



Degree Program in PPE: Politics, Philosophy and Economics

Gender Politics

Gender Differences in Communication  
Reflect on the Leadership:  
Towards a De-Gendered Style

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
1. The Art of Communicating.....	5
1.1. Defining “Communication” .....	5
1.1.1. The Communication Realm and Society .....	7
1.1.2. The Perception of Male and Female Communication .....	8
1.2. Political Communication.....	10
1.2.1. Words of Advice from the Ancient World .....	10
1.2.2. Today’s Charisma .....	12
1.2.3. New Trends and Ways of Communicating in Politics .....	14
1.3. Male and Female Communication .....	17
1.3.1. Gender Differences in Communication Styles .....	17
1.3.2. Gender Differences in Influence Tactics .....	20
1.3.3. Socialization and Other Variables: Introducing the Leadership .....	22
2. Explaining the Leadership .....	25
2.1. Defining “Leadership” .....	25
2.1.1. Sociology as Background: The Interplay between Society and Actors .....	26
2.1.2. Power, and Leadership, as a Male Concept.....	29
2.2. The Evolution of Leadership.....	33
2.2.1. A First Paradox .....	35
2.2.2. Disinterested Politics .....	36
2.2.3. Empathy and Understanding .....	37
2.2.4. Experience Brings Competence.....	38
2.2.5. From “leader” to “lead” .....	39
2.3. Male and Female Leadership: Characteristics and Differences .....	40
2.3.1. Literature that Shows Gender Differences in Leadership.....	41
2.3.2. Literature that Shows No Gender Differences in Leadership.....	43
3. Transactional or Transformational: Perhaps Both .....	47
3.1. Transactional Leadership .....	47
3.1.1. The Path-Goal Theory .....	49

3.1.2. Key Characteristics: The Relation Leader – Follower .....	50
3.1.3. Bill Gates .....	52
3.2. Transformational Leadership .....	53
3.2.1. Idealized Influence .....	54
3.2.2. Inspirational Motivation .....	56
3.2.3. Intellectual Stimulation.....	57
3.2.4. Individualized Consideration.....	60
3.3. Drawing a Conclusion.....	61
3.3.1. Taking a Step Back: Transactional as Male and Transformational as Female .....	61
3.3.2. A De-Gendered Leadership .....	66
Conclusion.....	71
Bibliography.....	73

## Introduction

Communication is the basis of how we relate to others and to external circumstances. Societies have always adopted new ways of communicating, which reflected human's interaction evolution, and both physiological and socializing factors. Starting from this element, this thesis analyses the distinct approaches to communication by men and women, and how they reflect on gender's leadership styles, with the aim of evaluating the effectiveness of both.

Previous studies have already considered gender differences; for instance, Deborah Tannen argued that while men have a goal-oriented approach, women tend towards a relation-oriented one. Additionally, theorists like Bourdieu and Keohane have examined the relevance of power dynamics in human interactions and social structures, highlighting how they greatly influence societies' perception of male and female competence in leadership positions. Furthermore, numerous scholars and researchers have provided a critical framework of different perspectives: while part of the research does not believe in gender differences in leadership styles, most findings aim towards the understanding and the evaluation of both.

My research's goal is to understand if there is one style of leadership, either the male or the female, which is more appropriate for leadership positions. While much has already been written, since part of the body of research is relatively recent, little conclusions have been drawn for the quest, whether there is a leadership style that may include both male and female characteristics. This thesis seeks to answer the following questions: To what degree are a male leadership and a female one effective and positively perceived by society? And, based on this answer, is it possible to have a style of leadership coherent with both genders, and therefore able to overcome sexes stereotypes and double binds?

The research focuses more on the differences between gender approaches because I aim at highlighting how both can upbringing the same degree of competence and effectiveness in power positions. If this hypothesis were to be proven correct, it could be possible to consider a leadership style capable of including male characteristics as well as female ones. This thesis' intent is to provide a cohesive line of thought concerning empirical

insights and previous theories, studies and research, and contributing to the field with empirical insights and theoretical advancements about the possibility of considering a *de-gendered* approach to leadership, that could inform both academic debate and practical policymaking.

In the first chapter, I will provide an insight on gender's approach to communication, analysing it also in relation to the political sphere, and including how these differences are perceived by society. Based on the critical examination of communication approaches, chapter two will deeply delve into gender leadership approaches. And being leadership a form of power, it is hereby discussed an insight on power dynamics in society from a sociological perspective. It is presented both the body of research that does believe in gender differences, as well as theories that do not believe it is consistent. Additionally, it is presented an analysis of how leadership has been developing in the past few decades: the question which arises, is if its development is pointing towards a more "feminine" approach to leadership.

The final chapter represents the culmination of this thesis, as it critically scrutinizes the analogies between the male style connected to the transactional type of leadership, and the female one linked to a more transformational approach to leadership. Furthermore, this chapter articulates on a potential merging of the two, with a subsequent newly found style, offering a well-rounded conclusion to the dissertation.

My hypothesis is that, based on the idea that there are gender differences in communication, which are reflected in the political and leadership sphere, the differences do not denote one style to be more efficient than the other one. By focusing on the differences of male and female communication and leadership styles, this thesis aims to promote a balanced and inclusive framework for effective leadership, transcending traditional and stereotyped gender dynamics.

## Chapter 1: The Art of Communicating

### Introduction

This first chapter aims at presenting a basis of research concerning *communication*. This is presented at first neutrally, with a specific focus on how male and female communication is perceived. In the second section, there is a shift towards a more political perspective; the topic is presented through general lines, and with the presence of charisma and new media tools. Lastly, the discourse focuses on the approaches to communication styles and influence tactics of men and women.

### 1.1. Defining “Communication”

Communication [noun] - /kə,mju:nɪ'keɪʃn/

The transmission or exchange of information, knowledge, or ideas, by means of speech, writing, mechanical or electronic media. (Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 376)

Since ancient times, even before the creation of proper languages, humans have always communicated. At the beginning, they mostly used non-verbal communication, meaning gestures, facial expressions, and body language, to express emotions and intentions. Then, they developed vocalizations and sounds which conveyed specific meanings. And surely, with the advent of the Written Era, humans were able to shift from these primary types of communication to more complex languages, which allowed for a more constructed exchange of knowledge, information, and ideas. Technological advancements have then propelled communication channels, and the Internet further sped up the process. Finally, the birth of digital platforms brought to the development of new forms of non-verbal communication; emojis, memes, and posts allow individuals to communicate among themselves. Human societies have thrived because of the continuous development of communication, with the consequent formation of the language.

Indeed, according to the Collins Dictionary, to “communicate” means “to impart (knowledge) or exchange (thoughts) by speech, writing, gestures, etc” (Harper Collins Publishers, 1995, p. 218). The act of communicating entails the transmission and reception of information between individuals or in a group, and this process can involve different channels, such as written texts or oral presentations or even nonverbal inputs.

The definition includes a variety of communication styles which have been shaped with time. Indeed, as on one hand, human communication has developed alongside societies, following their growth and advancements in technology and language, on the other hand, these languages have as well shaped individuals and societies. The process accounts for a reciprocal influence: communication and society have grown together. In other words, as certain factors emerged in societies, they shall be reflected on the language. It is evident how communication systems reflect the society in which they are found. Consequently, when analysing the spectrum of gender identities, as societies saw the development of two genders, male and female, even communication found its ways in this binomial.

Indeed, the awareness of certain biological and physiological differences between genders has emerged in societies across the globe since ancient times. This has often led to the assignment of specific roles and responsibilities: for instance, while men were mostly preoccupied with hunting and protecting their land, women had the duty to research food and take care of the children. Reflecting these tasks on features, men were typically associated with strength, dominance, and provider roles, whereas women with caregiving, nurturing, and domestic ones. This delineation of social roles eventually developed in more complex gender ones, and as societies and primordial languages progressed, those rudimentary distinctions between sexes evolved into hierarchical frameworks. And just as these roles became based on cultural and societal norms, the approach to communication between genders began to differ. While men developed a language useful to fulfil their tasks, women did the same (Goldschmidt & Weller, 2000). This process resulted in the construction of diverse styles of communication, which granted both the male and female population the most appropriate way to communicate.

With communication and social construction of gender roles developing, societies attributed certain traits to masculinity and to femininity: this has created a binary framework through which individuals are expected to navigate their gender identities (Wood, 2010). Today, such constructed notions of gender often reflect and reinforce existing power dynamics, privileging traits associated with masculinity while devaluing those associated with femininity (topic further exposed in the second chapter). Moving back to the example of men hunting and women nurturing, they were simple characteristics which progressively developed in habits and traditions, and that in the language were transformed in the stereotypical expressions of “she throws like a man”

and “he is a stay-at-home dad”. This has reinforced existing gender roles, and consequently created a framework through which individuals are evaluated and treated differently. This process sheds light on how language is influenced by the growth of a society and vice versa. And as the interplay between gender roles develops, so do communication dynamics between genders.

### **1.1.1. The Communication Realm and Society**

Further discussing the matter, structural gender gap significantly influences the communication dynamics between men and women, shaping patterns of interaction, power relations, and the different perception of gender itself. Therefore, the communication between men and women not only reflects and reinforces existing structural inequalities, but furthermore perpetuates stereotypes and limits opportunities for meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

One of the ways in which this inequality manifests in communication is through power dynamics and structures. The term “power structure” refers to the “way in which power is organized or shared in an organization or society” (Cambridge University Press, 2024). Nowadays, they are often based on factors such as social status, wealth, or expertise; consequently, it is appropriate to state that the discussion does not limit itself to power *structures*, but rather to power *hierarchies*. To create an example of this discourse, societal structures often grant men greater access to positions of power and authority, which can translate into imbalanced communication dynamics where men's voices are privileged, and women's contributions are marginalized or dismissed. This power differential can inhibit open and equitable communication, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Additionally, gender stereotypes and societal expectations shape the content and style of communication between men and women (Goldschmidt & Weller, 2000). Stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity may influence individuals' communication behaviours, with men often socialized to be experienced, self-confident, and competitive, while women may be encouraged to be nurturing, accepting, and dependant (Feingold, 1994). Furthermore, disparities in communication and decision-making processes can be exacerbated by gender-based discrimination in the workplace. Indeed, this results in unequal opportunities for advancement and recognition which then reflect on the



dialogue. These stereotypes can influence how men and women are perceived and evaluated in communication contexts, perpetuating biases, and reinforcing gendered expectations.

### **1.1.2. The Perception of Male and Female Communication**

It is evident that this gap between men and women has created a scenario with diverse opportunities for individuals based on gender. And, as shortly explained and anticipated here, the cultural traditional stereotype of the leader appeared to be *male* (Oakley, 2000). Which is why in the leadership sphere, this fact subconsciously pushed females to adopt several strategies to face the situation.

To put it simply, female leaders had to adopt, for lack of alternatives, to male standards. Recognizing the various challenges that women in any field, because of their sex, had to face in addition to men, women developed ways to adapt their style to men's one. This was practiced to in some way "fit" in the male standard of leadership, which was for long considered to be the traditional and unique one (Oakley, 2000). Of course, this process did not suddenly appear, but rather was slowly and carefully developed by the female unconscious through societies and language systems. Indeed, female leaders have existed in the past, but it should come as no surprise that the first female leaders which appeared on the political scene in the 20<sup>th</sup> had all a typical masculine approach to communication:

Women are expected to behave like leaders while simultaneously fitting into the stereotypical feminine role. However, at the same time, women are expected to behave in a strict democratic and masculine enough manner to be acknowledged and respected as a leader. (Merchant, 2012)

No sentence would better explain a woman's struggle in leadership. Karima Merchant's words highlight the role that expectations and stereotypes play on the perceived leadership value of a woman. They must in fact shift between the acknowledgement of their capability through a demonstration of masculine traditional leadership, and the faith in their history of communication with a less traditional feminine approach.

Indeed, throughout history, women in leadership roles have faced numerous challenges, from traditional male-oriented frameworks to standards imposed by societal norms and stereotypes. In this reality, women had to work harder than their male counterparts in the pursuit of leadership positions. Since for centuries, leadership positions have been a space

dedicated solely to men, in the collective imaginary the leader figure has typical male traits (Oakley, 2000). Society has shaped men as more suited for high-level leadership roles than women (Eagly & Karau, 1992; Heilman, 2001). It therefore seems to be more *natural* for men to cover such roles. In fact, due to the prevailing stereotype associating leadership primarily with men, female leaders often face less favourable assessments of their leadership abilities. This double standard in the assessment of competences arises from the fact that individuals, influenced by societal norms, tend to assess identical leadership behaviours differently based on the gender of the individual exhibiting them. This brought women to find a way to overcome society's lens of male-oriented models: the result was women closely imitating a male style of leadership (Schwartzberg, 1980).

Indeed, while men are viewed as naturally better leaders, women worked hard to adapt to male's standards in order to have higher chances of being considered fit for the male's traditional description of leader. "In politics this is especially true in the case of the first pioneers whose appearance on the political scene was so exceptional that it did not raise any question about the nature and scope of female leadership" (Campus, 2013, p. 60). It is the case of the Iron Ladies, first of whom there is Margaret Thatcher – Prime Minister of the United Kingdom between 1979 and 1990. She was well-known for her bold, resolute, and even aggressive approach, all characteristics that can be traced back to a more masculine style. It is worth notice that she was not negatively judged for these traits because of her gender, but rather praised for being "as assertive as a man" (Campus, 2013, p. 61). She is one of the political actresses proofs that until not so long ago, to rise in leadership positions one had to adapt to a masculine approach to leadership. Fortunately, nowadays the values of a more feminine approach to leadership are more recognized (it will be further discussed in the next chapters).

Yet even today, when it comes to workplace biases, female leaders must carefully balance conforming to a prescribed set of behaviours where cultural norms of femininity interest with expectations of leadership (Lips, 2009). Women are often criticized and judged as either too assertive or too passive, too forceful or too accommodating. This makes it hard for women to find the delicate balance in any professional sphere. Women are pressured to exhibit leadership qualities while conforming to traditional feminine stereotypes, and any deviation from these gender norms often results in criticism. In other words, women

are required to demonstrate authoritative and masculine traits to be recognized as effective leaders; yet, when they do assert a more masculine dominance stance, they frequently face harsher scrutiny compared to their male counterparts, solely due to their gender. This phenomenon is referred to as the femininity-competence double bind (Jamieson, 1995).

Society is not used to see women in the shoes of leaders, since traditionally these roles are a men's prerogative. Therefore, women must choose whether to conform to traditional gender expectations and exhibit the assertiveness necessary for a masculine effective leadership, or stick with a less traditional and more feminine, and criticized and devaluated, approach to leadership.

## **1.2. Political Communication**

### **1.2.1. Words of Advice from the Ancient World**

As highlighted in the previous section, to communicate is an essential function of human existence. One could go so far as to say that it is like an art, which can be acquired and improved. And to utilize this art means to be able to communicate with the aim of informing, teach, update, take decisions, persuade, and motivate. To achieve this, people must be able to not simply speak but communicate efficiently. Consequently, knowledge and expertise may not be enough: communication is an art that leaders should master. The first civilization that approached this matter finds its roots in early times: *ars oratoria*<sup>1</sup> is what ancient Latins called the art of speaking in public. Indeed, communication is just as relevant today as it was in their society. Already in the fourth century BCE, some philosophers had highlighted the importance of communication, while formulating definitions kept alive till today's time. Two actors of the ancient world to discuss are Aristotle<sup>2</sup>, in *Rhetoric*, where he argued the three key ingredients of communication, them

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<sup>1</sup> "Ars Oratoria," a Latin expression derived from "ars" meaning "art" and "oratoria" meaning "oratory".

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle (384–322 BCE), influential ancient Greek philosopher, made significant contributions to fields such as ethics, politics, and metaphysics.

being *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*<sup>3</sup>, and Cicero<sup>4</sup>, in *De Oratore*, in which he explained the different types of communication.

