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The role of coaching in managerial careers of women

Introduction

Coaching is a fast-growing concept that can help women develop the tools to successfully compete for top managerial positions traditionally held by men, a development that could lead to better business results.

Despite the fact that the coaching process is not differentiated in respect to the client's sex, the authors justify its application in the professional development of women who want to be managers and compete for managerial positions with men. An analysis of contemporary Polish and international literature, as well as interviews conducted with women who underwent this process and hold top positions in organizations, suggests that coaching can be used as a tool facilitating and accelerating career development. It probably plays a similar role in the case of men, but this paper is devoted to the involvement of women in the coaching process.

Managerial career of women in figures

More and more often a female career is becoming the subject of national and international statistical analyses [Delloite Report 2012; Lublin 2011]. Despite the increasing presence of women in management, Polish and international statistics show that men still dominate managerial positions, particularly in the top executive hierarchy [Bombuwela, Chamaru 2013].

Following the women's movement initiated in the 1970s, more women hold managerial positions in the world's largest corporations, the effect of a new approach to management and employment. Companies increasingly initiate actions targeted at employment of women and then keeping them at their work posts and supporting their development [Grant Horton Report 2014]. The key determinant of the phenomenon is a growth in companies' demand for diversity in attitudes, abilities, and management styles among managers. This thesis is confirmed by the results of the Report *Women on boards*, the data of which unambiguously indicate a growth in the number of managerial positions held by women in the largest British companies year after year [Davies 2014].

Surveys carried out by Desvaux, Devillard, and Sancier-Sultan show that enterprises with gender-diverse managerial boards achieve better business results [Desvaux, Devillard, Sancier-Sultan 2010]. Companies with more women on the board have a 42% higher return in sales, a 66% higher return on invested capital, and a 53% higher return on equity than enterprises that are not interested in the presence of women in organization management [Davis 2011]. The results are connected with the advantages of diversification of leadership behaviors presented by both sexes, such as access to a wider spectrum of potential business activities. Another confirmation of the thesis of the role of women in business is the issue of underappreciated female characteristics pointed out by psychologists, among which may be counted: stress resistance, ability to work under pressure of time, multitasking skills, good organization of work and teamwork ability [Deloitte Report 2012].

In Poland, women hold 40% of managerial positions [Deloitte Report 2012]. According to the Deloitte ranking "CE Top 500" [Deloitte Report

2014], women are on the boards of the 28% largest Polish enterprises, but only in 4% of companies do they hold the top managerial positions. At the same time, the data of Grant Horton's Report indicate that the number of women holding managerial positions in 2014 decreased by 14% compared with 2013 [Grant Horton's Report 2014]. The report also mentions the advantages of women's involvement in the company management processes. Among these benefits are improvement in the board's effects and the business outcome, due to extended access to a wide range of talents and their use, broader openness to the market and customers, and establishment of corporation order more favorable to business, thanks to increased openness to innovative thinking [Grant Horton's Report 2014].

Despite market tendencies indicating the economy and market demand for talents possessed by women, they still face numerous obstacles hindering their managerial careers.

Women on managerial career path – barriers and limitations

"Glass ceiling" and "glass walls" are two of the barriers faced by women aspiring to top positions, according to the literature. The key manifestations of these phenomena include applying different standards for men and woman in evaluating work, unequal earnings based on sex, or disregarding promotions for women [Bombuwela, Chamaru 2013; Catalyst 1990]. The reasons are mainly external, artificial ones—informal barriers caused by social schemes and gender stereotypes [Report PWnet 2011; Starman 2007]. Yet women themselves often believe that they cannot be as successful as men in key executive positions.

The surveys carried out by Bombuwela and Chamaru indicate four types of factors influencing emergence of the "glass ceiling" effect [Bombuwela, Chamaru 2013]:

1) individual factors: lack of the sense of own value, negative attitude;
2) family factors: childcare, responsibility and household duties, obligations to family and friends;
3) organizational factors: unequal promotion criteria for women and men, ambiguous management style;
4) cultural factors: social beliefs, traditions, patterns.

All of these factors directly influence the quality of professional career of women.

