

Monika Różycka

West Pomeranian Business School

The conditions of women’s success in the context of appreciation of female values

Introduction

The notion of “female values” is a well-known one that for centuries has been used in literature with various meanings. Each culture has its own views on the attributes and characteristics of either gender, and the virtues and strengths that it represents. Historically speaking, women and men have been assigned different cognitive, emotional and personal features. Women have usually been perceived in opposition to men – as caring, empathic, intuitive and ready for sacrifices. Sometimes they have been regarded as morally superior to men, who act in the public sphere, which is associated with demoralisation. These views have been reinforced by such contrastive dichotomies as objective-subjective, rational-emotional, and public-private. Characteristics such as modesty, gentleness, humility, compassionateness, supportiveness, sensitivity and unselfishness have also been considered as typically female values.

Women have been assessed negatively in disciplines typically practiced by men, such as science, development of statehood and law, and entrepreneurship. Throughout the centuries, male style dominated the public sphere and men were supported in the development of this part of their personality that is associated with independence, self-control, will, thinking, reason, logic, the capacity to form judgments and moral appraisal. Men’s achievements are translated into economic results also at the moment. Men are still characterised as tough, strong, resolute, self-confident, ambitious, direct and reserved. Female characteristics, traditionally associated with protectiveness resulting from motherhood, resourcefulness, and diligence connected with the domestic sphere, have been underestimated for ages.

Women are capable of making choices and setting priorities, and have attributes that may be regarded as typical of their own gender [Ziemińska 2008:115]. It is obviously not to claim that some characteristics are assigned solely and exclusively to women, while others to men. First of all, particular individuals may have skills that are not specific to their gender. Second, identifying the characteristics of most women does not imply that all women will display them. Although the statistical average is composed of both extremities, a specific set of characteristics may be more representative for women than for men, and the other way around. Women and men may interchangeably use both codes – cognitive and moral ones – not assigned to their gender.

Scholars have claimed for some time now that women bring to business characteristics and talents specific to their gender and resulting from their life experience. It is asserted that the business model based on values traditionally regarded as male, such as power, authoritarianism, or the task and competitive management style, has been exhausted. The corporate culture is changing, in particular within the largest and richest companies; diversity is ever more accepted and appreciated, as companies want to use the opportunities arising from the potential of women in business and on the labour market. This gives rise to a paradigm of appreciation of values traditionally associated with women [Różycka, Kmiecik, Król 2016]. Nevertheless, employers, especially the owners of small and middle-sized enterprises, still believe that employing women is not an economically viable option due to their low disponibility, conditioned by their caring responsibilities.

This paper intends to identify female values in the context of the paradigm of appreciation of values traditionally regarded as female ones.

The aim of a survey conducted among female entrepreneurs in the West Pomeranian Province, whose results are analysed herein, was to answer the question which characteristics are displayed by women who are successful in business and on the labour market. The research hypothesis related to S.L.Bem's well-known theory, whereby an individual may possess one of several possible combinations of male and female characteristics and their balance allows faster adaptation and better functioning in an ever more complex social reality [Bem 2000]. Such persons "have a better capacity to act in a constructive manner" [Kuczyńska 1992:240]. Another goal of the survey was to verify the hypothesis that **women who are successful in business represent simultaneously strong female and strong male characteristics**. Although such characteristics are usually understood in contrastive terms – as opposed to one another or mutually exclusive – their complementarity may actually contribute to the development of companies and the improvement of their effectiveness and efficiency.

The paradigm of appreciation of female values

European culture takes its roots from the Judo-Christian tradition along with Greek and Roman antiquity. The contemporary discourse on female and male values originates from the Old Testament (9th-5th century BC). In Ancient Greece, there were two prevailing views: the Platonic recognition of equality and the Aristotelean conviction about gender differences [Puszkow-Bańka 2014]. These two concepts had a lasting influence on speculations regarding gender in Western culture countries.