Starting from the former, in his book, Aristotle indicates the three pillars which must characterize communication. He suggests that communication must necessarily take place through these three components: one individual speaks, another one listens, and the topic of discussion. If even one of the three components is lacking, there cannot be communication:

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. (Aristotle, 2004, I.2, 1356a)

So, Aristotle associates each element with one of the three modes indicated above: *ethos* has to do with the speaker, *pathos* with the listener, and *logos* with the content of the discourse being communicated.

*Ethos* indicates the credibility that every speaker should have. The speaker must persuade the audience to believe in the words he is saying, therefore establishing *ethos* with the listener. It is the type of discourse, delivered with competence and knowledge, that makes an orator reliable and contributes to persuasion. Over time, this trait has acquired a broad meaning, mainly linked to the possession of moral qualities and personal credibility. Secondly, there must be *pathos*. Aristotle argues that this is the characteristic of discourse that evokes emotions in listeners. It deals with feelings. Being the empathetic side of every person, it has to do with the second component of communication: the listeners. Even then, speakers understood the importance of empathy. Finally, there is *logos*. This represents the means of persuasion based on discourse, meaning the content discussed. Discourses, to achieve their purpose, must be formed by logical reasoning, and provide evidence and demonstrations. *Logos* is the logic of communication, its rational part: it consists in being clear, orderly, and reliable in what is said. In other words, it requires that

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<sup>3</sup> "Ethos", "logos", "pathos", terms originating from ancient Greek rhetoric. "Ethos" (ἦθος), meaning "character" or "morality". "Logos" (λόγος), signifying "word" or "reason". "Pathos" (πάθος), translates to "suffering" or "experience" (Rocci, 2014, pp. 826, 1132, 1362).

<sup>4</sup> Cicero (106–43 BCE), a prominent Roman statesman, orator, and philosopher, was renowned for his eloquence and rhetorical skill in the Roman Republic.

arguments provide evidence to support their thesis, satisfying the reasoning part of the mind. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* thus indicates that the arguments offered through discourse are of three kinds: the first depends on the character of the orator (*ethos*), the second on the possibility of predisposing the listener in a certain way (*pathos*), and the last on the discourse itself, as it demonstrates or elaborates something (*logos*).

Cicero, in his works, recalls the teachings of Aristotle. He seems determined to put into practice the three traits of communication highlighted by the Greek philosopher. Yet, for the orator, it is fundamental not only *what* is said, but also *how* it is said. Indeed, Cicero believes that words must be backed up by three modalities of communication: the verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal. The verbal communication substantially consists in the use of the most appropriate words: the language used should be reachable and easy to understand. The paraverbal corresponds to everything that accompanies the content of the message. It deals with the voice and its modulation, meaning rhythm, speed, volume, tune and pauses. The nonverbal communication concerns body language and facial expressions: the behaviour of the body, the movements of hands, the position of the arms all contribute to the analysis. Another relevant point is the intensity of the gaze: the eyes give out much of our mood and state of mind, which then reflect on our face and overall performance of the discourse.

Additional and more recent research prove another interesting point. According to the American psychologist Albert Mehrabian (1967), the efficacy of communication depends only for the 7% on the words used, 38% from the para-verbal, and for the 55% from the non-verbal communication. Communication does not limit itself to flawless written speeches, but to the way these are performed and backed up by other factors as empathy, gestures, and credibility. The lessons of Aristotle and Cicero highlight the relevance of aspects in communication which are still considered today. Classical rhetoric recommends numerous instruments to make the leading class more competent through the enhancing of the art of communication. The aim is not only to pass through contents or knowledge, but rather the persuasion, education, and formation of the listeners.

### **1.2.2. Today's Charisma**

It is easily deducible that the ways with which Greeks and Latins communicated 2.000 years ago has slightly changed. With the arrival of new technologies and the development

of media, new forms of communication have emerged. Yet, there is one variable that seems to have remained constant up to this day, which could be referred to as *charisma*. Max Weber (1972) – renowned German sociologist and political economist – defines it as “the supposed extraordinary quality of a personality that causes him or her to be considered a “leader”” (p. 140). Similarly to the explanation of Aristotle regarding having a person that speaks and one who listens in a communication pattern, Weber points out the way charisma relies on the social connection among the charisma holder and the charisma believer.

In general terms, charisma in politics refers to the personal magnetism or charm exhibited by political leaders that enables them to inspire and influence others. It includes traits like eloquence, confidence, empathy, and the skill to emotionally connect with the public. Charismatic leaders often have in common a commanding presence and can captivate audiences through their speeches, gestures, and overall behaviour and appeal. It plays a significant role in political leadership, as it can help leaders mobilize supporters, influence public opinion, and navigate challenging situations. Charismatic leaders are often perceived as authentic, dynamic, and visionary, which can increase their credibility and therefore their chances of being voted. It is also interesting to notice, that while charisma has certainly brought to life the studies on leadership, it presents ambiguities examined by scholars in various disciplines, and applied to different situations (Burns, 1978, p. 243). Indeed, charisma can also have drawbacks: for instance, it may attract authoritarianism (Weber, 1968), cults of personality (Weber, 1968), or even populism (Hawkins, 2010).

While this last point will be further investigated in the next section, to better understand the power of charisma it is now presented an interesting study. Published by an Arizona State University, it argues how charisma has played a crucial role in influencing public opinion as governors addressed the public during the pandemic COVID-19 crisis. Indeed, it was found that enhancing the governors’ “charisma signalling” in certain instances could have potentially saved thousands more lives by persuading more individuals to adhere to stay-at-home measures. The study, published in *The Leadership Quarterly* (2023), with Associate Professor Ulrich Jensen and a research team of Swiss academics, examines a four-month period of messaging which were delivered during the pandemic. The project consisted in analysing 350 speeches given by all the 50 U.S. governors, and

the aim was understanding the degree of charisma that could emerge in each one of them. Through the analysis, it was shown that the level of charisma demonstrated by a governor was directly proportional to the probability of people following the politician's request for them to stay home. In other words, citizens tended to listen and trust more leaders that showed a higher charismatic approach. The results of the study underline that if all the governors would have been able to give off more charisma, a greater amount of people would have stayed home, and therefore more lives would have been saved.

«People respond not only with their minds but with their hearts. In times of crisis and beyond, people don't respond to policies like robots. It matters how policies are communicated» (Jensen, as cited in Scarp, 2023). Jensen's words highlight the relevance of emotions in shaping people's perception of a leader. Just as Aristotle wrote, *pathos* is a powerful tool to influence and persuade. Charismatic people which can adapt it, may find themselves one step ahead of the others, because this capacity grants them the power to persuade people.

### **1.2.3. New Trends and Ways of Communicating in Politics**

In our contemporary era, communication – political one as well – is going through major changes, in communication channels as well as new trends. These have brought to the advent of new priorities and ways of communicating. In our visual culture, it is often attributed greater weight to charisma, showmanship, and personality. Surely, as seen, part of the characteristics of communication earlier highlighted has remained and is still practiced in positions of power. Yet, some new trends do not go unnoticed.

Today, political communication is becoming increasingly personalized (Rahat & Kenig, 2018), mediatized, privatized and spectacularized. For starters, politics has become more “mediatized,” as in it has lost its autonomy, being continuously shaped by mass media (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p. 250). Indeed, these represent new tools of communication and social dynamics, on politics and political participation. Yet, “media have an extremely limited capacity to transmit a full and complete picture of the nearly limitless wealth of events that comprise political reality” (Meyer, 2002, p. 46, as cited in Campus, 2013, p. 22). Consequently, they tend to focus on aspects which can more easily attract people's attention. In fact, a common phenomenon today is the personalization of politics. Thanks to the new visual culture, it is common for candidates to craft their image: “visuals aids

allowed candidates to craft careful images of themselves” (Newman, 1999, p. 21). The personalization of politics involves shaping how individuals interpret the images presented to them through communication, as the media and, ultimately, the citizens. In other words, it consists in the tendency of political leaders to build and promote vivid and distinctive personal images with the goal of connecting to the public. Since this process takes place on an emotional level, it is interesting to underline the role that *pathos* plays, even if with different means of communication compared to those used in ancient times’ rallies.

This tendency influences the way in which political campaigns are conducted, with a major emphasis on individual charisma discussed earlier. Moreover, with the advent of social media and similar channels, as the radio or the television, it is easier to engage in direct communication with the citizens. Till a few decades ago, it was not for granted that the citizens of a country knew of the appearance of their leaders; surely, they could listen their discourses on the radio, but there was not a visual image imprinted in their minds. Then, with the arrival of new form of political media, there has been growing emphasis on political marketing: politicians present themselves accompanied by their family members to construct a personal “liking” of a political *persona*. New buzz words are “politainment,” “lifestyle politics” and “family picture.” This last one, for instance, sees leaders often portrayed with their family; an example of this new trend is Barack Obama. He presented himself with his family on several occasions; for instance, in Springfield (February 2007), announcing his candidacy for presidency, or when he swore as new President of the USA (January 2009). Here, Michelle Obama even stated that the littlest of the daughters had to stand on an elevated podium to be more visible during the ceremony (Obama, 2018, pp. 254-255 of images section). Barack Obama decided to present himself with his family, and consequently representing the new trend of personalization of politics.

Additionally, with the growing relevance of personality in politics, there is a consequent increase in mediatic representation (Negrine & Stanyer, 2007, p. 237). Communication strategies become more oriented towards the creation of persuasive and enthusiastic narratives which shake the public through the channels of communications available. Even here there is a characteristic taken from ancient lessons of communication art: it must persuade the public, which is precisely what social media can do. Indeed, recently



there has been a decline in the importance of the role played by the press in forming opinions, and an increase in the influence of television and online environments. The Web allows leaders to communicate directly with the public, so there is no doubt that the social networks have eroded the concept of traditional leadership. Moreover, there have been growing trends of privatization of political communication. This concerns the role of non-governmental and private organizations in shaping the political agenda and taking political decisions. This includes the always more pressing role of the lobby, private agencies, and civil society's organizations in determining policies. To take a political decision is not anymore only a matter of politics but includes a judgement and engagement of the overall population, with both its benefits and disadvantages. Finally, another point in the list is the spectacularization of politics. This refers to the tendency of dramatizing and sensationalizing politics: events are presented and interpreted through a lens of spectacle and entertainment (Debord, 1967, chap. 2; Kellner, 2002). The risk is that this could lead to a politics dominated by simplistic and polarizing narratives, rather than by a rational and deliberate debate.

Also, these changes in political communication, as in the advent of social media and the personalization of politics, seem to affect more controversially women compared to men (Van Zoonen, 2005, 2006). Indeed, while a men's private life is discussed only in case of trouble, women's life is more easily subject to judgement in any circumstance. Consequently, to avoid unnecessary criticism women may opt for the strategy to hiding their personal life, as for example Angela Merkel has done (Van Zoonen, 2006). Yet, there are some aspects which may also advantage women: indeed, the personalization of politics and the impact of mass media are supporting the creation of a new type of leadership, which seems to be making room even for stereotypically feminine characteristics (Campus, 2013, pp. 29-31).

Furthermore, in this evolving panorama, a new informal speaking style arises, which is possibly led by a compromising wave of populism. Indeed, "from the perspective of popularization of politics, there is a close connection between emphasis on politicians' personal traits and the process of celebrity building" (Campus, 2013, p. 28). Under this perspective, leaders are represented as standing with the people and distancing themselves from the political *elite* and from ideologies. There is a limited use of rhetoric and the adoption of a more informal speaking style which aims to make the politician a

“spokesperson” for the public. To make an example, Donald Trump’s speaking style is highly conversational, and seems to find its root in the oral culture: indeed, it includes false starts, sentence fragments, unfinished sentences, digressions, and vague implications (Lombardo & Eade, 2022). It may lend the perception that none of his speeches are preprepared but rather improvised, fact that influences citizens to believe he is closer to them compared to high politics. Patty Wood, body language expert, analyses Donald Trump’s charisma and use of personality to attract people. «It is a leader’s ability to show and communicate a broad range of emotions that translates into perceived power and charisma» (Wood, as cited in Noel, 2016). Wood emphasizes that emotional expression plays a vital role in public speaking as it enhances the speaker’s humanity, relatability, and trustworthiness. As she suggests, greater expressiveness leads to better outcomes.

In conclusion, because of recently new developed trends in politics, the way in which we communicate has shifted from a more rhetorical form to a more colloquial one. And of all the phenomena that might have influenced such change, the impact of mass media, and the personalization of politics and its mediatization have had an influential impact.

### **1.3. Male and Female Communication**

#### **1.3.1. Gender Differences in Communication Styles**

Communication is a complex art which, in times to times, has evolved. After analysing the growth of communication and its characteristics in the political sphere, this section will highlight a different aspect: the art of communicating adopts diverse shapes based on gender. Indeed, men and women significantly differ on their communication styles.

The main difference would lie in their diverse objectives when taking part in a conversation. In the psychological field, several research indicates that while women tend to use communication to foster social bonds and build relationships, men employ it to establish dominance and accomplish concrete objectives (Leaper, 1991; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Mason, 1994; Wood, 1996). In John Gray’s book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in a Relationship* (1993), he underlines this different between man and women, stating how men are goal-oriented and women more relationship-oriented. So, as men fulfil

themselves through their achieved results, women's perception of themselves is based on the quality of their relationships. In his analysis, he goes as far as to say that men and women are different to the point where they come from different planets. With men coming from Mars and women from Venus, they appear to have different needs, goals, and values which reflect themselves in their communication approaches.

An additional theory that investigates these differences is the Genderlect Theory. It was developed by the sociolinguist Deborah Tannen, and it suggests that men and women often have different communication styles because of their type of socialization and cultural expectations. In Tannen's book, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990), Tannen suggests that men and women often have different ways of speaking, which she defines "genderlects" (*portmanteau* of "gender" and "dialect"). These genderlects are shaped by societal expectations, cultural norms, and upbringing, rather than inherent, differences between men and women. Regarding the differences in approaches to communication, as first focus, Tannen highlights the status *versus* support approach:

For most women, the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing and negotiating relationships...For most men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. (1990)

Based on her observations, she deduced that men often engage in communication to establish and maintain status within a group; their focus appears to be more on hierarchy, independence, and competition. In contrast, women tend to prioritize building connections and providing support through communication, giving more relevance to aspects as empathy, cooperation, and inclusivity. Consequently, men and women are prone to using different conversational rituals. For instance, men may more easily engage in "report talk", while women more in "rapport talk". The former involves conveying information, facts, and solutions. It is typically more straightforward, direct, and goal-oriented, and mostly conveys knowledge while asserting dominance within a conversation. Men engaging in report talk may focus on presenting factual information, offering solutions, and asserting their expertise, thereby emphasizing competence and authority within the conversation. Differently, the latter focuses on building rapport, sharing experiences, and expressing emotions. The emphasis of "rapport talk" is on building connections, fostering relationships, and expressing emotions. In fact, women

appear more prone to share personal experiences, validate others' feelings, and seek mutual understanding, thereby creating a supportive and inclusive conversational atmosphere.

Additionally, Tannen describes men as “adversarial”, indicating they often pursue conflicting goals, and women as “synergistic”, meaning they tend to share common goals. So, in contrast to men, who navigate a world centred on status, where conversations serve as negotiations for dominance and power, women inhabit a realm of connections. For them, the aim of conversations is to negotiate closeness and maintain intimacy. This leads to the characteristic seen by Tannen as the most dividing among gender differences: when facing a conflict, women listen to create a connection, and men listen to offer a solution. When shifting to the job market, in jobs that prioritize direct communication and interaction with clients, strong communication abilities are essential; consequently, since women are considered better communicators, they are preferred for those roles. Differently, in jobs which require a more goal-oriented and result-focused approach, men are the ones privileged. For what concerns the political sphere, studies have shown that women tend to be put in charge in moments of crisis, where indeed skills as teamwork and relationship building are considered more important (Zenger and Folkman, 2020).