The next phenomenon for discussion is the matter of reconciliation between professional and family life [Maitland 2007; Report PWnet 2011]. Women very often indicate predominance of career costs over the benefits of professional advancement [PWnet 2011]. Difficulties with maintaining a balance between these two spheres of life is the reason that many women do not take up higher managerial positions. On the one hand, there are real limitations caused by too many responsibilities, while on the other, female respondents indicate that some limitations derive from their own beliefs that a woman's duty lies mainly in maintaining her household. A challenge is also posed when reentering employment after a period of maternity and childcare leave, which is thought to be one of the most difficult moments for women following professional career [Parke, Bingham 2012]. Making such a decision, and the scope of responsibilities it will bring, evokes stress and uncertainty. According to surveys conducted by Lovejoy and Stone, well-educated women often change their working environment after the maternity period from typically male (computer corporations, legal practice) into more feminized (education, work in a social organization) [Lovejoy, Stone 2012]. On the one hand, it means a greater chance to maintain some balance in their lives, while on the other it is caused by the belief that being a mother should mean resignation from managerial career. Such an attitude is often conditioned by nurturing and social messages, and is strengthened by employers refusing reemployment of women after maternity leave [Lovejoy, Stone 2012]. The results of the report "Female success manager" may lead to a conclusion that women characterize "lower readiness to self-promotion, undertaking risk, negotiating partnership in sharing household duties" [Report PWnet 2011]. Researchers conclude this phenomenon is mainly caused by the fact that women have problems defending themselves and taking care of their own needs [Desvaux, Devillard, Sancier-Sultan 2010]. The Deloitte Report [2012] also indicates the influence of problems with self-acceptance and acceptance of their own feminine nature, which is determined by greater sensibility compared with men. Another factor that favors men is women's lack of role models among experienced female top executive managers [Report PWnet 2011]. Lack of awareness and faith in the power of one's own resources results in women assuming male behavioral patterns in order to achieve professional goals. This is not the natural, feminine style; therefore, they

lose their authenticity and credibility, which can hamper a promotion to an executive position [Desvaux, Devillard, Sancier-Sultan 2010].

The availability of managerial positions is also limited by the system of developing managerial competences, which traditionally has supported the masculine style of functioning and learning. Training and courses are usually oriented on knowledge transmission and analyzing hypothetical cases. In this system, activities addressed to women should be more oriented toward their individual needs, with emphasis on solving situations directly concerning women and personal reflection about their own management style and attitude [Vinnicombe, Singh 2003].

Companies that interested in including women into management processes: decisiveness, responsibility for business outcome, should undertake development strategies addressed directly to women [Desvaux, Devillard, Sancier-Sultan 2010]. MBA programs –training courses addressed to women targeted at their managerial development – should be based on their needs and their model of thinking and learning. A profiled development process increases women's chances for effective company management. Therefore, women began reaching for tools of personal and professional development, which gave them the opportunity to perfect the abilities and attitudes necessary for functioning in the executive suite [Falla 2006].

One of the elements of such a development process which meets this criterion and matches the style of women's functioning is coaching [Desvaux, Devillard, Sancier-Sultan 2010; Filsinger, Worth 2012]. The surveys carried out by consultants McKinsey & Company prove that coaching is becoming a necessary tool for women aspiring to top executive positions [Lublin 2011]. It is confirmed by practices existing in Belgian companies, for example, which according to the report *Women in the boardroom: A global perspective*, published by the Deloitte Global Center for Corporate Governance (2010), want to promote women to higher managerial positions and offer them development programs involving coaching.

Theoretical approach to coaching

Surveys by Tulpy and Bresser show that coaching has been used increasingly by companies and individuals all over Europe [Passmore 2009]. It serves development in both the professional and personal area. Statistics indicate that coaching in Polish companies has been also increasing (http://www.thecoaches.pl/451-471711bf3dc6d-13342.htm) and often its users are managers. Moreover, among employees, women are more open to participating in coaching processes [Leimon, Moscovici, Goodier 2010].

What exactly is coaching? According to the definition of Coaching Chamber, coaching is a method of supporting development carried out in the form of a series of meetings of the coach with the client. During these meetings the coach accompanies their client in setting goals important for the client, finding internal resources needed for achievement of these goals, and establishing and implementing action plans. It is achieved through active listening, asking questions and using other specific tools and development-oriented tasks. The coach supports clients in discovering and effectively using their personal potential in order to improve their quality of life [the Coaching Chamber 2012].

