, 2015).

Results

Communication Styles

When addressing communication styles, many scientific studies correlate the differences between men and women, focusing on the fact that men's language expresses independence, competitiveness and reinforces their status, while women's language allows for connection and intimacy (Tannen, 1990). Based on the differences in communication styles between genders, two approaches have been developed: dominance and difference.

In this study we have focused on the difference approach, closely linked to difference feminism (Bell et al., 2019), which assumes that men and women have different communication styles because they have been socialized differently (Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2008). Women's discourse is committed to networking, seeking approval and solidarity; and, on the contrary, men's communication style is focused on exposing their skills and seeking hierarchy. This difference is exemplified in the use of "I" and "we"; men would emphasize "I" to anchor their individual achievements; while women would use "we" to anchor group membership,

"Iron hand silk glove' right? That's how I feel a little bit." (Interviewee 12_46 years old, Dircom).

The results of the research are close to a mixed communication style, that is, a direct, clear and transparent communication typical of the direct style attributed to the masculine communication style; and, at the same time, empathetic and close to the receiver, which are qualities of the style considered related to the feminine communication style. The same happens in the research of Kaladze et al. (2020) where it is indicated that women leaders in the communication sector have an empathetic communication style and that it is easy for

female employees to communicate with them because they are attentive and attentive to details.

"Well, I try to be both. I am direct, but being considerate, that is, I think you can be direct, but using the right words and also being very empathetic".
(Interviewee 3_49 years old, Dircom).

In the analysis of communication styles, the category of direct communication style emerges, especially among younger professionals and/or with fewer years of experience in the sector. This is related to an idea very much implanted in public relations professionals, which is to show seriousness as a symbol to reinforce their authority, especially when they are young. A direct communication style is part of this need to be taken seriously. In fact, this need to show seriousness appears in the interviews when interviewees point out that their dressing style is intentionally sober with the use of suits, high heels and dark tones. In the field of communication, as in the field of politics, the dress style still acquires a very relevant role especially in the case of young women who try to show through clothing more age to be taken seriously (de Travesedo Rojas & Ramírez, 2019).

"I am quite direct in terms of answers and in terms of addressing also communication strategies in general" (Interviewee 19_36 years old, Dircom).

This is reaffirmed by the fact that the communication directors point out that their communication style has been changing over the years from more direct to mixed styles.

The differences in communication style between men and women receive the name of genderlect and would be defined as a dialect by gender (Suciu, 2013; Topić et al., 2017), attending to the fact that the different communication styles are due to the way in which men and women socialize, interact and, therefore, communicate. However, Clayton et al., (2021) in their research on women in public relations in the North America state that

genderlect not only affects communication style but is an obstacle for women in their work, in line with Stroi's (2020) conclusion that gendered language permeates the entire hiring process at all levels.

Leadership Styles

Starting with the so-called third wave of feminism, the debate on working conditions and women's leadership within organizations has begun. Research on female leadership has been carried out mainly in the United States (e.g. Dandalar & Abebe, 2020; Dzubinski et al., 2019) while in Europe it is still incipient. Nevertheless, Spain-along with the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands-is at the forefront of the study of female leadership (Topić et al., 2020; Aceña & Villanueva, 2018).

In the field of communication, the main conclusions of these studies show that female communication managers suffer a devaluation in terms of leadership. Women communication professionals find it difficult to access and remain in managerial positions for sociocultural reasons that associate women with a specific leadership style that is undervalued and stereotyped as negative, compared to that associated with men (Topić, 2020; Baxter, 2015).

Within leadership styles in communication, two models predominate. An authoritarian and hierarchical model, related to male communication style; and a democratic and inclusive communication style, associated with female leadership (Molero, 2009; Aldoory, 2005). All the female communication managers interviewed attribute to themselves characteristics of democratic and inclusive leadership style such as empathy, team cohesion, delegating responsibilities to the team, making the team shine, active listening, flexibility, team empowerment, understanding and the importance of communication.