Furthermore, taking a step back to the position of genderlects, Tannen's analysis places significant emphasis on the role of socialization and upbringing in shaping individuals' communication styles from a young age. She observed that boys establish connections with each other through shared activities, which play a central role in their friendships. Conversely, girls form close bonds by engaging in simple conversation: as she states, “talk is the essence of intimacy” (Tannen, 1990) for girls. It is with this that male and female are considered to have “natural” differences, these being the habit of adopting diverse approaches which answer to society expectations and dynamics. Indeed, children are socialized into gendered communication patterns through various channels, including interactions within their families, peer groups, and exposure to media representations of gender roles. Within both family units and peer groups, children observe and adopt communication styles that reflect traditional gender norms. In families, parental interactions inadvertently reinforce these norms, such as encouraging boys to be assertive and competitive, while promoting empathy and cooperation in girls. Similarly, within

peer groups, children learn and emulate communication styles that align with prevailing gender expectations, further solidifying gendered communication patterns.

Additionally, exposure to media representations of gender roles and behaviours can influence children's perceptions of appropriate communication styles for their gender. Media portrayals often reinforce stereotypical depictions of masculinity and femininity, which can shape individuals' understanding of how they are expected to communicate based on their gender identity.

Overall, Tannen's emphasis on socialization and upbringing highlights the ways in which genderlects are perpetuated and reinforced through early social experiences. Yet, she not only underlines differences in conversational goals, speech patterns, and interpretation of language between genders: she also proposes a “difference model”, which acknowledges that both communication styles are equally valid, and that therefore there is not a “deficit model” for which one is inferior to the other.

### **1.3.2. Gender Differences in Influence Tactics**

When analysing communication styles, other elements to consider are influence tactics. Influence, understood as a leader's capacity to inspire and sway followers to alter their behaviour, beliefs or attitudes, varies between men and women. According to the leadership researchers Gary Yukl and Carolyn Chavez (2002), there are nine primary influence tactics: inspirational appeal, rational persuasion, consultation, ingratiation, personal appeals, exchange, coalition tactics, legitimating tactics, and pressure. Numerous studies have explored how gender intersects with them, yielding varied results: while a significant portion of this research suggests that there are indeed disparities in the influence tactics employed by men and women (Carli, 1999; DuBrin, 1991; Lamude, 1993; White, 1988), other studies propose that these differences stem from situational factors rather than gender per se (Carli, 1999; Lamude, 1993).

A scholar that has analysed both facets is Kevin Lamude (1993). Regarding the former opinion, many findings arose. Firstly, it was revealed that male actors tend to utilize personal appeal, consultation, and inspirational appeal more frequently than their female counterparts. As explained by Yukl and Chavez (2002), personal appeal involves leveraging a strong interpersonal bond between the agent and the target individual to

persuade the latter to undertake a task or grant a favour. As second factor, consultation entails the agent involving the target individual in decision-making by soliciting their input, concerns, or suggestions for improvement. Finally, inspirational appeal is a tactic where the agent aims to secure commitment by evoking the emotions of the target individual. This style aims to a high assertiveness and efficiency.

Secondly, Lamude's findings (1993) indicate that female managers tend to employ consultation, inspirational appeal, and ingratiation more frequently when interacting with female employees, while they utilize exchange tactics more often with male employees. Regarding the interaction with the same sex, the first two characteristics are common in both male and female figures. Plus, there is ingratiation, which occurs when the agent utilizes praise or flattery to cultivate its likeliness with the target individual. Differently, when considering interactions with males, exchange occurs when the agent offers an incentive, such as exchanging favours, in return for compliance with their request. This suggests that female managers are better able to establish and cultivate close relationships with female employees due to shared communication styles, whereas they may encounter challenges in connecting with male employees due to differing communication approaches.

Additional analysis was added recently. Influence tactics were categorized into two main groups (Barbuto et al., 2001), based on the level of resistance anticipated from the target individual: "soft" and "hard" tactics. Hard tactics, such as legitimating, exchange, pressure, and coalition, are described as forceful and difficult to resist, whereas soft ones, including rationality, inspirational appeals, consultation, ingratiating, and personal appeals, rely more on interpersonal relationships. Lamude discovered in his study that male supervisors tend to employ soft tactics when interacting with male managers, while resorting more to hard tactics when dealing with female managers. This suggests that male managers utilize emotions and interpersonal connections to influence male counterparts but rely on more intimidating tactics when dealing with female counterparts. Also, he highlighted that differently female supervisors tend to utilize soft influence tactics with both male and female managers, reflecting their preference for intimate communication styles and the importance they place on interpersonal relationships in the workplace with both men and women. So, according to this school of thought, male

managers tend to adopt more assertive and authoritative approaches to influence, whereas women typically employ consulting and inspirational tactics.

Yet, as previously mentioned, the study of the intersection of influence tactics and gender presents even an opposing view: while the one just mentioned believes that influence tactics differ based on gender, the opposite perspective suggests that both men and women employ similar influence tactics but in different contexts. According to this, disparities in influence tactics are attributable to situational factors, as an individual's environment, status, followers, and tasks. Despite variations in influence tactics across situations, adherents of this perspective maintain that, overall, men and women utilize the same influence tactics. Yet, assuming that it is true that men and women do not have different gender tactics, but rather use communication approaches according on the situation, considering that the situation precisely consists in a society where men and women are indeed treated differently, I deduce that even the situations in which men and women find themselves are influenced by their gender identities.

### **1.3.3. Socialization and Other Variables: Introducing the Leadership**

In addition to Tannen's insights into the role of socialization in shaping genderlects, and other authors' insights on influence tactics adopted by men and women, sociologists and psychologists have long examined how gender roles and societal norms possibly shape communication behaviours from an early age. In fact, cultural expectations regarding masculinity and femininity influence language use, nonverbal communication, and interaction styles (Goldschmidt & Weller, 2000). For example, since men have been attributed roles as hunting and working, their language has adapted to more accurately fit the fields that they were supposed to wander; similarly, as women were expected to engage in nurturing and house-caring tasks, they developed more an empathetic type of talk. Therefore, tracing it back to Tannen's perspective, the former developed more the report talk, while the latter the rapport one, for they had different tasks to cover, and consequently diverse aims (Goldschmidt & Weller, 2000).

Yet, when examining gender disparities in communication, an interesting aspect to consider lies within the realm of physiology. Female and male brains are characterized by distinct cognitive architectures: in other words, the brain is organized and somewhat "programmed" differently based on gender identity. In fact, the constitution of our brains

varies. From a biochemical standpoint, humans' brains are constituted by both grey matter, as in neurons, which correspond to task-orientation and action centres, and white matter, meaning neuronal connections, responsible of handling and processing information (The Renewal Point, 2024). Yet, recent studies have demonstrated that women have ten times the white matter as men, and men have seven times the grey matter as women (The Renewal Point, 2024). Consequently, because men have a greater abundance of neurons, they more easily lean towards logical reasoning, while since women show higher neuronal connectivity, they display heightened empathetic capacities.

Thus, empirical evidence underscores the presence of physiological disparities in brain functions between men and women; so, the social construction of gender is just one portion of the story (Haslanger, 1995, p. 98; Wood, 2009). However, the extent to which these physiological traits shape and have been shaped by societal norms is not a matter of discussion in this thesis. The role played by the innate constitution of our brains should not overshadow the research illuminating how socialization processes instil in individuals communication norms aligned with their gender identity. In fact, it is precisely this process that leads to differences in conversational strategies and goals, and as direct consequence, these communication patterns influence the perception of male and female leadership. For example, traditional gender norms often associate assertive and dominant communication styles with effective leadership, characteristics that align more closely with stereotypical notions of masculinity. In contrast, female leaders who deviate from these gendered communication norms may face scrutiny or backlash, as their behaviour may be perceived as incongruent with societal expectations of femininity. Furthermore, the role of power dynamics in communication further complicates the perception of male and female leadership. In contexts where power is unevenly distributed, men may wield greater influence and authority in communication interactions (Mulac et al., 2001, p. 123). This can create a social environment that privileges male leadership styles and marginalizes women's voices and contributions.

So, research on the interaction between the gender of the influencer and the gender of the target individual they seek to influence has led to several conclusions. Clearly, the fact that situations may influence individuals into using one approach instead of another, and that physiologically male and female brains are programmed differently, cannot be



ignored. Yet, this thesis finds its basis on the line of thought according to which men and women tend to have different approaches in communication as well as different influence tactics. The gender-based variations in influence tactics contribute to the understanding of why disparities in leadership styles based on gender exist, as a leader's capacity to influence their followers is a fundamental aspect of leadership. Consequently, these psychological differences in communication styles and influence tactics have given rise to a set of stereotypes that delineate expectations for men and women in the workplace. In conclusion, society's gender norms and stereotypes influence the relation between communication patterns and gender perceptions. While structural inequalities influence the communication realm, actors within it play a central role in influencing power dynamics, and in shaping the complex challenges of female leadership within a society.

### **Conclusion**

In human's evolution, communication has developed differently in men and women. This process can be traced back in social dynamics as well as physiological factors – which are not deepened in this thesis. Nonetheless the causes, since the goal is to highlight the impact of different approaches to communication between men and women on their leadership's styles, the following chapter examines the way this overall prospect reflects on the leadership – topic already mentioned in this first section. It is relevant to state that the findings discussed in this first chapter constitute the basis on which the whole thesis is rooted.

## Chapter 2: Explaining the Leadership

### Introduction

After having discussed the facets of gender communication, chapter two focuses on leadership. Firstly, it is underlined the role of society and power structures in shaping gender's presence in leadership positions. Then, there is a focus on the way leadership itself has evolved in the past decades, and various examples of leaders are analysed. Lastly, it is discussed pre-existing research that concerns gender differences in leadership, presenting also contrasting views.

### 2.1. Defining “Leadership”

Leadership [noun] - /'li:.də.ʃɪp/

The position or function of a leader. (Harper Collins Publishers, 1995, p. 649)

This is the definition of *leadership* provided by the Collins English Dictionary: the noun is described as the actions pursued by a leader. And leader is described as “a person who rules, guides, or inspires others” (Harper Collins Publishers, 1995, p. 649). It embodies the role of someone who not only governs or directs, but also functions as a source of motivation and guidance for others, motivating them towards a common goal. “Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers” (Burns, 1978, p. 18). Leaders are hereby described through their ability to influence and uplift those around them. People have been covering this role for a long time, back to the hierarchies of early civilizations with the guidance of tribal elders; the presence of leadership reflects humanity's inclination towards organization and direction, from the rise of empires to contemporary governance.

While in the previous chapter it was presented communication in all its facets, this one is instead dedicated to leadership. And since “leaders are a particular kind of power holder” (Burns, 1978, p. 18), it is necessary to explore the roots of power, in order to deeply comprehend the nature of leadership. So, before analysing how communication

influences leadership roles, it is useful to present an insight on the modalities which bring leadership to surface.

### **2.1.1. Sociology as Background: The Interplay between Society and Actors**

This discourse will concentrate on power dynamics and their influence on leadership's definition and perception. Already in the first chapter, it was briefly illustrated how gender inequality significantly influences communication dynamics between men and women, shaping power relations and furthermore perpetuating stereotypes and limiting opportunities for dialogue. Indeed, power dynamics cannot be disregarded, for they influence society's perception of communication dynamics, and consequently the perceptions of leadership positions. Across the spectrum of social science theories, numerous sociologists have scrutinized the connection between individuals and society.

Among all the theorists, Pierre Bourdieu offered valuable insights into the interconnection of society and its structures. He was a French sociologist considered both a structuralist<sup>5</sup> and a constructivist<sup>6</sup>. And in his work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972), he introduces structuralist elements such as the concept of "habitus", and constructivist ones, as the definitions of "practice" and "agency". As a structuralist, he emphasized the significance of social structures in shaping individuals' behaviours, beliefs, and preferences. He analysed how these structures impose constraints and opportunities on individuals, consequently influencing their social trajectories. To explain it, he introduced the concept of "habitus" (1980): this refers to a set of durable dispositions that individuals acquire through their socialization within specific social environments. The habitus is not a fixed or deterministic set of traits, but rather the result of human experiences and cultural background. As such, it is constantly evolving, shaped by societal contexts. At the same time, as constructivist element, Bourdieu highlights the role of individuals in producing and reproducing social structures. He acknowledged that individuals are not passive recipients of social forces, but actively engage with the context they are placed in. In other words, it is through *practice* that individuals shape their social lives, and consequently

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<sup>5</sup> Structuralist perspectives highlight the relevance of structures and organizational systems which shape social phenomena.

<sup>6</sup> Constructivist theories place greater emphasis on the active role of individuals in constructing and interpreting their social reality.

behave as active *agents* capable of influencing and transforming their social realities. In other words, humans are capable of reflecting society.

As a result of the two approaches, Pierre Bourdieu examined society from two perspectives: as structured and as constructed. Social life is shaped by the interplay between social structures, which correspond to the “structured” society, and individual agency, meaning the “constructed” or the “structural” society. Regarding the former, Bourdieu proposed that society is organized by various forms of power, dominance, and inequality. These structures encompass economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, which dictate individuals' positions, opportunities, and overall life prospects within society. In contrast, the constructed society highlights the active role of individuals and social groups in creating and perpetuating social structures. Individuals engage in practices and behaviours that reflect their social status and habitus. Through their daily actions and interactions, individuals contribute to either maintaining or altering these social structures. With these concepts, Bourdieu aims at analysing the dynamic relationship between the society's structures, that influence agents' behaviour, and the actors' choices, which also have an impact on society itself. In other words, there is an exchange between a full-grown society which has the authority to impose its traditions and norms to its citizens, and the individuals that have the power to gradually shape and change it.

Similarly, the English sociologist Anthony Giddens adds his perspective by introducing the concept of “structuration” (1984). This emphasizes the dynamic interplay between individuals and society, highlighting how social structures are not static entities but are continually shaped and reshaped by human agency. His perspective surely sounds similar to the theory of Pierre Bourdieu previously examined. Indeed, even in his view, social structures are not external constraints imposed on individuals but are instead constituted and sustained through their ongoing activities and interactions. Thus, the concept of structuration highlights the recursive relationship between agency and structure, suggesting that individuals both shape and are shaped by the social contexts in which they are situated. By acknowledging the dual role of individuals in both reproducing and transforming social structures, Giddens offers a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of social life and the mechanisms through which social order is established and maintained.

So, the ideas discussed by Bourdieu are largely backed up by Giddens' perspective. *In primis*, both Giddens and Bourdieu challenge the deterministic view that portray individuals as passive actors, and instead emphasize their active role in navigating social realities through their agency. *In secundis*, Bourdieu's theory of practice as well as Giddens' concept of structuration both highlight the dynamic relationship between individuals and society. But the most relevant similarity may lie in their opinion concerning the display of power within a society. Indeed, the concepts of habitus and structuration serve as basis to develop an explanation of power dynamics.

In Bourdieu's perspective, power dynamics extend far beyond the lines of coercion or authoritative control. Power is in fact deeply entrenched within the fabric of society: to understand the roots of power means to dive into a complex web of interactions, where various forms of capital — economic, social, and cultural — play crucial roles. For instance, the economic capital influences power dynamics because of its financial resources; similarly, so do social connections and networks, meaning the social capital, as well as knowledge, skills, and education, which correspond to the cultural capital, etc. In this context, the habitus would serve as a tool to perpetuate existing power structures within specific fields of society. On the other hand, Anthony Giddens's theory of power dynamics, rooted in his structuration theory, offers a slightly different perspective. For Giddens, power is not solely possessed by individuals or institutions but is rather exercised through social practices carried out by individuals. Furthermore, power is not static or predetermined but is continually negotiated and reshaped through human interactions. It is also emphasized the importance of reflexivity, intended as individuals' awareness of social structures and their ability to act upon them. This concept is used in understanding and potentially altering power dynamics within society.

So, power dynamics shape individuals as well as can be shaped by them. Indeed, as illustrated by Bourdieu (1972) and Giddens (1984), power has a multifaced nature, embedded with social structures and the agency of individuals in shaping and challenging power relations within society. The interplay between society and individuals is a complex phenomenon, but precisely because of it, power structures can in fact evolve. Therefore, the structure of today's society are the product of a long history of mutations and transformations: if power is shaped on relations and dynamics within a certain society, it is possible to examine how power has adapted and was adapted by a context of

patriarchy, consequently shaping its forms of communication, and henceforth leadership styles.

