



MENTAL TOUGHNESS AND
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN
MANAGERS – A CASE STUDY
IN POLISH ORGANISATIONS

Background

When planning a successful business, we seek employees who can ensure success. We can recruit and promote them by taking account of various factors such as knowledge, professional skills, qualifications, experience, seniority, interpersonal skills, etc.

However, we all know cases where an excellent MBA student who graduated with distinction turns out a mediocre manager. We all know managers with a lot of knowledge and experience and who are successful in one environment, after changing companies do not measure up in new situations when faced with new challenges.

A significant part of the explanation lies in the fact that our success largely depends on our internal resources which resemble an internal engine pushing us forward despite pressure and obstacles that we come across. This internal engine is fuelled by our mental toughness.

We already know that it is important to assess the level of mental toughness when we recruit new employees. Additionally, when you recruit new managers, don't forget about the differences in mental toughness between women and men, which is clearly observed in the Polish population. These might be of significant importance when juxtaposed with the current business challenges of the company.

Our study revealed a significant correlation between the level of mental toughness and the position in the organisation's hierarchy – the higher the latter, the greater the mental toughness of employees. A reasonable conclusion is that the level of mental toughness is one of a potentially important factors promotion and talent management.

Gender – some interesting observations

The study revealed differences in mental toughness of women and men in top managerial positions.

At the regular employee level, females appeared to achieve slightly lower mental toughness score than males.

On the normally distributed sten scale the mean score for male employees came to 6.6, whereas the female employees mean score was 6.0.

However, this pattern was reversed when it comes to top managerial positions.

There, the mean sten score for senior female managers was 7.1.

Males in equivalent positions scored 6.6 on average.

The conclusion may be obvious to some – especially when we consider social stereotyping which can prevent women from climbing up the organisational ladder and the “glass ceiling” they so often come up against. It seems that, when they get to senior positions, the top of the hierarchy is occupied by very strong and resilient women.

Examining the 4Cs

Further analysis of the data revealed some interesting and consistent patterns when drilling down to the level of the component scales of Mental Toughness.

Female managers scored significantly higher than their male counterparts on the Challenge scale. Female managers scored 6.6, while male managers 5.4. Attitude towards challenges is interpreted here as treating changes and problems as opportunities for development, without avoiding them and protecting the status quo, as well as continuous search for development opportunities.

This is a statistically significant difference. It may indicate a significant source of strength for female managers.

It seems that this is a significant factor in the promotion of female staff. The mean score for Challenge for women in top managerial positions came to 6.6; whereas female employees scored 5.6.

This suggests that female managers are more willing to take on challenges, adapt to changes more easily and be positive about new things. They perceive it as a chance for personal, team and company development. This extraordinary advantage could be of special value to organisations which have perhaps stalled or stagnated, and which seek new areas of activity, services and innovation or niche solutions.

When we look at scores for male managers, their highest scores lie on the Control scale. Especially where this includes the emotional control sub-scale. This is where the sense of “can do” sits.

The significant difference on the Control scale between males in executive and employee positions (male executives – 7.0, male employees – 6.3) suggests that it is the sense of control, viewed as the sense that they can influence their surroundings and control the situation, that is a significant factor for male promotion.

The ability to control emotions for male managers may be particularly important in crisis situations. Their large need for control is definitely useful when a company wants to stabilise its market position and expand by increasing the area of influence.

When seeking people who will provide success for us and our organisations it is worth to look not only at their knowledge, skills and experience, but also behaviours and attributes. Today, we can precisely assess and measure these with the MTQ48 test and to think how we can extend its potential. Today, we know that this development is possible.

(based on the article titled *“Awansujesz pracownika? Pamiętaj o różnicach w odporności psychicznej kobiet i mężczyzn”* [“Promoting an employee? Remember about the differences in male and female mental toughness”], Katarzyna Kłoskowska-Kustosz, Katarzyna Lorenc, Harvard Business Review, October 2007)