Coaching as a method targeted at personal development has its roots in many fields, including sport and developmental psychology [Sanson 2006]. Development of coaching is also influenced by organizational consulting, clinical psychology, counseling, and mentoring. However, they are entirely separate forms of work aimed at development of an individual, a team or an organization [Galuk 2009].

According to Ratajczak and Pilipczuk, coaching means providing assistance and managing development of abilities and competences of a person in a particular field, carried out individually by the coach. Its significant element is the partner relationship and mutual trust between coaches and their students/clients/sportspersons/employees/teams. The main objective of coaching is supporting "coachees" in achieving the goals agreed upon with the coach [Ratajczak, Pilipczuk 2010].

The coaching objective, particularly in the case of business coaching, is improvement of effectiveness and efficiency of the organization through facilitating employees' learning in a planned way and in partnership with the coach. The process is mainly targeted at allowing a more effective solution of problems, as well as improvement of the individual employee's efficiency in task performance [Szulc 2008].

According to Downey, coaching is an art; perfection in its implementation makes its technique insignificant. The coach fully engages in work with the client, where the most important attributes are har-

mony and partnership. It is an art enabling learning, development of other people and increasing their possibility for success [Downey 2003].

Thorpe and Clifford treat coaching as helping a particular person to strengthen and perfect their performance through reflection regarding the use of particular abilities or possessed knowledge [Thorpe, Clifford 2004]. Whitmore defines coaching as the process of releasing the client's potential in order to maximize their achievements; it is a process in which the client learns, rather than being taught by the coach [Whitmore 2011].

Coaching is defined as a method of working with resources, supporting a person in perfecting their performance through stimulating reflection about goals and use of personal resources [Smółka 2012]. It is not a one-off event, but a process which allows the client permanent learning and improvement within the area of undertaken tasks and new roles [Sidor-Rządkowska 2012; Witherspoon, White 2003]. Coaching changes habits an, behaviors, and supports building attitudes desired by the client. It inspires changes. It is a partnership between the coach and the client based on trust and respect of the client's values and experiences [Sidor-Rządkowska 2012].

Coaching may concern both professional (business coaching) and private life (life coaching). It is also divided depending on the recipient, e.g. executive coaching (addressed to CEOs), managerial coaching, and team coaching.

Irrespective of the recipient, the key coaching objective is discovering potential and developing it, improving clients' competences (team/organization) adequately to their needs, and assessing the context of their his/her performance, based on thorough reflection and undertaking concrete development actions [Witherspoon, White 2003]. The most often used version in the organizational context is the **executive coaching** process, when a person "learns how to learn". A personalized relationship with a coach provides space for undertaking challenges, risk and use of possible individual abilities and resources in order to achieve personal goals [Sanson 2006].

The expected effect of coaching is increased self-awareness and a growing system of mutual interactions between a manager and organization and business goals, accompanied by a sense of personal fulfillment [Sanson 2006]. Coaching uses the basic principles of strengthening responsibility and faith in oneself, accompanied by orientation on the future and task completion [Starman 2007].

Recapitulating, the main coaching objectives should be [Coaching Chamber 2012]:
- Supporting clients in forming and summarizing professional and personal goals and methods of their achievement.
- Extending clients' self-awareness, awareness of their goals and the context of their activity.
- Better use of natural abilities, potential and resources.
- Undertaking more conscious decisions.
- Removing internal obstacles (e.g. beliefs, attitudes), as well as external ones (e.g. environment pressure) in the goal achievement process.
- Accepting responsibility for one's own future and its active shaping.
- Perfecting performance in order to achieve expected outcomes.

Because the subject of this article is the business sphere, the term **executive coaching** merits a closer analysis. From the authors' point of view, the best definition is presented by Kilburg, who described this form of work as "a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to assist the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and consequently to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement" [Kilburg 2000].

For Gallwey, one of the creators of executive coaching, coaching is the art of creating an environment through conversations and a way of being, which initiates the process by which the client can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner [Gallwey 2007].