To further develop this point, given society's patriarchal nature, its structures and actors conform to this paradigm, shaping the *natural* order along male standards – topic which will be further discussed in the next section. Women who adopt those considered as “masculine” behaviours, such as leading a firm or country, are perceived as disrupting this order: they appear as a threat to the existing power dynamics (Bourdieu, 2001). Being society shaped on this male-centric model, leadership ideals mirror it as well, and this renders a female approach incongruent and non-appropriate within societal norms. Consequently, emerging female leaders may often find themselves classified as insufficiently qualified for positions of power precisely because these are entrenched in a historically male-dominated framework. So, female leaders are not considered to be qualified enough for power positions because these positions have been shaped and reinforced by a male-based society structures for a very long time. To solve this, female behaviours should be “forced” into the fabric of society to the point where this will not look as disrupting the “normality” of society anymore. Indeed, as power is exercised through social practices (Giddens, 1984), and is therefore dynamic and prone to change, it is through individuals’ action that it is possible to change power dynamics. It will eventually be reached a point where both structures and individuals will consider the new order to be “normal”, and the old one as odd and insufficient.

### **2.1.2. Power, and Leadership, as a Male Concept**

As analysed through Bourdieu and Giddens, “power is ubiquitous; it permeates human relationships” (Burns, 1978, p. 15). When examining the sources of power, it is possible to further research how its dynamics influence leadership’s roles and conception of men and women; indeed, the nature of leadership lies in power dynamics for it corresponds to a form of power itself (Burns, 1978, p. 12). To discuss this, two theorists are presented.

The first one in line is Nannerl Keohane, American political scientist mainly known for her leadership position in higher education roles. During her time leading a research university, she wrote several books and articles on topics such as social justice, international relations, and gender identity. In her book *Thinking about Leadership* (2010), Keohane discusses the nature of leadership, and finds its roots in power dynamics.

Her examination points towards a masculine conception of leadership, which appears to be due to the human's habit of considering it as a male characteristic (Bourdieu, 2001; Keohane, 2010). As she (2020) states, "throughout history, leadership has been closely associated with masculinity. The king, the father, the boss, the lord are stereotypical images of leadership" (p. 121). There are many examples throughout history which suggest an interconnection between typical male roles and positions of authority. Nowadays the situation has changed, and it is more common even for women to engage in similar roles. Yet, "women ambitious for leadership still face formidable obstacles" (Keohane, 2020). The problem would lie in the lack of possibility of women. To better explain, a woman which wishes to achieve a higher status will still have to face all the issues related to societal expectations on women: the role played in the background by stereotypes and gender norms will require a lot of work to be dismantled. Consequently, the issues faced by women regarding personal and family sacrifices to reach a leadership position is disproportionate compared to those faced by men. And since this topic is highly rooted in today's societies, it has a non-indifferent influence on our perception of what is *natural* or not. To use Keohane's words, "we cannot know whether women are "naturally" interested in top leadership posts until they can attain such positions without making personal and family sacrifices radically disproportionate to those faced by men" (2020).

To understand this issue more accurately, it is necessary to highlight the way Keohane defines leadership. «A leader», according to Keohane, «can define or clarify goals by issuing a memo or an executive order, an edict or a fatwa or a tweet, by passing a law, barking a command, or presenting an interesting idea in a meeting of colleagues» (2020). The role of a leader is to underline the goals of and for a group and push it towards those goals. To accomplish that, a leader has various instruments, such as passing a law, if the leader is a politician, or issuing an order or presenting an idea at the workplace, or even simply posting a tweet, if the leader is someone influential on the social media platform. She furthermore presents leadership as follows:

We can think of leadership as a spectrum, in terms of both visibility and the power the leader wields. On the one hand we have the most visible leaders, such as the prime minister of the United Kingdom, while on the opposite side of the spectrum there is a more casual, low-key

leadership found in countless situations every day around the world. It is about leaders that can make a significant difference to the individuals whose lives are touched by it. (2020)

This passage explains that leadership comes in various forms. Some leaders, like the prime minister, are highly visible and powerful, while others might have a less prominent role but still influence people positively. It emphasizes that leadership isn't just about fame or authority but about making a meaningful difference in the lives of others, regardless of how noticeable or influential the leader is. In fact, there are different types of leaders, as there are leaders in different fields and shapes of societies. Moreover, the author discusses that «leaders can mobilize people's energies in ways that range from subtle, quiet persuasion to the coercive threat or the use of deadly force» (2020). Indeed, there are numerous ways with which leaders can push a group towards a certain direction, to the achievement of a specific goal.

Shifting the focus back to power dynamics, they both influence and are influenced by society. So, they impact people's idea of leadership, for they involve the exercise of power by an authority in a specific context or time frame. And since, in the past, such positions have been routinely held by men, consequently, women have continuously lacked the opportunity to practice leadership. Having examined how society is both structured by and structural of its actors, it is evident how, “as both cause and consequence of this fact, leadership has been closely associated with masculinity” (Keohane, 2020).

This idea of the leadership as associated mostly to men is still a widely shared opinion. A phenomenon that seems to be quite consistent till not so long ago is the "think manager, think male" one. It refers to the tendency for people, when asked to picture a typical manager or leader, to conjure images and traits traditionally associated with masculinity. Indeed, in the body of research “a consistent finding is that the ‘successful leader’ is perceived to behave and act in ways associated with masculine traits. Therefore, the “think manager, think male” phenomenon prevails in organization studies” (Collins and Singh, 2006, p. 7). Further research from the 1970s highlighted a significant correlation between gender stereotypes and the traits perceived as vital for success in managerial roles. Studies found that both male and female managers believed that characteristics linked to managerial effectiveness were more commonly attributed to men than to women (Schein, 1973, 1975). Yet, as for today, women in almost every society have demonstrated



their capability of handling leadership positions, and have proven to be valuable authorities, even in cases of crisis. To take examples from the past, efficient female rulers were Elizabeth I of England, which became known as the Virgin Queen for her unwillingness to marry a foreign king for political and power-related reasons, and Catherine the Great of Russia, whose aim was to transform Russia's education system while guiding the country through the Russian Enlightenment.

Today, many women cover power positions; there are many female prime ministers, as well as CEOs of corporations, or presidents of nonprofit organizations, and more. But there is still a degree of unevenness in this progress (Keohane, 2020). Indeed, it seems that even now it is still *unusual* for a woman to occupy such positions: one clear index of this, is the highlight that newspapers reverse in news such as “the first female Prime Minister of Italy”<sup>7</sup>, or “the first female Director-General of the World Trade Organization”<sup>8</sup>. This detail on the one hand aims at underlining societies' progress in their fight against male-based systems, while on the other one, also detects the yet existing need to keep pushing for equality, so that one day there will not be the need to underline a leader's sex anymore. As for now, societies are still shaken to the idea of women occupying certain positions, and journalists will not miss the opportunity of catching citizens' attention with similar news.

Keohane is not the only one that expressed herself concerning the leadership being a male prerogative. Bruce Solheim is an American history professor, and author of a series of historical writings. In *On Top of the World: Women's Political Leadership in Scandinavia and Beyond* (2000), he examines Scandinavian political and social characteristics with the aim of finding out the reasons why women's rise to power was faster compared to that in other regions. As he examines, “traditionally, women have not been considered in the concept of power, and female use of power was considered illegitimate” (2000). Solheim seems to agree with Keohane on this point: in history, since women have been marginalized from positions of power, the conception that societies have developed of such positions preclude traditional female characteristics. Instead, the general idea of “power” is associated with traits traditionally attributed to men. Since societies were

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<sup>7</sup> A similar title of article has been used by journals as the NPR, the CNN, Euronews, and others.

<sup>8</sup> A similar title of article has been used by journals as the Washington Diplomat, Aljazeera, The Guardian, and others.

always driven by men, now it is “normal” to consider male characteristics as the most adapt and coherent with power dynamics. As Solheim continues, “traditional feminine traits have been excluded from the characteristics of power” (2000). This also explains why several research has shown how women in positions of power have admitted feeling uncomfortable or “out of place” (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Yet, in addition to Keohane’s perspective, Solheim presents an interesting touch to the overall theoretical framework:

Given the terrible crises we face at this point in history [...], it is worthwhile to ask if female leadership or female-style leadership could provide some guidance. [...] Women appear to have been on the forefront of this kind of leadership style. Women’s traditional roles, socialized as nurturers and sustainers of life, may have prepared them for the role of empowering, cooperative leadership. (Solheim, 2000)

The author posits that women may excel in leadership roles by drawing on qualities typically attributed to them, such as nurturing and cooperation. These qualities, ingrained through societal expectations and roles, may equip women with the skills needed for empowering and collaborative leadership. In essence, the quote highlights the potential for female leaders to bring a fresh perspective and approach to addressing contemporary crises, leveraging qualities honed through their traditional social roles. It is possible that the result of the struggles that women must face to integrate themselves in contexts of leadership, is an aid for them. With leadership styles and priorities and society’s structures changing, female may find themselves one step ahead. And the reason for this would precisely be their capacity to lead following the same paths of feminine style that were in different cases devaluated and considered as not competent. The same ones in which women were in some way constrained to navigate in by society’s norms. The fact that women earlier were confined to certain roles, could turn out to be their greater strength in developing societies that are starting to value new characteristics, and not only male-associated ones. Yet, before further addressing this point, the second section of this chapter will focus on presenting how leadership has grown over time.

## **2.2. The Evolution of Leadership**

Gianluca Giansante is an Italian communication professor at University Luiss Guido Carli. In his book *Leadership* (2023), he presents a guide for understanding leadership; in

particular, he has provided an analysis of the evolution of leadership, with some of the characteristics that he thought have transformed in the last decades. As he explains, research has demonstrated that the traditional perception of a good leadership has recently switched into a different vision. The leader's perception went from a leader-follower model to a leader-leader one: now, the leader is not alone now, but rather part of a group, and his main role is not to command but rather – how also anticipated in the definition of the Collins Dictionary – to motivate others to collaborate towards the achievement of a common goal (Giansante, 2023).

The organization based on a leader and a lot of followers has worked in times when society was based on a vertical structure (Giansante, 2023, p. 65). The model was constituted by a leader – possibly male – which bossed his followers. Clearly this is a simplification for a way more complex model: indeed, the followers have always been there and always played a role. And this model based on a clear pyramidal structure has worked as powerful system for a long time (Burns, 1978, p. 238; Giansante, 2023, p. 66). What changed is a shift in the requested work force (Giansante, 2023, p. 65). Today, a great percentage of workers have expertise in intellectual matters, not physical ones. Consequently, even if a vertical structure may work for more physical jobs, when moving in the intellectual workforce, to treat followers as *followers* implies that the expectations of them will be based on followers' standards, and finally they will act like followers (Marquet, 2013). They would have a limited margin for decision-making and little incentives to do take out their maximum of their mental capacities, energy, and passion (Marquet, 2013). This may matter little for small situations, but in a society in continuous growth, there is a higher need for independent workers compared to followers. The structure leader-leader is based on the idea that anyone could be a leader, and that it is indeed better when everyone is. Leadership is not a trait that someone has, and some others do not: it is a skill on which anyone can work, and which should be applied in every aspect of an individual's life (Marquet, 2013). This new model leader-leader grants the opportunity to grow for both the whole team and each component individually. Nowadays, this style is spreading fast in politics as well as in entrepreneurships and other fields, for it can bring higher participation and enthusiasm, more accurate decision making, and, generally, better results (Giansante, 2023, p. 68).

Also, considering the growing active role of followers, leadership researchers have begun to shift from a leader-centric view (Lord and Dinh 2014; Shamir 2007); part of the third chapter is dedicated to exploring a slightly more follower-centric perspective. But in this section, the focus is on presenting some of the factors that represent a significant change in the role of leadership and of how it has grown and is perceived. There are five main points to highlight: a renewed acceptance of “ordinary” leadership, the effort required by such role, the ability to connect with others, the experience it takes to lead, and the distinction between a leadership rooted in the *leader* and one inspired by the verb *to lead*. Moreover, for each point there is one political actor or actress presented.

### **2.2.1. A First Paradox**

Starting with the first point, it represents one big paradox of leadership. To understand it, one must imagine on one side charisma, which we highly appreciate and look for in a leader, and on the other side the body of research that demonstrates that people prefer leaders which they feel closer to (Giansante, 2023, chap. 1). We want leaders which are extraordinarily competent, but we also want them to be alike us, and with which we can share the same experiences and difficulties. We want a leader which is better than us but also just like us. This is one of the paradoxes on which leadership is based (Giansante, 2023, p. 30).

The following is an attempt to better grasp this apparent contradiction. It is March 27, 2020, when the President of Italy, Sergio Mattarella, addresses the nation. With his speech, he aims to convey confidence and hope, while at the same time urging citizens to respect the distancing rules set by the government. The speech, passionate yet calm, has the intended effect. However, what attracts more attention from the Italians is a detail: a behind-the-scenes clip of the president shared on social media, later removed from the official final video. This shows a different side of the president: Mattarella is in his study, captured while delivering the speech. At one point, with a slight cough, he stops speaking, and an external voice, his spokesperson Giovanni Grasso, advises him to take advantage of the pause to tame a rebellious tuft of hair. The president attempts unsuccessfully to tame the tuft, and then confides: "eh Giovanni, I'm not going to the barber either..." (translation by Sanchez, 2022). The video reveals the president's behind-the-scenes: a person like many others, trying to record the video but stumbling over words and failing

to handle his hair. But above all, a human who finds himself in the same situation as his citizens. Mattarella was sharing the difficulties of Italians, and his speech about respecting distancing rules was therefore for everyone, himself included. The president showed himself as a citizen equal to the others. This episode suggests a reflection on the nature of leadership: it is a common belief that the best leaders are extraordinary figures, but this perception – perhaps also partly due to the media phenomena analysed in the first chapter – is changing. This episode highlighted how a calm man managed to arouse the country's enthusiasm both through his speech, which undoubtedly portrayed him as an effective and prepared leader, and by showing himself close to the citizens' experience. A leader close to the group can currently have more influence than an external leader, because by presenting similar characteristics to the group the leader can present himself as one of them. (Giansante, 2023, chap. 1)

### **2.2.2. *Disinterested Politics***

As second point to discuss, there is the idea of the traditional leadership being an activity which grants favours and privileges, and that somehow places the leader as above the rest of the group and the citizens. Citizens in this vision are supposed to be working for the leader, not with it. Instead, it was illustrated how real leadership is based on effort and sacrifice, and on the contrary consists in placing the others in the first place. A leader must take good care of his responsibility in a *disinterested manner* (Platone, *Repubblica*, as cited in Giansante, 2023, p. 43), meaning without personal bias or self-interest. The credibility of a leader greatly depends on the perception of integrity: to keep the word, hold in mind promises, or not make favouritisms. One of the most important questions that citizens ask themselves is if they can trust the leader not to take advantage of the newly acquired authority (Hogan & Keiser, 2005, p. 173). It is only when people see the leader working for the group that they can see an affirmative answer to that question. So, when personal interests conflict with the collective well-being and are prioritized, the unwritten agreement between the leader and the group is broken. The only way to respect the social pact triggered by the attribution of a leadership role is to restrain these personal interests, to curb ego and personal ambitions, and to place the community's welfare at the centre of one's actions.