"I like people on my team to feel recognized, to know what they want and to acknowledge it to them. I really like them to feel empowered, to know a bit about their interests and give them space. I don't like hierarchies, I am zero hierarchical. I am very open, very expansive and I am very open downwards and upwards when they allow me to be. A very communicative leadership style, listening to people and giving strategic guidance" (Interviewee 4_46 years old, Dircom).

"My leadership style is not very authoritarian and hierarchical, it is more about gaining people's trust, trying to put myself in their place, listening, understanding and doing things in a very consensual way and after having listened to many people" (Interviewee 14_47 years old, Dircom).

Most of the communication managers show a rejection of the authoritarian and hierarchical leadership styles. For them, this style is not effective and, in their own experience, they do not consider that good results are obtained, especially in the long term,

"Experience shows you that it is better to have people by your side, to win them over and keep them happy than to use an authoritarian, unilateral and hierarchical leadership style, it is clear to me..." (Interviewee 14_47 years old, Dircom).

Also, some female directors directly identify it as a style that is proper and exclusive to me, something that occurs with similar research in Greece (Triantafillidou & Yannas, 2021) and Georgia (Kaladze et al., 2020) where women in public relations identify authoritarian leadership with men in the communication sector,

"My leadership is quite empathetic leadership, that is I am not authoritarian at all. I consider myself a leader, I do not say charismatic, but I do play more

with charisma than with authority, and perhaps because I have moved in that world of men I could not be authoritarian I had to look for other qualities"
(Interviewee 8_49 years old, Dircom).

Regarding their perception of what is effective leadership, there is a relationship between their communication style and their ideal model of leadership. Tench et al. (2017) conclude that communication professionals perceive effective leadership that in which communication is open and transparent,

"It is essential to be a good communicator, but especially for managing a team, managing a project. If you communicate and explain well, people understand. You also monitor that they are understanding you well, and, it is complicated"
(Interviewee 12_46 years old, Dircom).

For Spanish communication directors, the importance of knowing how to communicate is a vitally important trait for effective leadership,

"Well, you have to know how to communicate. Communication is not only unidirectional, that is, you also have to know how to listen. I think that if you know how to communicate you have 90% of your leadership, communicate with your team, listen to them and see how they feel, what they need and share" (Interviewee 8_49 years old, Dircom).

There is a relationship between the communication style and the leadership style of Spanish female communication directors, which is corroborated by research in other countries, framed within the prototypical female models. Skills such as authenticity, adaptation, perseverance, balanced personality and emotional intelligence are more frequent in women with positions of responsibility in communication than in men and are considered basic for effective leadership (e.g. Offerman & Foley, 2020; Harjoto et al., 2020). Characteristics

considered to be feminine have been tested as more effective in leadership (Hernández-Bark et al., 2016).

What do Communication Employees think of their Managers' Leadership?

The female communication directors affirm that their leadership style is democratic and inclusive with a very high presence of empathy and understanding with respect to their team. However, when asking employees whether they prefer to have male or female superiors, a great deal of diversity was found in the answers. On the one hand, some female employees state that they are indifferent to the gender of the person they lead, but that it is more focused on the person's leadership style. On the other hand, there is a tendency among female employees who have a superior to indicate that they prefer male bosses. The justification lies in the demands made by female communication managers, which also stems from the demands they place on themselves.

"I prefer to work with men, I think that we can do ourselves a lot of harm, honestly". (Interviewee 22_40 years old, female employee).

The female communication managers were asked if they considered themselves role models for their female employees. Most of them say yes, that they believe they can be a role model, but there is a part of the interviewees who expect that they do not have her as a role model. The reasons revolve around the fact that factors such as work demands, long hours, ups and downs in the professional career and the sacrifices made to reach that position are not ideal.

"I don't want to be anyone's boss, you know? And if I tell you that I'm working 12 or 13 hours a day... I don't want to be anyone's boss". (Interviewee 3_49 years old, Dircom).