The dependence of one's moral condition on biological sex may be found in the philosophy of J.J. Rousseau, who demonstrated the inferiority of women and formulated a conception that allegedly confirmed their full subordination to men. Rousseau argued that characteristics that do not befit men prove to be virtues for women, but only if women are dependent on their husbands and subordinate in marriage. Independence or pursuit goals other than the family's welfare was held to imply the loss of the characteristics that make a woman desirable and

respectable. The notion of virtues conditioned by gender to which, in Rousseau's view, women should aspire was harshly criticised by M. Wollstonecraft [1792]. She advocated revolutionary changes in female manners, the necessity of women's education and the development of virtues related to entrepreneurship and economic independence. She believed that the best professions for women include not only nursery, midwifery and medical care, but also politics or business. Although she noticed unfair double standards in the treatment of women and men, she ultimately acknowledged the superiority of male power and male values [Taylor 2003:12, 14-15].

Although virtues as understood by Rousseau significantly depreciated women, views that underscored women's strengths and advantages in times when it was difficult for them to achieve independence could have struck many as interesting. There were some advocates of the claim that society may become morally better under the influence of women. It was possible this way to demonstrate that women who display specific characteristics may be morally superior to men. The argument that the activity of men in areas mostly dominated by them, such as war, politics or government, coupled with the nature of the male psyche which is often destructive, was a convincing one in the struggle for women's suffrage in the early 20th century [Singer 1998:537].

According to R. Ziemińska, "gender determines both cognitive processes and moral attitudes. This is indicated by empirical research, which helps to describe the manner and scope in which it does so" [Ziemińska 2008:115]. The conviction that men and women differ with respect to ethical priorities and moral reasoning, as a result of different life experiences and the ways of their social expression, is supported by C. Gilligan, who emphasises, as part of the concept of the ethics of care, that there exist separate sets of distinctive characteristics of each gender. She argues that they appear as early as during girlhood and do not depend on skin colour or social background (as cited in [Kamińska 2008:39]). According to C. Gilligan, the way of thinking typical of women is ignored in the mainstream of traditional ethics. Starting with Plato and Aristotle, through Hume, Kant or utilitarianism, the description of morality is, as noticed by Gilligan, the description of male morality and does not take into consideration non-normative women's experience in this area. As a result of adopting the male way of thinking, it was believed that women were at an inferior stage of ethical development with respect to principles de-

veloped by mainstream ethics. The concept of the ethics of care put forth by C. Gilligan balances on the border between developmental psychology and moral psychology. The author believes that men find it more difficult to establish emotional relationships with other people, while women are more willing and find it easier to orient themselves on deeper interpersonal relationships. They have inborn psychological aptitude to enter into romantic and emotional relationships and take care of other people [Gilligan 2015]. In Gilligan's study, in contrast to the ethics of justice, morality is expressed in care for other people and manifests itself in the pursuit of the welfare of a person who a person acting morally care for by satisfying the needs of the latter and, indirectly, also their own interests.

The belief that social roles that are traditionally recognised as female may help to adjust priorities and values associated with the more destructive part of the male nature is voiced also by feminist theoreticians who agree that there are specifically female virtues and values and that they should be noticed and appreciated (e.g. [Tong 2002:173; Noddings 2003:28]). R. Tong constructed a set of positive characteristics, so-called values traditionally associated with women, including gentleness, modesty, humility, supportiveness, empathy, compassionateness, tenderness, nurturance, intuitiveness, sensitivity and unselfishness, which – as she emphasises – are more valuable in moral terms than values traditionally associated with men, such as strong will, ambition, courage, independence, self-confidence, perseverance, rationality or the ability to control emotions [Tong 2002:173]. Other feminist scholars also agree that ethics cannot be universal, as it is conditioned by gender. They believe also that values promoted by feminist ethics enrich all the areas of public life. This, however, may also act to the detriment of women. According to J. Grimshaw, a socially appreciated and glorified female function may prevent women – as those who are responsible for creating a homely atmosphere – from liberating themselves from the image of a mere “background” for the important activity of men in the public sphere [as cited in Kamińska 2008:19-35].