Thus defined, coaching has significant differences with other methods. Unlike mentoring, coaches neither give advice nor share their experience. Instead they ask questions and listen to the client's answers. Unlike training, coaching does not provide knowledge; it inspires individuals to seek and discover necessary resources in themselves [Sanson 2006]. Lastly, coaching is not a therapy; the main differences are presented in Table 1.

The line between therapy and coaching may be a subtle one. However, from the authors' point of view, coaching in its pure form should concentrate on the future and use only coaching tools. Therapy includes a much wider scope of tools, methods and approaches, which have their long history and extensive

Table 1. Differences and similarities between therapy and coaching

Therapy	Coaching
Concentration on the past, neutralization of negative experiences from the past and their impact on current behaviors	Concentration on the present and future, development of potential
Passive attitude (effective listening), reflection	Active attitude – action and reflection, active listening
Information comes from the client	Information comes from the client and people from their environment
Focus on inappropriate behaviors (also pathological ones)	Focus on achievement of positive goals and development
Problems are of internal character (are personality-related)	Problems lie outside the client – in environment
Client is a person participating in therapy	The notion of client is ambiguous – client is a person participating in coaching, client (sponsor) is the organization employing coaches for its employees
Client should feel enriched ("feel better")	Coaching should improve performance (goals achievement), not necessarily client's mood
Regular, standardized sessions	Sessions may last 1 to 8 hours; their frequency may vary
Work in the therapist's office	Work at the client's workplace or a neutral place, in the coach's office. Various methods of work – emails, phones, communicators, direct conversation
Work directly concerns client's personal problems	Work indirectly concerns client's personal problems, more often focuses on possibilities to perform a particular activity and improvement of personal effectiveness
Client chooses the therapist	Client chooses the coach, but the sponsor/company may recommend a few coaches for the client to consider

Source: [Peltier 2011].

theoretical base. Taking into consideration the fact that many coaches do not have psychological education, the application of therapeutic tools (e.g. Gestalt, Jung or the psychodynamic method) is not advisable, as it may cause numerous threats for a person participating in the coaching process. Because its history is much shorter than that of therapy, coaching is a growing subject of scientific studies, but unlike therapy, its theoretical and empirical base is still in the development phase. In any case, the core objective of coaching is realization of a particular change defined by the client, and achievement of a particular goal in the present and future [Lennard 2013].

Synthetic presentation of procedure in the coaching process course and selected coaching tools

In this part, the main assumption of the coaching process and selected coaching tools will be presented in a synthetic form, to be followed further by preliminary empirical surveys.

The duration of the model coaching process should be between three and six months. The most recommended frequency of coaching sessions is meeting a male or female client once every two or three weeks. However, the sessions often are held weekly, or once a month. The duration of a meeting most beneficial for the process is 90 to 120 minutes [Wildflower, Brennan 2011].

A correctly designed coaching process should include the goal for the entire process, as well as the goals for particular sessions, according to SMART principle (Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely defined). The structure of each session should follow the following pattern:
- introduction, determination of the session goal, consistent with the goal of the entire process (answers the question what do you want?);
- strengthening the values behind the goal (why do you want to achieve this?; what important thing is behind this?);
- description of the actual state including availability and limitation of resources (what is your situation?);
- setting up the plan and possible scenarios of the goal achievement (what will you do?);

- setting up the timetable for action and the task for the next session (do it!), which starts from a review (so, what now?) [Smółka 2009].

In order to ensure the highest quality of the coaching process, the standards set by the International Coach Federation (ICF), International Coach Community (ICC) or the Chamber of Coaching should be followed. All of them are based on the most important coaching competences, including determination of coaching principles, mutual creation of relationships, effective communication, and supporting the learning process and attainment of effects (www.icf.org.pl). The whole process should follow the coaching ethical code, whose most important elements are professional behavior towards clients, a guarantee of confidentiality and privacy, and elements for building trust [www.izbacoaching.com].

When analyzing the tools used in coaching, it is best to first consider priorities. One of the basic coaching tools is to determine and order the client's priorities; it is the beginning of the coaching process. Usually it relates to the areas such as the client's life, work, and planned enterprises. It allows determination of a long-term direction of action, with systematized particular areas of life, viewing the significant aspects of one's own life from another perspective [Wilczyńska, Nowak, Kućka, Sawicka, Sztajerwald 2011]. Thanks to this tool, clients receive help in creating a clear picture of their fulfilled life and its perception at a given moment, on a given day. This tool is not used to rebuild past states or create visions of the future – who I want to be. Neither does it show the person's achievements. The coachees have the opportunity to look at the areas where they feel fulfilled, as well as the areas where they do not feel satisfied. The application of the circle is an indication of priorities and a definition of goals and effects of operating within the coaching process [Wilczyńska, Nowak, Kućka, Sawicka, Sztajerwald 2011].