On the other hand, most of the communication directors say that for them it is indifferent to form a team with more women or more men. Although they say that they are more accustomed to working with women, they value mixed teams. In some cases, female managers state that they prefer to work with teams made up mostly of women, where they emphasize their ability to work and their efficiency in carrying out their tasks.

"Women! yes, without hesitation, come on. There are always exceptions, but women are super hard-working, efficient, concrete, creative, you name it! Creative, whatever you want. To roll up their sleeves? just enough. To sell themselves? just enough, we should do this [selling ourselves] more".
(Interviewee 4_46 years old, Dircom).

It is worth noting that most of the female managers reiterate the importance of forming teams that are diverse in age, gender and race. Diversity in teams enriches the ability to tackle tasks and generate positive business impact (Oesch & DuVernet, 2020). However, diversity, especially racial diversity, is one of the main claims in the public relations field. Even in more diverse societies such as the North America, there are claims that there is no racial diversity in the communication management field (Clayton et al., 2021).

Socialization, communication and leadership styles

It has been previously indicated that socialization is pointed out in a multitude of research on communication styles as one of the most relevant points in the formation of leadership. Sociology and social psychology assure the importance of the early years in the formation of personality and socio-communicative behaviour (Lahire, 2007). Therefore, parental styles, more democratic or strict, and the child's social environment, more or less feminized, are relevant to this research. Yule (2006) points out that communication is a learned skill, and that men and women learn this skill differently; and that it is influenced by cultural and individual differences.

Half of the female communication directors interviewed report that they have been socialized in more feminized environments for two reasons. On the one hand, some of them have gone to non-coeducational schools, which has implied a more feminine social environment; and, on the other hand, the insertion of women in the paid labour market outside the home was not so widespread in Spain in the 1970s (Ibáñez, 1999). Therefore, many mothers of these communication professionals did not work outside the home.

"Well, in an environment in which I spent more time with my mother. A bit because of the old model of women working at home, I was more with my mother than with my father. My father worked outside the home and, in addition, I went to a girls' school." (Interviewee 14_47 years old, principal).

Regarding parental styles, there is equality among the professionals interviewed on a strict model and a democratic model. Analyzing the sociodemographic profiles of the interviews, there is a tendency governed by the time period in which the interviewees were educated (Luengo & Román, 2006). Thus, as they have been born later, they have been educated - at home and in educational institutions- in more democratic models.

When asked themselves about the influence of their education, parental style and previous experience, most of the interviewees affirm that these factors have substantially influenced their leadership style. Fundamentally, this becomes clear when they refer to their professional background, which some of them compare to a "backpack".

"Totally, that's the fruit of it. Of course, my character, my way of being is like that. I am the same at home as I am at work, that is my profile. I am empathetic, I am close, but I am authoritarian and I am the same at home. And then all my trajectory has made me become this type of leadership that I transmit". (Interviewee 8_49 years old, Dircom).

Office Culture

The work environment where workers develop their work activity can become a hostile environment, which blocks the person's capacity for promotion and the development of their skills, or, on the contrary, it is an environment that stimulates the projection of workers (Goleman, 2015).

Trending Topics, Networking and Sexist Segregation

Many companies in Spain already encourage internal networking techniques, internal training courses in emotional intelligence, and pursue sexist practices in the work environment (Alonso, 2015). Although these types of tools have not emerged in most of the people interviewed, there are clear examples of good practices to create a favourable climate at work.

"We have the training to avoid gender bias, training to avoid bias by ethnicity/race. We have in our DNA very much impregnated the need to treat genders equally, which in this case we are talking about genders, and therefore to be very careful with the language that is used, in the context that is used. In fact, we also have tools with which employees can report if they have felt violated by some kind of comment related to their gender, whether related to their race, their religion" (Interviewee 19_36 years old, Dircom).

Internal networking is recognized, almost unanimously, by communication professionals as a fundamental part of their work. They emphasize that communication is a cross-cutting area of companies and, therefore, they must be connected and informed of everything that happens in the organization.

"In my company/ (...) there are networking expectations. Networking is fundamental because you need to have those good relationships within the

company, to create those relationships of trust within the company to be able to build the messages and to be able to build the communication outwards."
(Interviewee 9_36 years old, female employee).