According to the research of E. Lisowska, the abilities to coexist and to communicate with other people are factors that usually determine women's success [Lisowska 2001:29]. Women are perceived as persons who attach greater importance to the sense of community, common good and the production of values by a community.

As claimed by G. Hofstede and G.J. Hofstede, masculinity and femininity may be attributed not only to individuals, but also to whole societies. In feminine cultures, emphasis is placed on care for other people, cooperation and relationships, while masculine cultures focus on success, money, property and fierce competition. As regards professional life, the authors contend that feminine factors include, first of all, relationships, that is a good rapport with one's immediate supervisor, and, second of all, cooperation understood as work with people oriented on cooperation. Moreover, work allowing employees to live in a place appropriate for them and their family, and guaranteed employment – the sense of security related to a stable place of employment. Male factors, in turn, include earnings, or the possibility to have high income, and, next, recognition, understood as due appreciation for well-done work, promotion, i.e., the possibility to move up to a higher position, and challenges, where motivating and ambitious work gives a sense of self-satisfaction [Hofstede, Hofstede 2007:132-138].

There are also other studies dating back to the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century that illustrate the trend dominating in the perception of female and male characteristics. A definite division of gender characteristics was proposed by S.L. Bem, who developed a questionnaire on traditional gender roles, reflecting the degree to which an individual identifies themselves with these roles [McAdam 2013:24]. Stating that an individual may have one of several possible combinations of male and female characteristics [Brzezińska et al. 2002:3], S.L. Bem assumes that androgynous persons function more effectively in social situations. The balance of male and female characteristics allows faster adaptation and better functioning in an ever more complex social reality. She emphasises that research shows that androgynous women and men are able to be both assertive and caring [Bem 2000:150]. Androgynous persons are individuals “having equally developed female and male characteristics, irrespective of their biological sex” [Kuczyńska 1992:239].

A. Kuczyńska, a Polish scholar, assumes that androgynous persons “have a better capacity to act in a constructive manner” [Kuczyńska 1992:240]. During a survey conducted among students in the 1990s, she identified respectively 15 female, 15 male and 5 neutral characteristics [Kuczyńska 1992:238-247].

Femininity and masculinity among women entrepreneurs in the West Pomeranian Province

The survey was carried out from December 2016 to December 2017 in the West Pomeranian Province and included three stages. It was conducted using four types of questionnaires and an original *Test on femininity and masculinity in business*. The form is a research tool indicating both the level of femininity and masculinity in business and success in business. It shows also to what extent female and male characteristics may be regarded as complementary, i.e., mutually supportive.

It has been established that **women's values**, which are values chosen by women as their priorities and preferences, are as follows: (1) family, home and children, (2) help, care and health, (3) security and altruism, (4) education.

Female values, in turn, are defined as a set of characteristics or talents specific to women, on the basis of which they function and which they display in external relationships (table 1).

It should be noted that "success" is a relative concept and it may be defined in different ways. In its popular meaning, the word relates both to professional life and to private life. It may refer to the effective pursuit of goals that bring measurable benefits. Although the best definition of success was formulated by A. Längle, an Austrian psychologist ("To achieve a success means that I have had fortune in life because my efforts have been effective"), the research conducted in the West-Pomeranian Province adopted two factors as criteria for success in its broad sense.¹ The first one concerns "success in running a business" and the other one is related to "success in life". Success in running a business was measured by the women's fulfilment of the requirement to pursue an economic activity for more than 3.5 years. Moreover, success factors were assessed also using the criterion of asset (property) growth stability according to a 5-point Likert scale, with respect to the generated EBIT/EBITDA operating profit,² revenue dynamics and net return on sales (ROS³). The criterion of asset growth stability related to the significant, stable and systematic growth of the company's property, including its fixed assets, e.g., tangible fixed assets, real property, intangible assets, and current assets, e.g., inventory, receivables, financial resources or securities. Moreover, the company's development and market success

were measured by compliance with at least one of the following conditions: being one of the best businesses in the city/province/country/world, having a good position within the local/provincial/national/international market, successful functioning on the market, generation of an operating profit and systematic development.

