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# Is Christine Lagarde a transformational leader? A case study

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## ABSTRACT

The uncertainty and unpredictability that characterizes the dynamic contexts of organizations environment require a strong and effective leadership. Given the different challenges facing organizations, more complex leadership responses are required. Thus, a leader's choice is based on transferable and flexible competencies that enable all members of the organization to pursue common goals without detracting from individual interests as well as adjusting responses to changing challenges.

This is the case of contingency models, where the transformational model is included. These issues have implications for the pressing issues of research and address issues such as gender leadership. However, we continue to see male leaders in mass, and in practice there are women who excel in leadership roles at the highest level.

This is the case of Christine Lagarde, who has imposed herself globally, especially in the IMF. Based on the model of transformational leadership, we have analyzed the leadership profile of this French lawyer and policy, based on the content of a heterobiography of two French journalists who accompanied her during time as a French minister (2005-2011).

The conclusions highlight a profile consistent with the theoretical framework used, in all its factors. In addition, more than a gender issue, the profile of competencies and a model of leadership that allows for the necessary flexibility to meet the demands of the global world seems to be emphasized."

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership in the Western world has always been an essentially male phenomenon. The paradigm shift, in which women assumes a status of reference as a model leader, will be far from a reality (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woehr, 2014). However, the recognition of women's specificities that instigates leadership and success in organizations, in addition to the progressive emergence of women who highlight in leadership worldwide and in different areas, until now male areas, are an important step. Indeed, at the present, women are more likely than men to have the education, experience, which facilitates the demands in the global arena (Stefanco, 2017). Finally, gender issues in leadership may be merely rhetoric, not happening with characteristics of leadership and leadership styles that, by scientific evidence, are assumed to be fundamental to the success of organizations. All differences, whether or not attributable to gender, based on scientific evidence, are fundamental to understanding leadership processes. Also, the examples of leaders who have stood out by the national and international projection constitute as fundamental elements of study.

The uncertainty and unpredictability that characterizes the dynamic contexts environment of organizations, with constant technological, social, political and economic changes, requires a strong and effective leadership. Firms need great transformations that implies the reinvention of cultures more than strategic modifications. Thus, it is crucial a transformational leader in order to transmuting the firm through a new vision where the interactions are organized to a collective purpose with the collaboration of the followers (Cossin & Caballero, 2013; Simola, Barling & Turner, 2012). In the first instance, the aim is to improve the self-efficacy and self-esteem in the followers as individuals and empower them in order to develop their potential, abilities and skills. However, the final goal is develops common values and beliefs where the leaders behave equally toward all members of the organization (Wang & Howell, 2010).

Christine Lagarde (CL) is an example of a leader in the feminine who has taken over inside and outside her own country, in the most influential organizational structures in the world, and in a world far from parity. Has she

approached the male leadership or took herself by her very nature? Convinced that, in leadership, the style or profile matters, regardless of gender, we intend to use the case of CL as paradigmatic. So, in this context, we propose to reflect on its profile, taking as reference the contingency models and, above all, the transformational model.

## 1. The emergence of a leader: some reflections on leadership models

The history of mankind is written with numerous references to undisputed leaders and to which the course of events is due, often changed almost inexplicably as a consequence of a decision or set of decisions. Sometimes, the role of the leader is particularly relevant, especially for the complexity of the projects, the people involved, and the urgency of the desired results. Notwithstanding the common endeavors of many men and women in pursuit of a purpose, the truth is that whoever stands for history and remains in the collective memory is often a single name, a single personality-the leader.

In this background, is not difficult to understand the interest of the investigation regarding the importance of leadership and the explanations about this "phenomenon". Is it possible to find an ideal leadership profile? Are the characteristics of the leader innate or acquired? Can we form leaders, or will we have to find the leader? What is the effectiveness of the leader? And the equation becomes more complex, especially as the leader does not always emerge naturally in a given context (emergent leader), in many situations being chosen by appointment to a position in the organization (formal leader). Even in these cases, it is important to answer those questions that help those responsible (with decision-making power) to "choose the best and the most appropriate leader".

Jesuino (1987) systematizes so far the research results so far in four typologies of models, according to the emphasis on: a) personality traits of the leader, dominant until the 1940s; b) leader's behavior and leadership styles, consequence of contradictory results from the

previous period; c) effects of situational variables on the personality of the leader from the 1960s; and d) effects of interactions between variables of the situation and characteristics of the leader, after the 1980s. Indeed, the new wave of models focuses “(1) na compreensão e importância do carisma e na capacidade transformacional dos líderes na relação com os colaboradores, (2) na preocupação em integrar os aspectos comportamentais e os traços de personalidade e, (3) no estudo de todo o tipo de interações que se estabelecem entre todos os membros do grupo vs. Organização” (Barracho & Martins, 2010, p. 31). In sum, these are integrative models that value the personality and behavioral characteristics of the leader, along with the moderating aspects between the situation and the effectiveness of the leaders.