The most recurrent topics in the office, but leaving aside work issues, are current affairs - social and political, family and leisure. The coronavirus was included in this list because this topic was also on the media agenda at the time of the fieldwork. And to a lesser extent, the communication professionals highlight the importance of sports, especially soccer, as a point of union among men.

"Well, personal issues, professional issues, their family, friends, leisure, where they are going to go for the weekend, that they have bought some clothes, well that, their children's family, their brothers, a cool restaurant to go for dinner."
(Interviewee 1_45 years old, Dircom).

Most of the communication professionals affirm that they interact equally with male and female colleagues, although some say that they interact more with women because the communication department is more feminized.

"I think we talk a lot about domestic issues, I don't know... about your children, your partner, that kind of thing, your parents, a little bit about your close family environment..." (Interviewee 8_49 years old, Dircom).

There are differences in the topics that each gender endogenously addresses with greater fervour; while men monopolize sports, women comment more on personal and family aspects.

"There is no women's equivalent to soccer. I have worked for many years in the automotive sector, in itself, it is super macho. It is still a very traditionally male sector and I remember that some summer they used to show the

Champions League and... there is no equivalent in women, if they go to the Champions League why can't I show... but it is true that what are you going to show the Cibeles catwalk?'" (Interviewee 2_41 years old, Dircom).

Gender-differentiated topics sometimes encourage the creation of closed gender groups in which, in addition to addressing leisure or sports issues, these structures are used to make important work decisions (Cabero & Barroso, 2016; Hirsh, 2009). Traditionally, sports such as paddle tennis or golf have been a scenario used for decision-making in managerial positions or for assigning job promotions. These spaces are not the ones where women mostly gather, thus creating a manifest inequality by gender in the use of time.

The Metoo Effect: Tendency to Change

Related to the previous section, one of the points on which the female communication directors show their dissatisfaction are the so-called "men's clubs" or strictly male informal circles within organizations. The communication directors specify that in their companies there is male networking that is promoted by WhatsApp groups and leisure activities outside the organization. After analyzing this data, it has been correlated that this male networking is frequent in organizations where there is a small percentage of female managers where stereotypically masculine business culture is ingrained (Noguer-Juncà et al., 2020).

"The corporate culture is always very masculine. So there are things that I don't even know how to explain, but for example, the directors have a group that is only men of the same age and they have their WhatsApp group and there they send each other their jokes and stories. I get along great with them and then they invite me to lunch and so on, but the WhatsApp group of jokes is only theirs". (Interviewee 11_36 years old, employee).

The alternative of communication professionals to the "men's clubs" is to create female networking.

"The organization does not promote networking, but the networking that exists is very, very, very masculine and the few female managers that are in the company, of which there are 10 of us, have set up our own informal networking for this purpose". (Interviewee 10_53 years old, Dircom).

Within the office culture of the organizations, there are sexist situations such as comments or jokes with a patriarchal character. Almost all the communication professionals interviewed stated that they have heard sexist comments in the office and have identified them as sexist. At the same time, it has been analyzed how sexist comments are interpreted differently by the professionals themselves. The age of the communication professional influences the evaluation of sexist comments. Older professionals state that they have heard sexist comments that they have not considered as negative depending on the context and the sender.

"It depends... It depends on who it comes from, doesn't it? And the truth is that I have sometimes come across comments that being sexist have not bothered me, and it seems to me that it was pertinent, and other times I have had to stop my feet". (Interviewee 4_46 years old, Dircom).

On the contrary, younger communication professionals exhibit less tolerance to sexist comments in the workplace. In addition, they are aware that within the corporate culture, comments that are overtly sexist have been normalized.

"Yeah, the typical comment that is sexist but it's so normalized that it's not taken into account as sexist and everyone just stares and you're like really, did he say that?" (Interviewee 16_25 years old, female employee).

The same happens with jokes. Although it should be noted that there are organizations that already have a strict policy of prohibiting sexist or homophobic jokes or comments.