Yet, as often happens, success is a double-edged sword. Giansante presents an example of a character who had to learn how to shift the focus from himself back to his citizens. There was a point in his career when the young politician – later President – Theodore Roosevelt was falling in love with himself. He used to interrupt assembly meetings to attract attention, attack opponents with a violence that made him irritating even in the eyes of his supporters, and refuse to listen to the advice of friends who suggested he show more balance. The change took place amidst difficulties in getting his political projects approved and the sudden deaths of his wife and mother within hours of each other: Roosevelt realized that it was necessary to set aside the intransigence and egocentrism of his character and start working together with others to advance the goals he deemed most important. The months during which Roosevelt had to make peace with his grief as well as his failures, gave him a more appropriate empathy and understanding of others' difficulties. Thus, his style changed radically when he returned to the political scene, and this finally allowed the citizens to consider him as one of them, understanding and close to them. And this leads to the following point, which concerns a characteristic which was for too long underestimated: the capacity to put oneself in others' shoes. (Giansante, 2023, chap. 2)

### **2.2.3. Empathy and Understanding**

To understand others' struggles, their needs, and priorities, and for the leader to know how to absorb them, is an ability to master. It is essential to be able to catch the serious and profound needs of citizens. In today's societies more than earlier, with increasing diversity and interconnectedness, Giansante analyses that the ability to empathize with others has become a pillar of effective leadership. Beyond mere sympathy, true empathy requires a deep understanding of the perspectives, emotions, and experiences of those around us. Leaders who possess this capacity can foster stronger connections with their citizens, leading to more collaborative and inclusive decision-making processes. It is by actively listening and acknowledging the concerns and aspirations of others, that leaders can build trust and foster a sense of belonging within the group. And to accomplish that, it is a must to have empathy. Indeed, the latter is a very important trait for leaders, for "empathy is the fuel for a just and compassionate society" (Nussbaum).

Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" (1963) speech, in my perspective, is an example of using emotions and empathy to unite people towards a common purpose. With it, he demonstrated his ability to connect with his audience on a deeply emotional level, appealing to their shared humanity and aspirations for a more just society. With his communication approach, he painted a vivid picture of his dream for a future where racial equality and justice prevailed: King spoke not only to the minds but also to the hearts of his listeners. By acknowledging the pain and suffering endured by African Americans under segregation and discrimination, he promoted solidarity among his audience, regardless of their race or background. It was by fostering understanding that he cultivated cooperation within his listeners. So, political leaders should master compassion, because their role does not only include the knowledge of information about their society and history, but also the ability to welcome and value the private lives and struggles of those that they wish to guide. Indeed, as showed by King's figure, leadership is not only decision-making but also cooperation. And here is where communication plays an important role: it grants people the possibility to coordinate action and put in place common strategies and to change them when necessary. To do this, a leader must be not only aware, but also understanding of the people's needs, and must also know how to coordinate the collective effort to reach a common goal. The nature of leadership necessarily needs the participation of a group. So, here lies another key point in this new era of leadership: the ability to empathize with citizens, and gently persuade them to collaborate towards the achievement of a common objective.

#### **2.2.4. Experience Brings Competence**

The fourth point in line is understanding that the leadership does not correspond to inherited traits, but rather it is constituted by complex competences that can be acquired, learned, and even unlearned, by the leader (Giansante, 2023). This happens through the personal and life experiences of the leader itself. Leadership is dynamic and its roles, functions and characteristics must change with time, and can be shaped by historical periods, time frames and events. It can change through space and time. A political actress which I find fit to match with Gianluca Giansante's analysis is the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Her leadership is the perfect example of an ability that she

succeeded in mastering over time, and thanks to her life choices and experiences. She was not born a leader, she worked hard to become one.

For instance, Angela Merkel's upbringing in East Germany under a repressive communist regime profoundly influenced her style. Growing up in a society where personal freedoms were limited and dissent was suppressed, Merkel developed a keen appreciation for democracy, individual rights, and social justice. Massimo Nava (2021), in his biography of the politician, reports some observations that she discussed concerning her first trip in the West side of Berlin. He writes how she was shocked of the differences that she witnessed between West Germany and East Germany: in the former, there were fast intercity trains, shopping malls full of luxury products, and international music playing on the radios. But most of all, youth that could engage in little transgressions: indeed, she witnessed students placing their feet on the chair of the wagon of a train (Nava, 2021, p. 40). It was just a first impression, and yet enough for her to open her eyes and start asking herself questions on the future of the country she had grown up in. While she grew up following strict rules, the reality she found on the other side of the Berlin Wall was quite different from what she had expected. This experience shaped her personal perception of her surroundings. In the trip, she also realized how much more informed she was compared to her other friends in the East: she was impressed to discover that the unilateral story that she was told in the East could have not been one-way only. Consequently, she started to question reality. This answer of what Merkel saw also matches with her background of physics' studies. Much possibly, her scientific training instilled in her a rigorous analytical approach to problem-solving and decision-making. Merkel is known for her methodical and pragmatic approach to governance: she often relied on data-driven analysis and evidence-based policymaking to address complex challenges facing Germany and the European Union. So, Merkel's life experiences shaped her leadership from several perspectives.

#### **2.2.5. From “leader” to “lead”**

Finally, the last characteristic to underline deals with the specific meaning attributable to leadership. It covers its interpretation. In fact, while the previous traditional vision of leadership considered the word *leadership* to be encompassed more through the noun “leader”, now the new trend aims at considering it linked to the verb “to lead”. It is



attributed less importance to the person and more to the verb: indeed, the verb represents an action, discourse that can as well be linked to the fourth point just explained, it being the leadership's need to evolve and not being an inherited and therefore static trait. So, leadership is not only a noun, but rather a verb. And to "lead" means "to show the way to (an individual or a group) by going with or ahead" (Harper Collins Publishers, 1995, p. 648). It means to make the first step, to act as an example. And this traces back to the third point concerning cooperation between the leader and its "followers": to be an example for the others suggests indeed that the leadership is a collective activity in which all members of a group must do their part. (Giansante, 2023, p. 162)

To conceptualize leadership starting from the verb, and therefore as a dynamic idea, it means to accept that the leadership can manifest itself in various ways. And because of this, there must be some sort of links between the most efficient forms of leaderships. The type of leadership which was previously most spread in the collective imaginary is through a strong and yet arrogant and egocentric leader; this style may be sufficient, but it hardly reaches excellent results. Differently, the person able to cast aside his or her ego and interests while granting more space for those of its citizens, can push people to the point of reaching extraordinary achievements (Giansante, 2023). It is the ability to make each person identify with the group and this way pushing everyone to do their maximum, and this not for one's own interest but rather for the general one. This is the essence of what a leader should be able to do.

The following section is dedicated to exploring where it is possible to find this leadership characteristic. And interestingly, according to the literature previously examined in this thesis, this trait seems to be a major prerogative of the female approach to leadership, while it seems to be lacking on the male counterpart.

### **2.3. Male and Female Leadership: Characteristics and Differences**

In the previous section, leadership was explored on a neutral perspective. The traits highlighted did not underscore gender differences, and the examples presented were both of male and female political leaders. And just as research previously examined has highlighted gender differences in communication, there is a body of research dedicated to differences in gender approaches to leadership as well. So, this first section is dedicated

to presenting the body of research that does believe in the gender difference thesis, while the subsequent section will illustrate the contrary.

### **2.3.1. Literature that Shows Gender Differences in Leadership**

There exists extensive research indicating that men and women exhibit distinct leadership styles. As extensively explored in the preceding chapter, psychologists and researchers propose that because of psychological differences in the way with which men and women communicate, it's reasonable to assume that their approaches to leadership differ as a direct consequence. And since part of the reason for this can be attributed to socialization and gender norms and stereotypes, it can be deduced that men and women inherently undergo distinct developmental processes, resulting in them evolving into unique individuals with varying leadership styles and skills, even when occupying similar positions of leadership.

This body of research on leadership differences across gender reflect the differences highlighted in the first chapter, about gender divergencies on communication styles and influence tactics. It concludes that men are task-oriented leaders, while women are relationship-oriented ones. So, men typically exhibit task-oriented leadership qualities characterized by autocracy, directness, and control (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Task oriented behaviours are “concentrated on performing the job that the work group faces and are thus alike those of the initiating structure factor. The leader is concerned with setting work standards, supervising the job, and meeting production goals” (Riggio, 2008). Conversely, women tend to adopt a relationship-oriented leadership approach, prioritizing democratic and participative styles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Relationship-oriented behaviours include “showing concern for employees’ well-being and involving them in decision-making processes” (Riggio, 2008). These differences in leadership style correspond to gender-specific communication patterns: men often communicate in a goal-oriented manner, emphasizing independence and dominance, while women tend to focus on fostering social and emotional connections with their followers. Consequently, feminine leadership behaviours encompass activities such as supporting, mentoring, and team building, while masculine behaviours lean towards problem-solving and delegating tasks (Hater & Bass, 1998; Martell & DeSmet, 2001).

An additional difference highlighted in literature concerns the way men and women approach moral reasoning. Carol Gilligan, in her seminal work *In a Different Voice* (1982), identifies a distinct pattern, and differentiates between “Ethic of Justice” and “Ethic of Care”. According to the former, men tend to rely on impersonal, abstract, and universal reasoning; differently, based on the latter, women often prioritize interpersonal relationships when making moral decisions. This debate deals with several key issues, including differences in moral capacities, reasoning processes, and conceptual frameworks. The ethic of justice, often associated with traditional moral philosophy, prioritizes principles of fairness, equality, and impartiality. This approach emphasizes the rights and autonomy of individuals and seeks to ensure that everyone is treated equally under the law or moral code. It often involves a rational and detached assessment of moral dilemmas, focusing on the application of rules and the consequences of actions without direct consideration of personal relationships or emotional connections. In contrast, the ethic of care emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships and compassion in moral decision-making. Proponents of this approach argue that, rather than relying solely on abstract principles, individuals operating within an ethic of care consider the specific needs and circumstances of those involved, prioritizing empathy, and understanding. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of individuals and emphasizes the importance of nurturing relationships as fundamental to moral behaviour. These ethics surely have a connection with the report and the rapport approach to communication elaborated by Tannen. Furthermore, Gilligan's research suggests that women are more likely to adopt an ethic of care, while men tend to lean towards an ethic of justice.

To conclude this piece of literature, there are other theorists that argue how differences in leadership approaches between men and women result in women being perceived more as transformational leaders, while men are often viewed as transactional ones (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Rosener, 1990). Transformational leaders are characterized as inspirational and visionary, capable of earning the trust and confidence of their followers. They work towards creating shared future objectives and developing plans for their followers to achieve these goals (Burns, 1978). Additionally, they prioritize nurturing and empowering their followers to reach their full potential. These attributes closely align with women's interpersonal leadership style. In contrast, men tend to exhibit a strong focus on management, a pivotal attribute associated with transactional leadership. Transactional

leaders operate by offering rewards in return for compliance, incentivizing followers to meet objectives through the promise of rewards and disciplining them for falling short of expectations (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998). This approach shares many characteristics with task-oriented leadership, thus similar masculine communication patterns are often observed in transactional leadership as well.

### **2.3.2. Literature that Shows No Gender Differences in Leadership**

The following research on gender disparities in leadership styles suggests that there is not a significant distinction between men and women in leadership roles. These studies propose that leadership roles are highly dependent on specific situations. So, according to this perspective, neither men nor women inherently perform better in leadership positions; rather, the effectiveness of a leadership style depends on factors within group and organizational contexts (Foels et al., 2000). Therefore, this body of research believes that there are no innate differences between men and women that make either one of the two genders present itself better in a leadership position. The explanation lies in the considering the setting in which a person is based as the reason of the greater performance of that person in the role, nevertheless of its sex.

A theory which supports this argument is the Contingency one (Fiedler, 1964). This theory posits that a leader's efficacy hinges on the degree to which the leader's approach harmonizes with a given context or scenario (Wolinksi, 2010). It recognizes that there is no best style of leadership, but rather "leader effectiveness depends, or is contingent on, the interaction of leader behavior and the situation" (Riggio, 2008). It implies that effective leadership depends on specific contexts, and therefore that a leader's efficacy can vary from one situation to another. In this perspective, individual's attitude to grow and learn plays a crucial role, and it leaves no space for gender disparities in communication as well as in leadership approaches. Indeed, while acknowledging the variability of leadership roles, it is important to highlight human capacity for growth and adaptation. The theory affirms that leadership effectiveness transcends mere skill acquisition; it entails a leader's keen awareness and adaptability within distinct circumstances. Consequently, instead of adhering to a singular leadership style, the solution would be to foster self-awareness. Moreover, it is by cultivating mental flexibility that leaders, male and female, are enabled to identify areas for improvement and

consequently adapt to new situations. So, the contingency theory leaves no space for debating which leadership is the most efficient, among a male and a female style. This because since “a leader’s effectiveness is contingent on how well the leader’s style matches a specific setting or situation” (Wolinksi, 2010), it is implied that the difference between a leadership style and another one lies solely in the leader’s capacity to adapt to and overcome situations.

Further research that believes that gender is not a variable when evaluating leadership styles, argues that organizational roles take precedence over gender roles in managerial and leadership positions (Kanter, 1977). Individuals of both genders holding the same organizational position should exhibit minimal differences in their leadership approach because both leaders “are presumably more concerned about managing effectively than about representing sex-differentiated features of societal gender roles” (Kanter, 1977). In other words, it is suggested that male and female managers exhibit behaviour that is less stereotypical of their gender roles when they hold the same leadership position. This occurs because they adhere more closely to the behavioural expectations associated with the managerial role rather than conforming to gender stereotypes. So, apparent differences in behaviour between genders are not inherently due to gender disparities but rather stem from distinct structural positions within organizations; women, often occupying less powerful positions, tend to behave in accordance with their relative lack of authority. Hence, individuals of both genders exhibit similar behaviours when occupying equivalent positions of power, indicating an absence of gender-based distinctions in leadership approaches. Thus, this approach does not exclude the existence of gender norms or stereotypes, but simply assumes that in the same leader positions those gender differences are not relevant compared to the need to act as efficient leader. It means, that when occupying an equal power position, a male and female leader would also adapt the same leadership style, since this is independent to the gender. This body of research mostly underlines a leader’s ability to be a leader, and this stands independently of its gender.

There are other additional studies that support the idea that there are no real leadership differences between men and women. When examining studies collectively, any discernible leadership distinction between genders becomes insignificant, as both sexes demonstrate comparable levels of task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviours. So, both genders reveal characteristics of what other schools of thought consider being

“feminine” and “masculine” approaches to communication. Margaret Thatcher, in her speech about public money to Conservative Party Conference (October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1983) embodies more an ethic of justice (Gilligan, 1982). She speaks about objective principles, the needs of the population, and refers to the greatness of her nation. Furthermore, she has a report approach, considered more typical of the male communication style. So, this piece of evidence would agree with the body of research that believes that men and women indeed do not differ on leadership approach, and that therefore it only concerns positions and power.

To draw some conclusions, this body of research that recognizes no impact of gender in different leadership’s styles is relevant and quite interesting. Indeed, it is agreeable that the decision of a leader to adopt one strategy instead of another one depends on the situation. And it is also fair for a leader to have to be aware of its capacities, while being able to grow and learn, even after reaching a position of power. However, the evidence of different approaches to communication between genders should not be weighted lightly: while admitting the relevance of the situation and individual ability to cover a leadership position, there are general, and perhaps even stereotypical, differences that should not be ignored. Even when power is called to answer as the reason why men and women may act differently in different power-related positions, research previously examined illustrates how power itself does influence male and female leadership’s perception. The role of power dynamics in this context cannot be limited to positions but should also be considered in regards of sexual differentiation. To further explain, if one considers the body of research according to which power itself does influence gender dynamics and the leadership perception of both men and women, it could be concluded that even if the problem lies in the power itself, there must be differences in leadership approaches. Whether power is the cause or an added factor, it does suggest that leadership roles are affected by it. Also, regarding Thatcher’s example, it is relevant to underline that her case is situated in a time lapse in which women still highly struggled to stand out: the speech did not occur in recent years, but in a time when power was still a prerogative of men. Now times have changed, there has been fewer need for female leaders to adopt their strategies on male standards, and societies are now more open to accept more “feminine” traits.

However, regarding this last point concerning both male and female leaders adopting traditional “feminine” or “masculine” tactics, the matter should be further developed. Leadership can be described in neutral terms and with non-gendered characteristics, as demonstrated by the examples and traits discussed by Giansante previously presented. Certainly, as there is non-indifferent research stating how there are no differences and an equally wide body of research which demonstrates its opposite, it is evident that the variables are numerous, and a thesis is not sufficient to exhaust them all and draw clear-cut verdicts. Nonetheless, the third chapter aims at providing some conclusions in regards of two relevant leadership styles, considering them both as influenced by gender differences and as de-gendered.