The following factors were adopted for the purposes of the research as the measures of "success in life": assessment of prosperity, being a source of inspiration and motivation for others, having social prestige and recognition, achievement of goals, balance between professional and private life, and lack of difficulties in reconciliation of professional and family roles. The achievement of success in life encompassed also a declaration regarding the personal opinion of a respondent about whether "she has been successful in life" by indicating 4 and 5 on the Likert scale, which was held to mean that the respondent has been successful.

As regards senior and top management staff, what was assessed was the impact on the financial results of the company in which the respondents work or contribution to its good results, also over a period of more than 3 years. Another measure of the companies' success was the significant, stable and systematic growth of their property or the stable level of their assets over the period covered by the survey. The criteria of success in life were determined in the same way as for the women owners of companies.

The reference group in the survey was composed of women who have the status of entrepreneurs and used to run a business but no longer do so following bankruptcy, insolvency or the company's liquidation. By the same token, the reference group for the managing staff was composed of women who had been dismissed and no longer held managing positions.

The survey qualification criterion for unsuccessful women was a decrease of assets or a significant, drastic decrease of assets in the company, and the fact that the company's revenue dynamics and sale profitability in the last 3 years or recently decreased or significantly decreased. The other conditions included low recognition among other businesses operating in the same industry on the market, a conviction that the company is one of many businesses that do not cope with competition on the market, and loss from business. Apart from a lack of "success in business," this group of respondents was characterised by a lack of a sense of "success in life." The criteria in this respect were analogical to those for the first group, but this time people were chosen who were

Table 1. The values brought by women to business and the labour market

Values	Source
Authenticity in communicating feelings and emotions	Introduction to: Gerzema, D'Antonio 2014; Buckingham 2012:86-94; Sandberg 2016:114-133, 379; Goudreau 2011; George et al. 2007; Report Deloitte 2012
Sensitivity to human needs, including those of employees and customers, and pursuit of economic goals	Zenger, Folkman 2012; Rubin 1997; Majewska-Opiełka 2000:346-350; Lisowska 2011:118; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:26-27; Brzezinski 2012:80, 127
Empathy	Brzezinski 2012:131; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:26-27; Gerzema, D'Antonio 2014:23, 300-301
Intuitiveness	Fisher 2003:38-39; Majewska-Opiełka 2000:67, 242; Hajduk 2017; Brzezinski 2012:134
Explaining and inspiring (as tactics of influence) to win the trust and commitment of employees	Zenger, Folkman 2012; Report Deloitte 2012:1-28
Focus on building and maintaining relationships with other people	Bendyk 2009; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:33; Kamińska 2008:53
Sharing knowledge, experience and achievements	PwC report 2015:116; Kupczyk 2013:87; Rifkin 2005:223-234; Rosener 2006:202; Brzezinski 2012:81; Gerzema, D'Antonio 2014:302; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:29, 43, 178; Report Deloitte 2012:20
Willingness to hear the opinions of other people despite a longer decision-making process	Gerzema, D'Antonio 2014:299; Fisher 2003:21; Kupczyk 2013; Report Deloitte 2012:1-28
Orientation on communication and compromise	Peters 2005:271-275; Fisher 2003:271; Pinker 2009:75, 94; Kamińska 2008:91; Brzezinski 2012:108-109; PwC report 2015:2-10; Lisowska 2001:29
Network thinking – taking into account various links and correlations, and the social context of a given case	Fisher 2003:21-23, 34
Care and responsibility for other people, understanding	Gilligan 2013, 2015; Lisowska 2011:117-118; Pinker 2009:86, 104, 121, 175; Noddings 2003:2
Urge to do one's utmost, no self-complacency	Brzezinski 2012; Sandberg 2016:50, 96; Kłós 2017; Niezgoda 2017; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:39, 44
Democratic management, preference for teamwork	Lisowska 2011:104; Rollnik-Sadowska 2010:130; Słowik 2017; Brzezinski 2012:117; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:29, 178
Multitasking	Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:52, 174, 176; Cabrera 2016; Fisher 2003:19-52
Fear of being perceived by other people as an unlikeable person or fear of losing popularity in one's community	Girl Scout Research Institute 2008:19; Sandberg 2016:66-67, 77; Brzezinski 2012:62-63, 66, 98 104, 110; Cistak 2016; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:47
Attributing success to luck or assistance from other people	Brzezinski 2012:57, 62; Sandberg 2016:52, 62-63; Report PwC 2015:11
Willingness to reconcile family with professional life	Brzezinski 2012:18, 34; Pinker 2009:147; Report PwC 2015:10
Focus on learning, improvement of skills and self-development	Lisowska 2011:111; Słowik 2017; Kłós 2017; Kupczyk 2013:87, 91; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:177; Report PwC 2015:10
Using feedback and expressing oneself in a contextual and more moderate style, e.g., I suggest, it depends	Brzezinski 2012:105; Kamińska 2008:83, 150; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:43; Report Deloitte 2012; Hajduk 2017
Economy (caution in making investments)	Raport Deutschebank 2016; Lisowska 2011; Sandberg 2016:58; Brzezinski 2012:76-77; Fisher 2003:40
Belief in the necessity to pay greater attention to the promotion of one's image	Dryjańska 2015; Brzezinski 2012:35, 43, 54, 120, 122; Sandberg 2016:96; Chybicka, Zubrzycka 2015:45