"I have not heard, because also in the company there is a lot of emphasis on being very careful with the language, that it is inclusive, that you do not have prejudices, so no, not at all, never" (Interviewee 22_40 years old, female employee).

The communication professionals indicate that men, above all, make sexist jokes when they are among themselves, that is, when women are present in the conversation, they avoid making sexist comments.

"It is true that men, to give you an example when they see that there are women they are very careful about making certain types of jokes, but when they are alone they tend to make the typical macho jokes of saying any kind of nonsense" (Interviewee 5_32 years old, female employee).

Also, when men are going to make a sexist joke or comment in the presence of women, they apologize beforehand; or if they have already made it, they apologize afterwards. Both actions are part of the so-called benevolent sexism (González-Rivera & Díaz-Loving, 2018). This is interpreted by the communication professionals themselves as men patronizingly treating sexist comments.

"There are still macho jokes of these of dropping some and saying "excuse me there is a woman here" (Interviewee 14_47 years old, Dircom).

The #MeToo movement, social change, the vindication from the feminist movement and the media coverage of these actions, are the explanatory reasons detected by communication professionals to affirm that there is a tendency to change in sexist comments in the office.

"I think it is changing. In the time before MeToo and everything that is emerging right now... there were jokes that were allowed and could be offensive towards women by men, and that is what is changing. Sexist or macho jokes are evolving and changing and every day we see less and less of them" (Interviewee 9_36 years old, female employee).

The Cost of Leadership for Female Communication Managers

Work Overload

Almost all of the female communication directors state that they have had to work harder because they are women. This variable is related to the level of self-demand and to the number of daily hours they confess they work every day. When analyzing these variables, it could be understood that it is their own internal factors that generate their total commitment to their work.

However, there is research that explains self-demand as a factor linked to female leadership, due to the constant need they have to demonstrate why they have a leadership position in an organization (Dandalar & Abebe, 2020). It is common that in interviews they define themselves as very demanding of themselves, or as very hard-working and responsible, traits traditionally attributed to women under the (self-) conviction that those who have broken the glass ceiling is because of their complete and persistent dedication over time to the workplace (Cuadrado-Guirado & Morales, 2007).

"I am very demanding, I am very, very demanding, but very demanding first with myself. I don't eat dinner anymore, I don't stop... if I always get an opportunity, luck catches you working." (Interviewee 2_41 years old, Dircom).

It is not surprising that some authors prefer the concept of cement ceiling to the glass ceiling, because of its difficulty to break it (Beckwith et al., 2016). As is the case with the number of daily working hours, which in addition to being related to the qualifier of "being hard workers", is imbricated in the external - and internal - a projection that family life is not taking them away from their management responsibilities (Esser et al., 2018).

"The right thing to do would be around 9 hours, 8 or 9 hours a day, but I am doing 10-11-12-13, I don't know... and it is not only a question of time"
(Interviewee 3_49 years old, Dircom).

The communication directors interviewed point out that on average they work between 10 to 12 hours a day, but that in addition to the number of hours in the office they are constantly connected via email or telephone.

"But in communication, in addition, you never disconnect, that is, digital disconnection is very complicated" *(Interviewee 20_49 years old, Dircom).*

Teleworking increased with the pandemic situation has also crossed the limits of the working day, breaking the space for work and the place for leisure and/or being with the family. This problem has affected more intensely women who have been immersed in an eternal working day alternating between work and care.

"With teleworking, I called my female coworkers, regardless of what their position was, and I saw and heard their children, whether they were engineers, secretaries, my boss, my partner ... and when I called any male coworker and very rarely were [the children] because they were with his wife, that is, we have all been in our house, but nothing to do with the distribution of tasks, but nothing to do, that is, the children are in Spain with us" *(Interviewee 7_43 years, employee).*

The reconciliation of family and professional life continues to be one of the main problems reported by communication professionals. As noted above, long working hours, the lack of disconnection outside the work environment, self-demand and the lack, in some cases, of a real and effective sharing of household and care tasks, lead women to state that the balance between both spheres is "complicated" or that it is "unbalanced" towards the work sphere.