### **Conclusion**

This second chapter has highlighted the dynamic processes involved in the leadership, and how they include various variables and therefore cannot be oversimplified concepts. As exposed by Burns (1978), “political leadership depends on a long chain of biological and social processes, of interaction with structures of political opportunity and closures, of interplay between the calls of moral principles and the recognized necessities of power” (pp. 3-4). Based on these concepts, it is possible to move towards a deeper analysis with subsequent conclusion in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: Transactional or Transformational: Perhaps Both

### Introduction

This last chapter taps into the material previously illustrated to draw a synthesis on two leaderships' styles: the transactional and the transformational one. Valuable insights of different authors are examined, together with several examples of political – and not – actors and actresses. Finally, in the last section the research on different gender communication approaches, and their consequent diverse approach to leadership, will merge in the overall analysis of the thesis.

### 3.1. Transactional Leadership

One of the first authors that approached transactional leadership was James MacGregor Burns (1978), political science and leadership researcher. Yet, the original idea is to be attributed to Max Weber, which had defined the “rational-legal authority” (1947): according to him, this type of leadership was based on normative rules, strict discipline, and systematic control. Indeed, the theory elaborated by Burns follows a similar path: it is centred on enhancing the exchange-based relationship between leaders and their followers, emphasizing the expectations of both sides. As explained by the author, “this theory conceives of leader and follower as exchanging gratifications in a political marketplace” (1978, p. 258). So, the success of this leadership style relies on one hand, on the leader's capacity to address and fulfil the followers' expectations, and on the other hand, the follower's ability to produce further leader initiatives. The leader solicits the follower, which in return complies with the demands and pushes the leader to create new tasks, and so the latter arouses new expectations, which are responded to by the followers, and so on. The dynamic created is rooted on a goal-oriented perspective: reached a goal, immediately move to the next one. Indeed, “the moods and styles are quick; [...] relationships are dominated by quick calculations of cost-benefits” (Burns, 1978, p. 258). Once again, a lesson from the past is fitting:

No one is afraid of Caesar himself, but he is afraid of death, loss of property, prison, disenfranchisement. Nor does anyone love Caesar himself, unless in some way Caesar is a person of great merit; but we love wealth, a tribuneship, a praetorship, a consulship. When



we love and hate and fear these things, it needs must be that those who control them are masters over us. (Epictetus, as cited in Burns, 1978)

This is the starting point, and core argument, for understanding the basis of transactional leadership. Power and influence are derived not from the personal qualities or charisma of the leader, but from the leader's control over rewards and penalties. People are not motivated by the leader themselves but by what the leader can offer or take away. For instance, rewards could be financial incentives, as bonuses or salary increases, or promotions to higher positions, or simply public recognition; on the contrary, penalties would correspond to financial penalties or negative evaluations and feedback. This is consistent with the transactional leadership style, which focuses on exchanges between the leader and followers. Indeed, leaders provide rewards for compliance and performance, and followers are motivated to meet these expectations to avoid negative consequences and gain positive outcomes (Nikezić et al., 2012). The system proves itself to be quite effective: it fosters a positive motivation in employees to work hard towards the organization's goals, knowing that their success will be rewarded. Additionally, employees are held accountable for their own actions, which enhances overall accountability within the organization (Forsyth & Hartzell, 2023).

The aspect of transactional leadership that should be addressed is the quality of exchange relationships between leaders and followers. "This equilibrium rests on a structure of give and take" (Burns, 1978, p. 290). The model is based on a series of behaviours performed by the members of the whole group, and a series of dynamics that are installed in the group. The transactional leadership style is typically employed in situations where leaders concentrate on fundamental process control, organization, and short-term planning. And while this argument appears more suited to the corporate and business environment rather than the political arena, it is still possible to explore examples of transactional leadership within the context of political communication. Examples of transactional leaders include American politician Joseph McCarthy or French leader Charles de Gaulle, which prioritize short-term objectives, adherence to standards, procedures, rules, and maintaining control.

### 3.1.1. Path-Goal Theory

This theory was elaborated by the psychologist Robert House (1971), then updated in an article in *The Leadership Quarterly* (1996), and it is closely associated with the transactional style. Indeed, the arguments posited by it may be easily reflected into Burns' view. The path-goal theory of leadership fundamentally posits that effective leaders should adjust their behaviour to address the specific needs of their followers, steering them towards success. This approach enables leaders to greatly improve their team's motivation, satisfaction, and overall performance (Rusconi, 2024). And for the success of this plan, and goal-achievement, the theory establishes a supporting system, through the situational use of directive, supportive, participative, or achievement-oriented leadership styles to clearly define the connection between performance and rewards for subordinates. It identifies which leadership style is most effective for each specific context. It is interesting to briefly go over each one of them.

Directive leadership is based on communicating clear instructions and assign tasks to individuals or a group (Toole & Baumeyer, 2023). It is characterized by the guidance of a leader task-structured, efficient decision-making processes, and an instructions-based approach (Rusconi, 2024). Supportive leadership may be the less transactional one, for it assumes a more understanding and empathic environment: a leader who embraces this style focuses on their team's needs and provides support and encouragement as necessary (Rusconi, 2024). Similarly, participative leadership is based on open communication between the leader and the group. The leader encourages collaboration and tries to actively involve the group in decision-making processes (Rusconi, 2024). Lastly, the achievement-oriented leadership aims at setting goals, and expecting them to be fulfilled in the most efficient way possible (Toole & Baumeyer, 2023). This type of leaders, for their belief in their team's potential, aim at high objectives, and focus on achieving outstanding results (Rusconi, 2024).

So, these four types of leadership correspond to the four diverse approaches which leaders are supposed to adopt according to the Path-Goal Theory. And this choice should be dictated by two situational factors: the nature of the followers, meaning how the individuals would receive the types of leadership, and the nature of the environment, as in the situation at hand (House, 1996). This overall framework, with

the various leaderships' options, allows the assessment of satisfaction of both leaders and employees. Indeed, House asserts that a leader's behaviour directly influences employee satisfaction, motivation, and performance.

Furthermore, an effective leader offers clear guidance, establishes ambitious goals, actively participates in achieving these goals, and supports their employees. And it is clear how these traits are compatible with the transactional type of leadership. Indeed, the underlying assumption is that the clearer this path is made, the greater the followers' motivation and performance will be. Therefore, considering the closeness of this theory with the transactional style of leadership, it is possible to connect the four main principles of the Path-Goal Theory with frameworks theorized by Burns (1978) in the transactional landscape.

### **3.1.2. Key Characteristics: The Relation Leader – Follower**

There are several principles of the Path-Goal Theory which also compose the main pillars of transactional leadership. Seen the close connection between the model and the relation between leader and followers, it is especially necessary to underline dynamics and responsibilities of both parties. Among them, of particular relevance are clarifying goals, removing obstacles, and providing support (Channell, 2023).

Starting with the first objective, leaders need to clearly articulate the team's goals and expectations, giving a sense of direction and purpose. By making sure team members comprehend their responsibilities and the desired results, leaders can coordinate individual contributions with the overall objectives. Indeed, Burns states that there is a specific type of transactional leadership – the party opinion one – whose *modus operandi* is precisely the gathering of leaders and followers committed to common goals (1978, p. 285). In this point, it is the responsibility of the leader to identify and remove obstacles that impede teamwork. Indeed, in both the path-goal theory and the transactional leadership, since the goal is common, it is responsibility of the leader to clear the path of progress for the followers, to grant them the possibility of pursuing their goal in the smoothest way possible. So, based on this model, the relationship between the two sides consists in “mutual support and mutual promises, expectations, obligations, rewards” (p. 289). It is by eliminating these barriers that leaders cultivate a supportive environment that boosts team members' motivation and performance (Channell, 2023).

Furthermore, leaders should provide guidance and support to their team members (Channell, 2023). This includes giving feedback and *coaching*, helping with skill development and, generally, when necessary. This step could also involve tackling resource limitations, offering essential training and development chances, or advocating for the team's interests within the organization. Leaders who handle this trait, establish trust, and cultivate constructive working relationships, which in turn enhance team members' self-esteem and enthusiasm. Yet, working relationships shall not be confused with personal ones. Indeed, another essential aspect to consider is the importance of the chain of command.

It is assumed that the followers will comply with the transactional leader's directives, because its authority is derived from their position within the chain of command. Since the leader holds a higher rank, the group is expected to follow the former's instructions. In other words, the transactional leader's role to direct subordinates stems from their formal authority and organizational responsibilities (Forsyth & Hartzell, 2023). This structure is pyramidal and hierarchical and reminds of the structure previously examined in the section regarding the development of leadership in more recent years. Indeed, this model leader-follower reminds the structure concerning the model of leadership of years ago, previously examined through Giansante's work (2023). He examined how, today, there is an ongoing shift from a leader-follower system to a leader-leader one. The transactional leadership recalls the first model, which as powerful as it was, could now be considered outdated in comparison to a leader-leader model – examined in the next section in relation to the transformational type of leadership.

To further investigate, transactional leadership approach inherently promotes a hierarchical structure, necessitating a clear, rigid, and well-defined chain of command. This structure is essential for the effective implementation of reward and penalty policies, ensuring that every individual understands their position and responsibilities within the organization. Subordinates are expected to operate strictly within their defined roles, avoiding any actions beyond their designated duties. The primary objective of transactional leadership is to achieve results as efficiently as possible by following a predetermined path. So, transactional leadership appears to be resistant to change: these leaders generally prefer adhering to established and proven methods rather than experimenting with new ideas or alternatives (San Francisco Business School, 2024).

And based on this, a key factor in Burns' analysis lies in the level of *conformity* of the group. Indeed, the more the followers are conformed, the higher the chances of this transactional model to succeed; since the group must work towards the same objectives, the more cohesive the group is, the faster it can achieve its goal. "There is a *purpose* to the conformity or consensus" (Burns, 1978, p. 291): the standard of the behaviours of the group is drawn from the determined goals of that group. Therefore, if the goal to achieve is common, it is spontaneous to think that the group should be as conformed as possible. Moreover, a second aspect should be considered: to act as the others do is a way to avoid disrupting power dynamics between leader and followers. In fact, if a member of the group perceives more esteem from his colleagues, he or she may aspire to take the position of the leader: the higher a follower's self-esteem, the more probable it is for him to attempt to the leadership position, and eventually even succeed (Burns, 1978, p. 294). This situation could lead to conflict, and it would disrupt the hierarchical order which characterizes the leader-follower model. It could ignite a change in the structure of that transactional leadership.

### **3.1.3. Bill Gates**

Bill Gates, entrepreneur and co-founder of Microsoft, is an example of transactional leader. His assertive and demanding leadership style, exhibits task-oriented behaviour, also characterized by his role as a confrontational taskmaster. Perhaps even thanks to his approach to leadership, he led his company to become a dominant force in the software industry. Indeed, one could state that the high-stress environment at Microsoft was a direct result of Gates driving his employees as rigorously as he drove himself (Bill Gate's transactional leadership, 2015). As a task-oriented leader, he facilitated the team's understanding of their goals by outlining a series of structured steps during their initial meetings. Gates articulated his approach by stating, "I believe that if you show people the problems and if you show them the solutions they will be moved to act." This quote highlights his style of transparency and problem-solving. Moreover, it demonstrates his belief in the power of clear communication and actionable solutions; this approach aligns with the support-providing aspect of the transactional leadership style.

Another characteristic of Gates' style is the minimization of personal relationship building, which is substituted by a high degree of working relationship:

Bill doesn't really want to review your spec, he just wants to make sure you've got it under control. His standard M.O. is to ask harder and harder questions until you admit that you don't know, and then he can yell at you for being unprepared. (Zitelmann, 2020)

Clearly, the entrepreneur cares little about how the job is carried out, as long as it is indeed pursued. Also, keeping in mind that the objective is to reach goals and gain rewards, this may imply growing competition between members of the same team. As a result, the development of personal connection is kept to a minimum (San Francisco Business School, 2024).

Additionally, it is fundamental for everyone to perform their own work: transactional leadership tends to have a micromanagement approach. The leaders usually follow their followers closely, to be aware of the tasks performed by each member (San Francisco Business School, 2024). Perhaps because of this attentiveness, Gates' employees anticipated being challenged, and they expected to have the opportunity to challenge Gates as well. Indeed, a quality underlined by Steve Wood (a Microsoft's programmer), is Gates' capacity to change his mind if someone presented a compelling argument (Zitelmann, 2020). Additionally, according to Scott MacGregor, whom Gates hired from Xerox, "A lot of people don't like their jobs because they don't get any feedback." Yet, this was not an issue at Microsoft. Indeed, as MacGregor continued to explain, "you always knew what Bill thought about what you were doing. The goal, the motivational force for a lot of programmers, was to get Bill to like their product." The overall leadership style of Bill Gates, which also matches with the description of characteristics included in the Path-Goal Theory, delineates him as a transactional leader.

### **3.2. Transformational leadership**

The first one to have coined the term transformational leadership was the sociologist James V. Downton (1973). And some years later, it was expanded by James MacGregor Burns who, after analysing the relationship between leaders and followers, concluded that it was precisely the reason that pushed both parts to greater levels of moral and motivation, by shifting their beliefs, needs and values. This notion was advanced in his book *Leadership* (1978), and later developed in *Transforming Leadership* (2003). The main point, is that transformational leaders can convey a vision to their followers,

inspiring them to prioritize the collective good over their personal interests (Campus, 2013, p. 18):

Leaders take the initiative in mobilizing people for participation in the processes of change, encouraging a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy, which in turn brings stronger feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy... The word for this process is *empowerment*. Instead of exercising power over people, transforming leaders champion and inspire followers. (Burns, 2003, pp. 25-26)

Transformational leaders actively engage people in the process of change, motivating them to get involved and fostering a shared sense of identity and capability. And this participation helps individuals feel more valuable and confident in their abilities. This model arises in contrast to the one of transactional leadership which, as was seen, aims at establishing an exchange rather than inspiring. Transformational leaders outline future objectives, create strategies to reach these goals, and continue to innovate even when their organization is thriving. Similarly, their followers often adopt an innovative mindset, enhancing their skills and contributing more effectively to the organization's success (Carli and Eagly, 2007, p. 136). Also, similarly to how the transactional leadership model recalled the leader-follower style, the transformational leadership sounds quite alike to the leader-leader one highlighted by Giansante (2023).

Yet, it was a few years later that Bernard Bass expanded on the concept significantly in what is now known as "Bass's Transformational Leadership Theory" (1990). Bass introduced methods to evaluate the effectiveness of transformational leadership and emphasized the importance of leaders exhibiting genuine energy to motivate their team members to emulate them. He suggested that there were four main ingredients for the transformational leadership style. These, called the "4-I's", are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. This section will further develop them, and for each it is presented one exemplary figure.

Anyway, it is interesting to underline how this type of leadership, just as the transactional one, does not limit itself to the political sphere: indeed, the model has also attracted scholars in management and organizational theory fields. Therefore, not all actors and actresses presented are entrenched in politics.

### **3.2.1. Idealized Influence**

Idealized influence, or charisma, sees leaders being charismatic and goal oriented. In this trait, Bass includes leaders which can inspire confidence in their followers, and which are seen as actors worthy of being emulated. To further explain, one of the four characteristics of a transformational leader is the capacity of instilling inspirational drive in the followers. Transformational leaders act as examples of ethical and socially commendable conduct. They tend to maintain a strong commitment to work objectives, and to display enthusiasm for the group's goal strategy. And at the core of this influence there are trust and admiration. In fact, leaders that have cultivated their idealized influence are trusted and admired by their followers to make decisions in both the general and individual interest. It is through this trust that the followers are inspired to mirror the leader and adopt his or her values.