In this context, there are no factors that overlap the others (individual or situational), but there are results (effectiveness) attributed to the presence of each and everyone and to the way they interact. It makes sense to abandon the effective model without more, giving place to the model eventually effective in a certain moment and context. However, the resulting complexity implies an increase in difficulties in the choice or selection of the leader, increasing the individual responsibility of the leader in assessing the situation and acting in accordance with what can benefit the results obtained with his leadership, in a permanent monitoring effort. Ultimately, it introduces additional individual characteristics into the profile of the potential leader, but continues to justify its study, although in an integrative perspective. Among the questions that may emerge from this conclusion, we highlight two that seem fundamental to us in the context of this approach to the analysis of Christine Lagarde’s leadership profile, from the perspective of contingency models: is the charisma fundamental to exercise leadership in a contingency perspective? Are gender issues that justify a differential approach to what may promote or undermine leadership in particular contexts?

## 2. Transformational, charismatic and transactional leadership

It is not easy to distinguish the concepts of transformational,

charismatic and transformational leadership. Although, by theoretical abstraction, the explanations become very clear, when we intend to do it for a concrete leader, things get complicated. In proposing the concept of transformational leadership, Burns (1978) referred very clearly to those who exercise leadership by introducing changes in the attitudes and behaviors of an organization’s members because of their commitment and empathy for achieving the goals. They are concerned with ideals and moral values (freedom, justice, honesty, responsibility, reciprocity, etc.) and not fear or envy, in order to empower the ones lead to be agents of themselves change agents. The objectives of the organization prevail, as well as the influence of the leader through the charismatic and inspirational components, the intellectual stimulation and the interest in the development of the capacities of the leaders, encouraging them to autonomize, reinforce and motivate them. Followers see themselves in the leader (identify themselves) and there is mutual trust, without followership, rather the contribution of all to achieve the objectives. Conversely, transactional leadership is based on individual interests, and its power is based on hierarchical authority, respect for rules and tradition, and hence more formalized relationships and routine fulfillment to achieve defined goals. On the other hand, the definition by the leader of the procedure to be used to obtain reward, performance monitoring and corrective actions, both by anticipation of deviations and by a posteriori intervention, are components of transactional leadership. According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders achieve greater employee satisfaction, effort, and effectiveness as opposed to transactional, but a leader can resort to both types, depending on the timing and demands of the situation.

Charisma emerges in Bass’s (1985) transformational theoretical model as a fundamental and distinctive element of charismatic leadership. Charisma is an essential condition for transformational leadership, but it is not sufficient because it depends on the way in which it influences: i) obedience to its decisions and non-acceptance of criticism and change of objectives, ii) collaboration, concern with interest and well-being. The charismatic leader is self-determined, with high self-confidence and self-esteem, facing defeats without being losers and cares about personal and other development. In addition, the leader promotes the development of interests, values and

expectations in the followers. According to Conger and Kanungo (1987), charismatic leadership is a facilitator in situations of crisis and change.

## 3. Gender role in transformational leadership: reality or stereotype?

The study of gender differences in leadership styles strongly depends on the context studied, that is, organizational culture and type of organization (Barracho & Martins, 2010). Thus, a leader in the female context tends to be perceived as more feminine (De Amicis, Zafra, & Garcia-Retamero, 2005) and in a military organization, the requirements of physical strength and virility reinforce the masculine ideal. Nevertheless, we can consider gender differences, which tend to stand out in organizations with a lower degree of bureaucratization and less impact of norms resulting from male (non-traditional) stereotypes, since in the others (traditional), the success of the woman leader is in the ability to conform to the norms and expectations of men (Druskat, 1994). According to Jung, Bass and Sosik (1995), women’s cultures are more conducive to advisory and affective leaders, while the male ones promote more leading leaders. Otherwise, transformational leadership has better conditions to develop in collectivist cultures. Regardless of the gender of the leader, the gender role is more important, as women often take on more masculine roles to have success on the leadership of an organization. It is crucial to understand and deepen the issues related to leadership and gender and to clarify a key issue: is the gender role played by the leader decisive, or leadership can benefit from gender specificities which, overall, change the way organizations operate, but also do they boost their performance? Ultimately, it is intended to answer the questions: i) are there benefits from each gender that necessarily imply male or female roles in leadership? ii) does it make sense to choose a leader according to gender? iii) is transformational leadership associated with gender?