Source: own work.

characterised by the low fulfilment of the indicated conditions, or measures of success, as illustrated by their choice of 1 and 2, equivalent to a lack of success on the 5-point Likert scale.

The survey had a written form and was conducted during individual meetings with 109 respondents. The time for giving answers was not limited but the average time of carrying out the survey (without technical and preparatory activities) for 1 person was from 15 to 60 minutes.

The survey results clearly confirmed the main research hypothesis that women who are successful in business have strong female and strong male characteristics at the same time.

The data have shown that the arithmetical mean for female characteristics in the category of success and for male characteristics was respectively 4.40 and 4.35 on a 1 to 5 scale, where weak femininity assumes values from 1.00 to 2.49, moderate femininity – from 2.50 to 3.50, while strong femininity – from 3.51 to 5.00. For women in the category “unsuccessful”, the values were markedly lower, with 2.93 on average for female characteristics and 2.51 on average for male characteristics. The analysis of the foregoing data shows significantly higher means for masculinity and femininity with respect to women who have been successful in business, as compared to unsuccessful women. These results are confirmed by the values of the median for female and male characteristics in the category of women successful in business: 4.51 for female characteristics and 4.35 for male characteristics, so very close to the aforementioned value of the arithmetical mean for these characteristics. The median and mode of female and male characteristics also assumed similar values. The values of the mode with respect to female characteristics related to the success variable are 4.70 and, for a lack of success, 3.10. For male characteristics, the values are respectively 4.51 and 2.33.

Most characteristics are moderately correlated with success, exerting an impact on the profitability, efficiency, and effectiveness of companies, as measured during the survey. The survey has demonstrated that characteristics moderately correlated with success in business, i.e., those that have an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of companies, include:

- sharing knowledge, experience and achievements,
 - focus on learning, improvement of skills and self-development,
 - intuitiveness,
 - economy,
 - authenticity in communicating feelings and emotions,
 - explaining and inspiring as tactics of influence used to win the trust and commitment of employees,
 - orientation on communication and compromise,
 - multitasking,
 - empathy,
 - sensitivity to human needs, including those of employees and customers, with the simultaneous pursuit of economic goals within a company,
 - willingness to hear the opinions of other people despite a longer decision-making process.
- Moreover, the hierarchy of female characteristics of women entrepreneurs was developed. The hierarchy covers characteristics with which the respondents identify to varying degrees. The characteristics include, first of all, authenticity in communicating feelings and emotions, which scored 4.70 on a 1-5 scale, just as multitasking. Focus on learning, improvement of skills and self-development scored slightly less i.e., 4.65. Focus on building and maintaining interpersonal relationships that gives a woman the sense of security and comfort scored 4.61 points, just as a willingness to reconcile family life with professional life. Sharing knowledge, experience and achievements and sensitivity to human needs, including those of employees and customers, with the simultaneous pursuit of economic goals within a company scored 4.58 points each.
- Most of the analysed female characteristics are relatively strongly correlated. Some of the pairs of male and female characteristic are strongly complementary:
- multitasking vs. the ability to focus on the performance of an assigned task;
 - belief in the necessity to pay greater attention to the promotion of one’s image vs. no problems with promoting oneself;
 - willingness to hear the opinions of other people despite a longer decision-making process vs. self-reliance, authoritarianism and fast decision making;
 - intuitiveness vs. rationalism;
 - economy vs. propensity to take risk and challenges;
 - use of more frequent feedback and a contextual and more moderate style of expression (e.g., I suggest, it depends) vs. an assertive and straightforward language and style of communication, strong statements;

- focus on building and maintaining interpersonal relationships that gives a woman the sense of security and comfort vs. independence and autonomy mean the sense of security and peace for a woman;
- willingness to reconcile family life with professional life vs. ambition, orientation on success and the pursuit of a career.

Although female and male characteristics are usually understood in opposite terms – as conflicting or mutually exclusive, the research has shown that the characteristics of the women entrepreneurs are correlated on a complementary basis, which means that they complement and support one another. This complementarity should be an added value for companies. The symbiosis of female and male values should help to improve the quality of management processes within companies. Characteristics there are seemingly contradictory or opposite are strongly correlated and form a complementary whole.

Conclusion

Female values include characteristics or attributes that are regarded by society (or women themselves) as specific to women at a particular historical moment, in a particular age or in a particular cultural environment, e.g., a country. These values will not be fixed and invariable but they will change with time. Just as **women's values, female values** are also susceptible to cultural changes, yet this process has an evolutionary character. They may have varying (greater or lesser) strengths or intensities, but they are still **female** values, being perceived as such by society. These values may be developed, shaped or improved (assuming that one is a unique and original individual) as one learns, gains experience or changes one's personality.

Success in business depends on numerous factors independent of gender. For instance, both women and man have the same managerial potential. Both genders are highly motivated to lead others. Every leader has a unique style. In this sense, gender and other variables are of secondary importance; they have little significance because what counts the most is the proper selection of staff according to competencies, passion, and, most importantly, inner energy to act. Women bring different values to business than men. Learning how to better use women's talents is an investment that will enable companies to develop effectively, increase their po-

tential to solve problems and improve their innovation. Women constitute more than a half of society, they are better educated and no business could afford to ignore such a potential.

The identified female characteristics are better suited to the contemporary conditions and the modern form of enterprises than male ones. Moreover, breaking the rule of femininity associated with reliance on characteristics regarded as female results in their being perceived in a negative way. In other words, women should avoid imitating male methods and try to look for their own ways of pursuing a career. The identified and described **female values** may be used for this purpose.

¹ Success may be understood also as surpassing one's internal limitations or the ability to face circumstances that may be beyond our reach and sometimes also our control. Overcoming a crisis or a serious illness may thus also be considered a success. Success may relate to moments when one feels a sense of harmony, happiness, beauty and satisfaction, or even the ability to appreciate every moment in life or to find good in everything that happens to one.

² EBIT – operating profit, or earnings before deducting interest and taxes. EBITDA (*earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization*) – the company's earnings before interest on interest bearing liabilities (loans, bonds), taxes, amortization of intangible assets and depreciation of tangible assets.

³ ROS – net return on sale, or net profit margin.

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