Malala Yousafzai is an example of transformational leader (Slingo, 2023); as she probably covers all the four characteristics of the style, here the focus is on her idealized influence. Malala's unwavering dedication to the cause of girls' education, despite facing grave threats to her own safety, has elevated her to a symbol of courage, resilience, and hope for millions worldwide. Her personal story of defying the Taliban's oppressive regime and advocating for the rights of girls to receive an education has resonated deeply with people of all backgrounds. She embodies the values of integrity, empathy, and unwavering commitment to justice, sources of inspiration for those who seek to challenge injustice and promote social change. Malala's ability to lead by example, to stand firm in the face of adversity, and to inspire others to join her in the fight for equality make her a transformational leader whose influence transcends borders and generations. She was charismatic, set high goals, and expressed confidence in those who listened to her. And this was also a part of her objective:

I wanted to reach people living in poverty, those children forced to work and those who suffer from terrorism or lack of education. Deep in my heart I hoped to reach every child who could take courage from my words and stand up for his or her rights. (Yousafzai, 2013)

She hoped to inspire and gently persuade people to speak up and to fight for their rights. Her personality and style rose her up to be an example of the idealized influence of transformational leadership. She could influence her listeners towards the idealization of a more positive vision. And because of this, she had eventually started to be seen as *worthy* of emulation.



### 3.2.2. Inspirational Motivation

Individuals' desire for leaders with an appealing and meaningful vision is satisfied through transformational leaders. The second point includes them to communicate a vision that resonates deeply within followers: if the goal is to make people follow an idea, it is through this characteristic that followers will adopt the same vision as the leader. The process starts with entrusting people with a purpose and driving them to excel by inspiration drawn from the leader's example. Transformational leaders first resemble principles for themselves, and then proceed to exemplify these standards for the followers. This way they infuse their followers with the same level of passion they possess. The result consists in a group of individuals linked with their leader through a strong sense of purpose and a "mission mindset" to pursue their objectives. (Bass, 1990)

An example of leader which I believe has succeeded in this purpose, is the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskij (Fox, 2022). In 2022, not more than 24 hours after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukraine war, Zelenskij pronounced a sentence that radically signed his perception of a leader. When he was asked to evacuate the capital Kyiv, to move somewhere safer, his answer was: "the fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride" (Zelenskij, as cited in Braithwaite, 2022). With these words, the president refuses to leave his people, and firmly decides to fight alongside them. Dismantling the image of the traditional political leader, wearing only military clothing, he became the symbol of the resistance against Russia's invasion (Giansante, 2023, p. 55). These choices demonstrated to his citizens that resisting was a possibility, and that his vision of a free Ukraine was not going to be carried out from somewhere safe: Zelensky would be believing for a peaceful country from the first line. He was able to show his vision of the country to his followers, and to make them believe in that vision to the point where it became their idea as well. When he started fighting, his people did as well, following his example (Giansante, 2023).

Further developing into the inspirational motivation trait, leaders often use symbols and emotional appeals to arouse followers. A female figure which succeeded in this is the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern. She is one of the global leaders that, according to research (Garikipati, 2020; Wittenberg-Cox, 2020), has better handled the COVID-19 crisis. The American magazine *The Atlantic*, to present her style in handling the situation, entitles the article "New Zealand's Prime Minister May Be the

Most Effective Leader on the Planet” (Friedman, 2020). She adopted a very empathic style: her messages are clear and coherent, as well as reassuring and balanced. Her interviews and lives on social media have been an opportunity for her to be shown as close to her citizens, while sharing their same difficulties (Giansante, 2023, p. 92). Similarly to Zelensky, she too was able to convey an image of herself close to the situation that her followers were living. In an interview, she stated that she too was a mother, and as such she was aware of the difficulties that it implied to avoid kids’ parks. But “the virus can live on surfaces for 72 hours” (Arden, as cited in Friedman, 2020). The picture of the leader is of a mum that, as any other thousands, cares for her children, and is afraid of what may come, and consequently pushes herself, as well as others, to adapt to the difficult situation (Giansante, 2023, p. 93). This collective effort sees Jacinda Arden being the exemplary leader that the followers want to imitate in their private interest as well as the collective one.

### **3.2.3. Intellectual Stimulation**

This characteristic implies leaders to question conventional beliefs and methods, while challenging followers to think in new and creative ways. They push individuals to think transversely, and differently from the standard and well-known patterns. These types of leaders aim at disrupting the mindset of “we have always done it this way” (Wuerfel). To achieve it, they challenge established norms and question assumptions. Just as in the inspirational motivation trait leaders share their vision with the citizens, here leaders promote their mentality among individuals; the focus is highlighting the importance of embracing new experiences, evaluating new opportunities, and fostering innovative thinking (Bass, 1990). Moreover, instead of worrying excessively on the outcomes, transformational leaders emphasize the value of growth and learning. And by shifting the focus away from fear of failure, they empower citizens to continuously seek learning opportunities and actively pursue other possibilities.

Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, may be the perfect example of transformational leader. He is known for his ability to challenge conventional thinking and push the boundaries of innovation. By fostering intellectual stimulation within his companies, and encouraging his teams to question assumptions, he can explore new ideas while embrace failure as a learning opportunity (Asher, 2016). His approach to problem-solving aims at

overcoming limitations through the creation of innovative solutions. He corresponds to the perfect example of a leader that challenged the world's traditional knowledge in the research on new creative possibilities, by promoting a culture of curiosity and experimentation.

Yet, when analysing the characteristic of intellectual stimulation, there are other figures that present their own way to think innovatively. For instance, Nelson Mandela scores high when considering the challenge of conventional beliefs, the creation of new possibilities, and the spreading of a mentality among individuals. "Through his vision of peace, inspirational rhetoric skills, and moral conviction, Nelson Mandela became one of the most notable transformational leaders there ever was" (Gallaher, 2022). Through his style, he "transformed South Africa with his inspirational vision of change and equality" (Gallaher, 2022). In particular, the trait discussed here is his ability to intellectually stimulate those who had trust in him. And there are several ways through which he handled it.

To start, he encouraged critical thinking; his speeches and writings often questioned conventional wisdom (Gallaher, 2022). He pushed South Africans to critically examine the apartheid system and the injustices it perpetuated. Also, he deeply valued diversity of thought, and always encouraged dialogue and debate among different groups (Gallaher, 2022). He recognized the value of solution emerging from various perspectives and backgrounds. Mandela's willingness to engage with different viewpoints contributed to fostering a culture of innovation, and therefore intellectual stimulation. Moreover, he promoted education and learning – similarly to Elon Musk, who aims at growing knowledge and learning from failure. In fact, education was seen as an instrument of empowerment and social change (Gallaher, 2022).

This trait was recently discussed by the professor Stephen Brookfield. In his paper "Radical Questioning on the Long Walk to Freedom: Nelson Mandela and the Practice of Critical Reflection" (2007), he examines Mandela's work *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994), and highlights two rooted assumptions that Mandela has challenged, which present himself as an intellectual stimulator. Firstly, Nelson Mandela disregards the idea that the struggle for the black liberation had to be conducted only by black South Africans (Brookfield, 2007). During the fight against apartheid, the initial common belief was for

the movement to include only black people; yet this idea, initially accepted by Mandela himself, was on second thought reevaluated. He understood that the fight would not have been won with an additional separation between black and white people. As he wrote, “if our struggle was to succeed, we had to transcend black and white” (Mandela, 1994, p. 120). Secondly, he pushed away the idea that the end the apartheid was through non-violent conflicts (Brookfield, 2007). Surely, he privileged a non-violent way to achieve their goal, but his pragmatism aimed at experimenting whatever method he thought would speed up more the process of liberalisation of black people. To quote Mandela himself, “we should employ the method demanded by the conditions. If a particular method or tactic enabled us to defeat the enemy, then it should be used” (Mandela, 1994, p. 127). Brookfield believes that during the 25 years spent in prison, Mandela had time to question his strategy for the establishment of democracy. He reevaluated his ideas and those around him, and changed his line of thought as he grew his mindset.

Additional analysis provided by Giansante, further underlines Mandela’s ability to grow his vision. The author points out that when people asked Mandela, after his period in prison, how he had managed to survive, he answered that he hadn’t survived, rather he was getting prepared to forgive, in order to survive and move on, because he found that this was the only way to guide his followers towards freedom (Giansante, 2023, p. 87). Furthermore, Nelson Mandela succeeded in proving that anger and vendetta are not the best way to solve injustices. Contrary to the numerous examples of strength, violence and oppression with which leaders can solve conflicts, the leader demonstrated that there was another way, based on respect and empathy, which was even more powerful (Giansante 2023, p. 91).

The analysis of these authors underlines Nelson Mandela’s ability to challenge conventional assumptions and create a new path to follow for the achievement of a community’s goal. By innovating his strategies, he pursued new possibilities to reach his objectives, and with that he kept moving forward against the obstacles. And at the same time, his empathetic and compassionate approach rose as innovative exemplary behaviour for his followers. Mandela corresponds to the transformational leader’s description for at least two of the traits, meaning the intellectual stimulation and the inspirational motivation one.

### 3.2.4. Individualized Consideration

The last fundamental trait of transformational leadership involves conveying the broader organizational culture to individuals (Bass, 1990). This is done by instilling in them a sense of ownership over their objectives and fostering their single independence (Bass, 1990). So, rather than dictating directives, transformational leaders prioritize the growth of their team members and cultivate positive relationships with them. This includes maintaining open lines of communication, addressing individual needs, providing mentorship, and acknowledging each person's unique contributions. Individualized consideration means to *consider* people *individually*, so as *individuals* who each have different characteristics and priorities. Transformational leaders lead by articulating a clear vision and establishing an environment where the most experienced are entrusted to make decisions within their domains of responsibility. Followers are treated equally and fairly, but the leader shows sensitivity to the talents and concerns of different individuals.

Canada's Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, is not a perfect example of transformational leader: some believe that he incarnates characteristics of transformational as well as transactional leadership (Plakhov, 2018). Yet here it is discussed a trait of his compatible with the individualized consideration. Trudeau has emphasized the importance of engaging with citizens in person, while addressing their individual concerns. Since 2017 (Guignard, 2019), he has implemented an initiative known as "town hall meetings". It consists in participating in meeting with a couple thousand people, to directly engage with Canadians and solicit their input on government policies and priorities. The topics often revolve around how new jobs can be established, how to strengthen the middle class, and to create new opportunities. It is meant to be a moment when the prime Minister attentively listens to its citizens and answers their questions. Through this initiative, it is evident how Trudeau cares for his citizens' concerns and opinions.

Yet, with the country changing after the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021 Trudeau had to remodel the format of these meetings. Because of security threats, the Prime Minister's Office suggested that instead of having events where anyone of the public could attend, there was the need to narrow the public and reach out to "specific special-interest groups \_ such as unions, universities and businesses" (Djuric, 2023). From that point, these groups were responsible for the setting up of these meetings and for the guests lists. This

was a way to get around security risks while still engaging with Canadian citizens. The Prime Minister Trudeau fits in the description of the individualized consideration trait, for he shows concern towards its citizens' needs even with the added difficulties of security related issues. Instead of abandoning his initiative, Trudeau decided to change the format of the meetings, to keep the dialogue between his government and followers still open. Moreover, his choices have demonstrated his advocacy for diversity and inclusion: he is a leader which recognizes the importance of unique perspectives and needs of different communities, which is what makes him fit for the individualized consideration trait of transformational leadership.

### **3.3. Drawing a Conclusion**

#### **3.3.1. Taking a Step Back: Transactional as Male and Transformational as Female**

In the attempt of drawing some conclusions, this section explores the distinct tendencies in leadership styles between genders, emphasizing how transactional leadership often aligns more closely with men's leadership approaches, while women are frequently drawn to a more transformational style. Just as was seen in communication patterns and leadership's styles tendencies, a significant body of research highlights gender differences when both communicating and leading.

Indeed, starting with the communication sector, as examined in the first chapter, women generally use rapport talk to establish meaningful connections with others, whereas men utilize report talk to assert their status relative to others (Tannen, 1990). The result is that, solely based on gender, males might be perceived as assertive and self-reliant, whereas females may be considered less competent and more dependant in comparison to males. This discourse is reproduced when shifting to the leadership one, for men tend to have a masculine approach to leadership while women a more feminine one. And as a reflection of the communication dynamics, women's style has long been considered unfit or insufficient even in leadership: till not so long ago, women had to adopt to the traditional male style of leadership to succeed in power positions. Women were trapped in a double bind: traditional female traits, such as empathy and sensitivity, could betray women's perception from citizens. In fact, "women are forced into a balancing act between meeting the gender expectations that ask them to be sensitive and tender-hearted, and to avoid

appearing overemotional and, therefore, unbalanced” (Campus, 2013, p. 58). This would also shed a light on to why most transactional leaders seem to be men: it is relevant to keep in mind that this type of leadership flourished in societies where power was still a male’s prerogative. And as previously seen, in a male-standardized environment, a male-based model will be developed (Bourdieu, 2001). It is a sociologically *natural* effect. Yet, a female politician portrayed by many scholars as a transactional leader is Margaret Thatcher (Refaat et al., 2023). Perhaps, this sheds further light as to how the Iron Lady has succeeded in power position, with a masculine approach to leadership: she adopted characteristics of the transactional style, mostly associated with men’s approach.

But fortunately, as examined in the second chapter, societies are evolving, and so is leadership. The result is doubled: a greater number of power positions of women, and the growth of leadership styles which resemble more women’s approaches. The more women in power, the more feminine voices shout craving their approach to be valued. Moreover, the higher the chances of individuals to appreciate approaches which become everyday more *standard* and easier to encounter. As women in power becomes ordinariness, people are less affected by it, and no longer consider it to be a scandal. With a growing number of female actresses rising to power positions, the perception of their competence is changing. Now, it is given more credit to characteristics that previously undermined the leader’s ability, but now constitute important traits that a leader should master.

For instance, compassion, empathy and understanding, are valuable characteristics, and much appreciated – especially in times of crisis (Jensen, as cited in Scarp, 2023) – by people. The same goes for charisma, as was previously highlighted twice. If considered in the spectrum of male and female traits, women more easily align with these characteristics. Furthermore, the relevance of these traits was examined in relation to the developing style of leadership, and in the section dedicated to the transformational leadership. In the former context, it was highlighted how the growth of leadership is pointing towards a more empathic approach, rather than a fact-checked one. And in the latter, it was stressed that one of four bullet points which make transformational leadership being so efficient and appreciated is in fact the use of emotions when engaging with citizens. Because of their ability to connect with people, it is more common for women to be compassionate and understanding, and consequently have a transformational leadership style.

Indeed, when examining the link between gender traits and the predisposition to either the transactional or transformational leadership, there are certain factors that point at transactional leadership more similar to men's approach, and transformational more to women's style. For instance, many studies have highlighted the closeness between women's styles and the transformational one (Rosener 1990; Bass et al. 1996), even though Burns' theory was elaborated neutrally and transcending gender differences. The reason for this would lie *in primis* in women's *natural* features, and *in secundis* in their socialization history (Campus, 2013, p. 19; Haslanger, 1995). Indeed, as was previously developed in depth, both because of physiological elements and sociological reasons, women have been for long attributed roles that better fit with the narrative of a person who took care and understood others. Consequently, women have developed skills that granted them the competence to fulfil their tasks. This reflects even in socialization processes, where women had to be empathic and gentle. Women created a style shaped on these necessities, which today more or less coincides with the bullet points of the transformational style of leadership.

Similarly, concerning the transactional one, there are several connections between men's approaches to communication and their closeness to this type of leadership. Because of men's logical thinking, the hierarchical structure on which transactional leadership is based allows for easier role clarity. Moreover, men's style is more goal-oriented, characteristic which fits with the objectives-accomplishment agenda typical of transactional leaders. The aim is to reach goals, and the reward or lack of it of followers that succeed in working efficiently: this detail is quite distanced from the relationship-oriented female approach. Also, just as for women, socialization played a role in shaping even men's attitudes: their tasks being hunting and structuring societies, taught them to develop the abilities to master these fields. Since for a long-time power has been a prerogative of men, they have well developed ways to handle it at its fullest. So, "pragmatic, transactional leadership requires a shrewd eye for opportunity, a good hand in bargaining, persuading, reciprocating" (Burns, 1978, p. 169). Burns highlights that these traits reflect men's attributes and fit more easily with the transactional leadership style. Yet, as he continues, "reform may need these qualities, but it demands much more" (Burns, 1978, p. 169). To "reform" the leadership system, these qualities are necessary,



but, according to him, may not be sufficient (discussion which will be further examined in the next section).