"My balance is a complicated balance to achieve" (Interviewee 1_45 years old, Dircom).

"I say that it is an imbalance because in the end, I dedicate much more time to work than to my family. I am aware of it, but it is very, very complex because there is no escape valve... and then you want to progress... well, things get very complicated" (Interviewee 10_53 years old, Dircom).

The communication managers point out that in order to have a family and to be able to progress in their professional career, two aspects are fundamental. On the one hand, their own ability to set limits both in terms of schedules and responsibilities - including not strengthening networking outside working hours - and knowing how to delegate tasks to the team.

"It is hard for us to sit down and say "this is my limit", but I set many limits, but I do not always verbalize them, but I set many limits, that is, I can not pick up the phone to my boss in peace (...) and delegate, and that is very scary because you lose a lot of control, you stop knowing about things... For me it is a risk that I am willing to take". (Interviewee 12_46 years old, Dircom).

On the other hand, it is essential to have a network of family support and circles of friends with whom to share the care and responsibilities of the family home. Even so, they recognize the difficulty and the personal and family "sacrifices" they have had to make

throughout their lives in order to maintain their leadership position. At this point emerges the feeling of guilt of not spending enough time with their family, and/or the time they do spend is not of quality, being physically and mentally exhausted; or with their heads still on work problems.

"You don't have the same feeling of enjoyment or the same level of patience when you have small children, that is, it is not the same to work 8 hours than 12. If you want to maintain both areas, working long hours, it is based on a lot of sacrifice on the personal side, and to assume that sacrifice if you want to" (Interviewee 3_49 years old, Dircom).

Labour Discrimination

Discrimination in the workplace is evident when elements such as the glass ceiling, the wage gap or various obstacles to career opportunities persist, but also in the differential treatment of women. The latter becomes visible when the majority of female communication directors state that they have been questioned about the way in which they have held positions of responsibility; that they have been job disapproved by a profile of men who are older than them; that they have felt treated differently because they are women; and that they have been excluded from important decisions.

"I've been given to understand, as in... "and where are you going to leave your child when you travel?" I mean, they are telling you that you can't because you have a child and you are a woman and then I answer "hey, have you asked the other directors who also have children what they are going to do with them? Why are you asking me?" I mean, all the directors have children, why are you asking me what I am going to do with my son? Don't worry about my son, I'll take care of him. These types of comments or questions are asked to a

woman, not to a man, to see if you can do this type of job or project, and that is clear gender discrimination" (Interviewee 8_49 years old, Dircom).

"I have uncomfortable anecdotes. In the sector where I started, they said 'look at this 23-year-old girl, why does she have that position'. And then another one, I replaced a publishing director of a multinational company charging 40,000 less knowing that I was charging 40,000 euros less". (Interviewee 2_41 years old, Dircom).

However, when asking the communication professionals if they have been directly told that they are not good enough for something because they are women, most of them say no; but it is relevant how some of them qualify their answer by indicating that directly no, but that they have been told in other ways. This is an example of benevolent machismo, referred to earlier (González-Rivera & Díaz-Loving, 2018).

"So like that... to me directly no. Yes they have told me things more related to my way of being, but not directly for being a woman, yes they have told me "I do not think you are able to sell a million euros because you smile too much", yes". (Interviewee 11_36 years old, female employee).

Conclusions

The main conclusions of this study can be briefly summarized in six statements:

- Female communication managers practice mixed communication styles: direct and clear communication, but also empathetic and considerate. Female communication managers prefer inclusive and democratic leadership styles.
- Female communication managers achieve and maintain their leadership positions by making great "sacrifices" on the personal and family level.
- Female communication managers are extremely demanding due to external questioning and the constant need to justify their leadership.
- A male company culture persists in which female communication professionals experience situations of discrimination.
- Social pressure and pressure from some companies against overtly sexist behaviour is improving the situation, even with the danger of incubating a benevolent or more subtle sexism.

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