Barracho and Martins (2010), in a reference to a synthesis of studies comparing female and male leadership, highlight the heterogeneity of results that depends on

who performs the evaluations (self and hetero perceived), the type of organization, the cultural context and the measuring instrument used. Regarding the instruments, we would like to refer to papers that used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), as it is a reference tool to operationalize transformational and transactional leadership, with much use in research in this area, whose psychometric properties are very satisfactory. Thus, in 10 studies that have used MLQ, those authors report 4 in which there are no gender differences, while in the others, women stand out as more transformational and more transactional men. A meta-analysis of 45 studies, conducted by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen (2003), also highlighted this gender association.

The lack of gender differences in research was explained by Eagly and Johnson (1990), either through the adoption of similar styles or by the tendency of organizations to choose women with a more masculine leadership style. However, almost 30 years have passed since this publication, and certainly the cultural and social evolution with the proliferation of women in the labor world and even the role assigned to it, enables women to adopt their own styles and impose their ways of leading, associated with undeniable gender differences in terms of personal characteristics. Yukl (2002) highlights only gender differences in certain behaviors and not in the aggregate. Muller (2008) emphasizes women’s ability to respond to the feelings of others, which leads to more sensitive, humanized, closer decisions and cohesive relationships. Also, Nolen-Hoeksema (2010) argues that a woman’s ability to identify her own emotions and perceive those of others facilitates empathy, trust, and loyalty, as well as allowing praise, communicating change, or disappointment. The author adds that the leader is increasingly required adaptive flexibility to respond to current challenges in which women take advantage because they are neither rigid nor conformist, allowing them to find new solutions to the available resources. Yet, Rosette and Tost (2010) concluded by the success of the organization attributed to women in top leadership, because of the greater capacity of communication, greater management skills and overall effectiveness, giving a significant advantage in the skilled leadership performed by women. A study conducted by Nielsen and Huse (2010) in 201 Norwegian companies concludes with a

different female perspective for strategic decision making attributed to greater sensitivity to others, although similar in their ability to perform operational tasks. Rosette and Tost (2010) point out that women can have a leadership advantage, especially when they are able to reach a top position, taking into account the peculiar characteristics that facilitate strong relationships, teamwork and employee care through development. Yukl (2013) points out only gender differences in certain behaviors and not in the whole. In 2012, Zenger Folkman developed a survey of 7280 leaders, whose results highlight women's performances positively and significantly, both in functions (12 of 15) and in leadership skills (the largest differences were taking initiative, practicing self-development, integrity/honesty, and driving for results). On the whole, this work evidenced distinct zones of better performance (men advantage in the technical and strategic areas and women in the people relationships and communication areas).

## 4. Analysis of Christine Lagarde leadership profile from the content of a heterobiographical book

Christine Lagarde is one of the most powerful women in the world (6th place by Forbes, June 2016). The French lawyer and politician was the first woman president of the international law firm Bakers and McKenzie (1999-2004) and the first female finance minister of the G8 and ranked as the best finance minister of the euro zone by the Financial Times in 2009. In 2011, she became executive director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and was re-elected on July 5, 2016. She was also a pioneer here as she is the first woman to run the IMF, considered one of the most powerful institutions of the world. All these reasons led us to choose it as a case study in leadership.

Evaluating and classifying a leadership profile with reference to a theoretical model always refers to the question of the instrument to be used. Bass and Avolio (1990), based on the Burns (1978) conceptualization, constructed and validated the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which is now considered a standard instrument in

research on transformational and transactional leadership styles. It is an instrument with good psychometric qualities and measured for various cultural and linguistic contexts. However, it is a self-assessment questionnaire, which is why cannot be support this work. Thus, we propose to carry out a work of evaluation of the profile of Christine Lagarde through a hetero-biographical book by Lachèvre and Visot (2011) Christine Lagarde: Enquête sur la femme la plus puissante du monde. The authors, French journalists of Figaro, accompanied Christine Lagarde in the period that includes her passing by the French government as a minister until she took office as the IMF's Director General (from 2005 to 2011). The book was written considering facts, statements of collaborators and three interviews to the own Christine Lagarde that, according to the authors, authorized the publication without any requirement of previous reading. So, we analyzed the leadership profile of Christine Lagarde from the content of a heterobiographic book, using four of the seven factors of the MLQ as analysis categories (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration).

Throughout the book, we have identified illustrative elements of a leader that we can generically classify as transformational. On the one hand, we highlight statements that highlight a concern of Christine Lagarde with moral aspects of justice, freedom, honesty, loyalty and reciprocity, in the relationship with subordinates, aiming at the achievement of common goals: "qui a fait de la loyauté et du sens collectif des armes fatals contre les politiques les plus retors "(p.19); "C'est une femme humaine comme patronne" (p.182); "Vouloir que l'autre réussite, c'est réussir soimême aussi. Raison pour laquelle, selon Crhistine Lagarde, il ne faut affaiblir ni ses coéquipiers (...). They are esprit d'équipe, cette forme de loyauté vis-à-vis de ses collègues "(p.221).