The next tool directly borrowed from management is SWOT analysis. It is used to organize information. This tool is used in coaching for analyzing the internal and external environment of the male or female client. SWOT identifies strong and weak points, potential or already existing chances in the environment and possible or already existing threats. In the SWOT analysis adopted for coaching objectives, the strong points concentrate on appreciation of internal resources, potential, trump cards, values, abilities, competences and experiences, which in a positive manner translate into success.

Weaknesses come down to determination of competences and abilities that need to be perfected. Opportunities include noticed openings, ideas and opportunities – eternal resources, phenomena, tendencies in the environment, which, used properly, become a stimulant for development and allow for coping with limitations. Threats comprise difficulties, challenges and external factors, which the coachee perceives as barriers hindering development or achievement of the attempted enterprise – weak points in the strategy and the client's concerns [Adams 2011].

Communication plays a very important role in the coaching process, particularly in respect to "hard" questions used as a successive coaching tool. Through asking such questions, the coach may suggest potential difficulties and indicate a possible solution. Questions are not targeted at finding if the goal may be achieved but how it may be done. They allow changes in the way of thinking through liquidation of internal barriers. Therefore, the procedure allows a positive change in perspective, as long as hidden traps in these questions – such as offering advice in them – are eliminated. The questions should be short, clear and open [Adams 2011].

The next coaching tool is the Walt Disney method. It allows creative analysis on ideas, based on three ways of thinking. The model assumes perception of the problem from the three perspectives: the Dreamer's, the Realist's and the Spoiler's. Each of them is connected with a different level of motivation and a choice of arguments. In the Dreamer's role, a coachee turns on the imagination, creates fantastic visions, and seeks unreal ideas. As the Realist, the client tries to find ways that would allow realization of the Dreamer's ideas. When clients are Spoilers, they try to undermine the effects achieved by the other two roles, analyzing errors and weak points of the Realist's plan. During successive stages the coachee returns to the previous roles, perfecting consecutive versions of the emerging plan until the moment when it assumes its final form [Wilczyńska, Nowak, Kućka, Sawicka, Sztajerwald 2011].

Another tool used in coaching is visualization. It is a technique similar to meditation, which significantly supports motivation. It is based on activation of the senses and emotions for goal achievement and for working out the best effects. It allows positive influence on desires thanks to creation of realistic, visionary pictures of the future. It leads to controlling thinking at the subconscious level [Wilczyńska, Nowak, Kućka, Sawicka, Sztajerwald 2011].

The last tool is work with beliefs. Beliefs are subjective truths, expressing the coachee's convictions. The objective is realization and strengthening of beliefs facilitating the changes as well as identifying those that are destructive for a person, and then reshaping those beliefs into positive ones [Wilczyńska, Nowak, Kućka, Sawicka, Sztajerwald 2011].

Coaching in surveys: managerial development of women

There are many surveys treating coaching as tools of effective development of managers available in literature, but only a few are directly devoted to women and their professional careers [Starman 2007; Bacon & Spear 2003; Ballinger 2000; Bougae 2005; Kampa-Kokesch 2001; Kilburg 2002; Schuck & Liddle 2004; Stevens 2005; Turner 2003]. Moreover, the surveys are quite rarely carried out exclusively by scientists. There is often spin out-spin off in surveys, i.e. solutions when business representatives form alliances with scientists in order to carry out mutual research. Available survey results present the overall influence of executive coaching on development of managerial staff irrespective of gender. Undoubtedly, it is effective for both women and men.

Surveys conducted by Kampa-Kokesch identified coaching as an individualized tool of development leadership competences [Kampa-Kokesch 2001]. Taking into the account differences between men and women in functioning, learning style and management style, it seems justified to analyze the results of surveys concerning coaching involving women.