Generally, it is also relevant to keep in mind that gender norms, stereotypes and power dynamics influence men just as much as women, but simply in different forms. Indeed, as on the one hand, women's performance may be devaluated in comparisons to men's, or judged if perceived as "too feminine", on the other hand men's approaches can also be considered unfit if closer to the female style, and their leadership may be "stymied or misconstrued as a result of being labelled feminine" (Pittinsky et al., 2007, p. 111). There is a binary path to follow, which strictly forbids anyone, both men and women, to cross that dichotomy. The notion of masculine and feminine leadership constitutes a polarized model which precludes leaders the possibility of crossing those borders to engage in leadership approaches of the other gender. In so doing, this polarization limits the range of abilities than both men and women can adopt in leadership position (Pittinsky et al., 2007, p. 111).

To upbring two examples of a typical male with transactional style and female with transformational one, it is possible to consider Boris Johnson and Jacinda Ardern. When listening to their speeches at the beginning of the 2020 Covid crisis, there are some differences clearly audible. Boris Johnson's speech in March 2020 regarding Covid measures, has an urgent tone, is direct and has no digressions. His conversational style leaves no space for arguments and is fact-based. He is a clear example of a report approach to communication, trait traceable to the transactional style. Differently, Jacinda Ardern speech has a rapport approach, for it focuses on understanding the need and emotions of the citizens. Also, while in his speech Johnson speaks a lot about economy, she only mentions it sometimes, deciding to dedicate more minutes to addressing the population's needs and necessity to be coherent with safety measures. Moreover, a clear index of a male leadership in Johnson's speech is the sentence "if you don't follow the rules, the police will have the powers to enforce them, including through fines" (BBC, 2020, 3,06 - 3.14): the principle of rewarding and penalizing followers based on behavior is typical of the transactional leadership. Differently, Ardern's sentence "the first really important thing to remember is that the vast majority of people who will ever have COVID-19 will only experience mild to moderate symptoms but there will be some who will need more care" (Sky News Australia, 2020, 00,32 – 00,46) underlines her focus on

understanding her citizens' needs and difficulties, demonstrating the individualized consideration of the transformational style. Overall, in the first speech, little time is spent on addressing individuals' concerns, and in the second one, little reference is made to fines towards those who will not respect the rules. This does not mean that the New Zealand's governments did not dispose any, but simply that Ardern found it to be a less relevant point to highlight in 6 minutes speech.

Yet, it is also interesting to grasp the *degree* of separation between the two approaches, the transactional and the transformational one. Indeed, when focusing on Bernard Bass's theory of leadership, a doubt arises. In the original theory by Burns, transformational and transactional leadership are seen as distinct and mutually exclusive styles. According to this view, a leader can either be transactional or transformational but cannot embody both styles simultaneously. However, Bass's leadership theory suggests that transformational and transactional leadership are separate dimensions, allowing leaders to exhibit both styles at the same time through their behaviour. Currently, most researchers align with Bass's perspective. Over the past two decades, both styles have been extensively studied, and numerous papers have been published on the topic. This issue remains relevant in both academic and business circles worldwide (Nikezić et al., 2012). If analysing this perspective, it is easy to comprehend that the distinction between the transactional and the transformational leadership is not that easy to draw. Indeed, research supports the idea that a leader may adopt styles of one type of leadership while simultaneously making use of the latter's traits. In other words, research indicates that a leader can integrate traits from both styles simultaneously, and this implies a difficulty in separating the transactional from the transformational theory.

This would explain why examples previously presented included both male and female actors and actresses representing traditional male and female features, and therefore both transactional and transformational leadership approaches. Indeed, for a variety of reasons that go from stereotypes and norms, to the developing of times with changes in ways of communication, and to new perceptions and acceptance of a refreshing variety of characteristics, it was demonstrated that men and women can developed traits traditionally attributed to their sex as well as adopt a style mostly corresponding to the other one. Also, when it comes to *efficient* leadership, the transformational seems just as efficient as the transactional one: even if the female approach is *soft* (Lamude, 1993),

research has demonstrated its appreciation and positive perception from individuals in concrete life circumstances. And a similar conclusion can be drawn concerning the appreciation of *hard* typically male techniques. So, it is possible for a political actor or actress to adopt characteristics of leadership styles which can be traced by on both a more masculine and feminine approach. The conclusion of this thesis aims at understanding how both styles, and therefore both *gender* styles, have traits that are perceived as being extremely valuable when it comes to leading a group of people, or even a nation. And this is based on objective analysis and research surveys, as well as on the subjective perception of individuals. Indeed, as Burns (1978) states, “leadership *mobilizes, naked power coerces*” (p. 439); regardless the typology, leadership examined through its rightful definition and meaning, is still equivalent to the leadership. It is not a sole demonstration of power, but includes a variety of additional meaning and purpose, which renders it worthy of being called with its proper noun. So, it would not be correct to state that the “male” style of leadership is more efficient compared to the “female” one.

### **3.3.2. A De-Gendered Leadership**

After acknowledging the connection of men and women’s approach to leadership with the transactional and transformational leadership, it is possible to state that both styles include highly valuable characteristics. And based on this, one could contemplate the idea of recognizing a “de-gendered” type of leadership. The idea is for it to not be based on one of the two genders, but rather for it to acquire characteristics of both approaches, the male and the female one – discourse which recalls Tannen’s idea of a “difference model” (1990) discussed in the first chapter – and use them to create a newly found style which will be equally accessible and easy to adapt for both genders.

For instance, Burns (1978) has highlighted how both types of leadership can contribute to human purpose. Indeed, both are based on moral implications: the former includes mostly *modal values*, while the latter primarily *end-values*. Modal values correspond to values of *mean*, as in honesty, fairness, and responsibility. They correspond to means to achieve a goal or to reach an objective. Modal values are mainly found in the transactional leadership: the system indeed includes followers that fulfil a task, and a leader who rewards them for it, and the whole situation based on this use of modal values. Differently, end-values are more common in transformational leadership: they correspond to liberty, justice,

equality. In fact, this type of leadership is based on the principle of elevating the followers, while elevating the leader as well (p. 426). So, modal values concern more individual conduct, while end-values aim at real change. Yet, this difference should not elevate one typology of values over the other (p. 430). Even if with different values, both styles provide a meaningful and valuable approach.

Aside this parenthesis, as previously discussed, research has also demonstrated that men tend to bend more towards more masculine traits of leadership and towards the transactional leadership, while women more towards a feminine style of communication and therefore the transformational leadership. Yet, there is not a rule which states that women will behave with a more feminine approach and men with a more masculine one. Rather, there is a higher probability for it to happen:

The claim that sex (or gender) matters for leadership could be put in terms of probabilities: the chances that a woman will lead in a way we might characterize as notable feminine are greater than the probability than a male leader will behave in such a way. (Keohane, 2010, p. 128).

Yet, as stereotypes and gender norms always occupy a littler role in today's society and power structures, it is possible to achieve an always higher degree of a *degendered* leadership style.

And when adopting this idea according to which there could be a leadership style which is de-gendered, it is relevant to recall the Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1964) of the second chapter. It stated that there are no different gender-based approaches, but that leadership competence solely depends on situational factors and power dynamics. As previously counterargued, even if the problem lies on power dynamics, these are not neutral: they are biased, and as such, whether the problem lies or not in power, the result remains the same. Yet, the theory is useful to grasp the concept that in a world where power dynamics do not tend towards a male nor a female perspective, it could be true that leadership's competence is a prerogative of who can handle better the power and a specific situation. So, in this case the ability to master the leadership would be in the hands of either a male or a female that is more capable, without the biases due to a male-based environment. And in this transition towards a more neutral style, transformational leadership may be the key.

It is true that transactional leadership appears to be quite fit for contexts as groups leadership, force of party, legislative, and executive fields (Burns, 1978, p. 307). But it is transformational leadership that may represent the bridge connecting the traditional idea of leadership style, based on male standards and approaches, and a new ideal of efficient leader, characterized by abilities traceable to men as well as to women (Campus, 2013, p. 20). The shift would go from a leader whose strategy is to elaborate a vision through the setting of goals and objectives, to a more complex one, which seeks to also inspire and motivate individuals. And seeing how a key point in the developing of leadership as a whole idea is the passage from the system leader-follower to leader-leader (Giansante, 2023), the direction is already pointing towards a more transformational leadership style. Indeed, nowadays “the objective is to go beyond power and include mutual needs, aspirations, and values. By turning followers into leaders, the transformational leader becomes a better leader” (Solheim, 2000, p. 6). So, this transformational leadership may represent a “tool for closing the leadership gender gap” (Campus, 2013, p. 20), meaning a way to close the gap between the different approaches in leadership styles of men and women.

Yet, as argued, while it is possible to trace men’s style to transactional leadership and women’s one to the transformational, it is not possible to polarize leadership strictly based on gender; there are a variety of possible leadership styles for both genders (Pittinsky et al., 2007, p. 111). Real-life examples show that this division is not so rigid: leaders tend to exhibit a variety of characteristics, drawing on different styles. They employ traits traditionally considered either male or female, transcending the adherence to just one model (Campus, 2013, p. 116). Furthermore, the research showed that, since women have historically been at a disadvantage in power roles, they were the first to find a middle ground between their leadership tendencies and those characteristics—based on the male model—traditionally deemed more appropriate for leadership (Solheim, 2000, p. 77). However, examples like Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrate the possibility of creating gender-neutral leadership even among male figures. Therefore, while women have more experience in balancing the two distinct styles, even men have the capability to achieve this equilibrium.

This balance would create a leadership style that is neither male nor female but based on gender-neutral characteristics and principles, shared by both male and female figures. The

goal is thus to "de-gender" leadership. Instead of focusing on the differences between male and female leadership, attention could be directed towards how both approaches include useful and effective characteristics. This inclusive approach, which focuses on the integration of effective traits rather than the gender of the leaders, would allow both male and female leaders to adopt an extensive set of leadership skills. Traditional male leadership characteristics such as assertiveness and goal-orientation can be combined with traditional female leadership ones like empathy and collaboration. By doing so, it is possible to appreciate and integrate the full spectrum of leadership qualities without the constraints of gender norms and stereotypes. This blend can create a more balanced and adaptable leadership style which can respond more effectively and in a prepared manner to a greater variety of challenges and circumstance: leaders would learn to incorporate the most useful and qualifying qualities from both approaches and decide which to put in practice based on the situation's needs.

The focus should therefore be on engaging in strategies to increase the number of women in power positions, through the facilitation of their potential levelling up (Pittinsky et al., 2007, p. 97), and on the fruitful functions and actions of the leader necessary to resolve a given situation (Pittinsky et al., 2007, p. 115). Indeed, the research suggesting that the effectiveness of leadership depends on the situation should not be ignored: beyond the question of whether gender differences exist, a leader is effective when they competently manage a specific situation, in a given environment and with a specific objective.

So, the goal of "de-gendering" leadership is to move beyond the binary classification of leadership traits as either male or female. Among the upsides of a de-gendered approach, there is an enhanced collaboration. It was examined how differences in gender conversational approaches may influence and may be influenced by society dynamics (Wood, as cited in Noel, 2016); by promoting a more de-gendered basis, leaders could more easily foster a cooperative and supportive environment. Additionally, it would push both men and women into an out-of-the-box thinking, for it would be facilitated to reflect through the opposite sex's line of reasoning, without fear of judgement or other potential backdrops. Moreover, a leader capable of adapting more than solely one style of leadership, would demonstrate a higher versatility, responsiveness, and ability to shape his or her approach based on the necessity. A de-gendered leadership would grant a broader range of possible competences that a leader can use to handle complex situations.

Furthermore, a leadership style which encourages both task-oriented and people-oriented traits could lead to higher individuals' satisfaction.

Yet, considering the low speed with which certain dynamics have evolved in the past decades, it is easily deductible that this step forward will not take little time to be achieved. But leadership should be viewed through the lens of effectiveness and situational appropriateness, rather than being ranked based on stereotypes and false perceptions: gender norms aside, female leaders have proven as much capacity to handle power positions as men leaders. There is a necessity to improve how women are supported and included in power and focus on the effectiveness of leadership traits rather than their association with gender. Nonetheless, traditional feminine and masculine characteristics shall not be disregarded: a de-gendered, or neutral, leadership style does not imply the absence of gender tendencies, but rather it implements diverse gender attitudes. The new leadership style should not be *nor* male *or* female, but rather *both* male *and* female.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis of the first chapters regarding the different gender approaches on communication and leadership, it has been shown that the male approach is closer to transactional leadership, while the female approach may be more aligned with transformational leadership. However, it has also emerged that both styles can be adopted by male *and* female leaders, for it is not possible to polarize leadership strictly based on gender. Finally, the epilogue points towards the creation of a *de-gendered* leadership style, meaning an approach inclusive of both male and female characteristics. Since this style has the potential to draw in the most appropriate and positively perceived strategies and qualities, leaders who adopt it may prove themselves to be the most effective in leadership positions.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the distinct communication styles of men and women and how these influence their leadership approaches, with a focus on evaluating the effectiveness of both styles. The research demonstrated that both male and female approaches to leadership are effective and appreciated, though they may excel in different contexts. The study confirmed that men typically adopt a goal-oriented communication style, while women lean towards a relation-oriented approach. Yet, interesting studies have provided the perspective according to which gender divergencies are not relevant, and the aspect to consider is rather the competence of a leader to handle a given situation. Nonetheless, the balance is in favour of the idea that both women and men *do* possess distinctive leadership styles.

These findings highlight the need for a balanced approach to leadership that incorporates the strengths of both male and female communication styles. This transcending of traditional gender stereotypes can lead to more effective leadership. Indeed, the thesis answers to the hypothesis, demonstrating that both male and female leadership styles are effective and positively perceived. Considering the existence of gender differences in communication, which reflect on the political and leadership sphere, they do not assume one style to be *inferior* to the other one. Rather, both prove their objective effectiveness and subjective positive evaluation from individuals.

Moreover, the thesis successfully answered the research questions by proposing a de-gendered approach to leadership that integrates traits from both styles. The implications of this study suggest that organizations and political entities should consider adopting a gender-neutral leadership approach; this can help in overcoming gender stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive and effective leadership environment. In fact, I consider the neutral solution provided to be the most effective, for it has the potential of drawing together the most appropriate strategies and qualities that any leader, independently from his or her sex, should adopt in leadership's position.

Yet, there are a few limitations of the study that should be addressed. For instance, the body of research which analyses gender differences in communication, as well as leadership styles, is extremely broad; consequently, the aspect of physiological



differences of men and women has not been deeply analysed. Moreover, no unanimous opinion is presented, seen the diversity of findings. So, the thesis was based on the greater part on the research that does believe in gender differences. Nonetheless, a different possibility has not been ignored: the relevance of power and circumstance when analysing the approaches adopted by a leader has been significantly weighted when reaching the conclusion of a de-gendered style. Additionally, seen how most studies are quite recent, little conclusion on pre-existing research was found regarding a potential melding of both gender styles.

This thesis attempts to create a ground base for future research: it presents the option of merging the male and female characteristics for the achievement of a more complete leadership style. Indeed, I believe that the synchronism of gender differences could provide great validity and efficiency, especially when dealing with politics. The hope is that future research could explore the implementation of a de-gendered leadership training programs and their impact on a leader's performance and positive perception.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender and leadership by providing empirical evidence and theoretical insights that support the development of a more inclusive and effective leadership model. By transcending traditional gender dynamics, and even take advantage of them, it is possible to move towards a leadership paradigm that, in power positions, values and integrates the unique strengths of both men and women.

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