The charismatic component or idealized influence, which initiate feelings of loyalty, identification and admiration, with collective ideals and behaviors associated with a sense of mission and respect for the leader and attitudes of trust and optimism, also points out: "Une femme qui a gagné l'estime de ses pairs" (p.19); "Cette rigueur qu'elle s'impose et ce mental d'acier qui la caractérise, elle les tient de son passé de sportive. Quand les événements ont tendance à se tendre et les difficultés à s'accumuler, au plus fort de la crise, elle a réagi en sportive: plus c'est dur,

plus elle se surpasse. (...) Le sport de haut niveau vous donne une carapace et vous apprend à remonter en scène tout de suite après an chute, tout en continuant à sourire pour ne rien laisser paraître" (p. 162); "lorsqu'elle prend une decision, si ce qu'elle fait est bon pour la collectivité" (p. 169); "elle veut que les personnes qui l'entourent se souviennent d'elle en bien" (p. 169); "Loyauté, esprit d'équipe, honnêteté, discretion. Ces traits de caractère si typiques de Christine Lagarde (...) par lui faire gagner l'estime de ses collègues du gouvernement" (214); "cette fidelité à l'égard des gens est une constante dans la vie de Christine Lagarde" (216); "Et c'est paut-être pour cette raison que désormais, cet ovni politique compte de plus en plus de jouers dans son equipe" (217); "Un bom soldat, dans toute la connotation positive: celui qui est loyal, courageux et sur qui on peut toujours compter pour se batter" (249).

Inspirational motivation expresses a leader's ability to act in a modeling way for followers, triggering a process of identification with himself and motivating them to perform tasks in pursuit of common goals and mobilizing team spirit to overcome difficulties: "Elle a besoin aussi que les gens qui l'entourent se comportent en retour de la même façon avec elle" (p. 176); "Elle profite pour acheter quelques tablettes de chocolate qu'elle distribuera à ses collaborateurs dans le Thalys de retour" (p. 177).

The leader's ability to take into account individual interests and competencies of followers - individualized consideration - is another fundamental element of transformational leadership and that means respect for diversity and the development of individual potential through delegation of responsibilities, but not forgetting the objectives and well-being. The content of the work contains several statements revealing its presence in the profile of CL: "Quand on a la foi, on a cette petite dimension supplémentaire du sens de l'autre, explique-t-elle (p. 168); "Respecter les individus. Ne jamais les mépriser (p. 170; "La grande bourgeoise aime les personnes simples et méritantes" (p.171); "Ce qu'il faut savoir quand on travaille avec elle, c'est qu'elle va vous tester pendant un certain temps. Une fois que vous avez fait vos preuves, vous gagnez sa confiance et une autonomie totale" (pp. 181-182); "à partir du moment ù elle a compris qu'elle pouvait avoir confiance en moi, elle m'a délégué plus de textes et de sujets à defendre" (p. 182).

Finally, intellectual stimulation, as the fourth characteristic of transformational leadership, arises mainly latent in certain statements that more explicitly we consider that fit better in the other categories. We choose the one that seems to reflect this factor better, since it represents the consideration of different points of view that add value to the individual positions, through the sociocognitive conflict: "sa capacite à réfléchir vite, sa cordialité et sa capacite à rapprocher les positions divergentes tout en restant férocement loyale aux intérêts de la France" (p. 233).

## CONCLUSION

Reflection and study on gender issues in leadership are increasingly current, especially in societies where parity is becoming a social and political concern, accompanied by effective legislative measures. Certainly science in this field, as in many others with a markedly cultural root, plays a key role, and may even be the most effective way of breaking stereotypes and myths. The literature reports that considered all leadership contexts, there are no gender differences in leadership effectiveness (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woehr, 2014). On the other hand, positive examples of successful leadership by women compete with the effects of science. In summary, it is a competition that has been transformed into collaboration to achieve common goals, the effects of which can be reinforced if science uses case studies to highlight the reasons for leadership effectiveness regardless of gender.

In this context, we have focused on a feminine case of leader that has imposed itself on the world scene, considering the theoretical framework of transformational models, based on a content analysis of a heterobiography on Christine Lagarde. We conclude by characteristics that may be illustrative of the four fundamental factors in transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration). We acknowledge the limitation resulting from content not read by the author and, above all, from an unseen data collection instrument / technique for assessing leadership. It would be interesting a concurrent validation process, through results obtained with a standardized instrument, although requiring the collaboration of Christine Lagarde.

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