Referring to the surveys presented in the Deloitte report [2012], coaching may be a tool-strengthening feminine management style. As a tool that inspires reflection regarding professed values, feelings, and relationships, it may strengthen women in using their natural assets in management, which are:
- a style based on relationships, or so-called soft management, which involves influencing people, motivating employees to responsibility and involvement;
- inspiring activity involving the needs and goals of co-workers;
- authority based on consistency, charisma, and relationships, instead of power;

- openness to compromises, ability to placate quarrels, carrying out merit-related discussions based on facts, simultaneous taking into the account emotions of their counterparts;
- perception of business as a space for cooperation, eliminating aggression.

As a tool for building internal consistency and allowing its manifestation, coaching may be the factor supporting women when they compete against men for the CEO jobs. Thanks to conscious use of their natural assets, they are able to bring new qualities into management. Surveys by Starman [2007] indicated that exactly these features and abilities strengthen in themselves women participating in coaching processes [Starman 2007]. As a direct coaching effect they indicated improvement of their own communication, which became increasingly more open and direct. Thanks to this they perceived themselves as effective leaders and managers. It made them brave enough to reach for successive challenges and higher positions. At the same time they noticed improvement in the quality of professional relations, mainly thanks to greater orientation on goals and business outcomes. Their priority became strategic actions, and they also made more balanced decisions based on the one hand on recognition of the needs of others, while on the other—taking into consideration companies' strategic goals. Coaching helped them realize their own resources, the strength of character and facilitated their consistent functioning in the role of company managers.

Coaching also proves to be a tool supporting mothers – leaders who find combining various responsibilities difficult. The surveys prove that coaching serves to determine priorities, define values and build an action plan to take care of the important aspects of professional life, at the same time not forgetting their own needs and those of their closest relatives [Maitland 2007; Parke, Bingham 2012]. Companies offering coaching to young mothers help them to cope with the "gap" in professional life after having a child. They support them in achieving a balance between professional and family responsibilities, simultaneously strengthening their managerial talents and realization of their professional ambitions. Thanks to coaching they allow themselves to openly express themselves, but also to accept honest feedback from their colleagues. Thanks to the coaching process, women can more effectively manage both tasks and company's goals [Leimon, Moscovici, Goodier 2010].

By investing through coaching in women re-entering work after maternity leaves, companies motivate them into further development and successive achievements. Women become more loyal and involved in work for their employer, stronger and ready to perform managerial functions. This is confirmed by surveys carried out by Elston and Boniwell [2011], which indicate a significant role of coaching as the tool for discovering, strengthening and daring the use of their resources and strong features by women. Using the resources facilitates pursuing personal goals, resulting in satisfaction and a sense of wellbeing. Building awareness of one's own resources thanks to coaching increases the sense of value and allows the spreading of wings. It facilitates standing up to challenges concerning advancement to the higher managerial positions. In addition, Galuk in her surveys proved that coaching strengthens women in taking up new professional actions [Galuk 2009]. Among the women she surveyed, coaching facilitated:

- analyzing difficult situations and making decisions in accordance with one's own values and resources;
- being authentic, due to a realization of what is important and right for women;
- finding ways to cope with encountered barriers; reformulating a destructive belief "I will not manage" into "I have influence and possibility for action";
- breaking limitations and breaking the impasse;
- noticing different perspective, understanding the point of view of others.

In other words, coaching was helpful in extending the horizons of perceiving the issues and thinking about them. It helped women take successive steps toward a managerial career by making strategic decisions at the company management level. Women more aware of their competences had a significant role in strategic actions on behalf of organization development, which ensured their satisfaction and professional fulfilment.

Galuk, as well as authors dealing with coaching issues, underline the role of the coach in the client's development process [Galuk 2009; Sidor-Rządkowska 2011]. Trust and partnership between them create conditions for sincere sharing of women's worries, fears, and limitations. The coach may effectively influence and lead clients towards a desired change, comprising greater awareness of themselves, their own needs and feelings; being more courageous and proactive, trusting in them-selves and their own potential. In other words, not only coaching as a tool serves women in achieving their professional ambitions, but also the coaches themselves matter and influence the quality and effects of the coaching process [Lennard 2013].

Empirical presentation of coaching in development of managerial careers of women

The cases of some coaching processes described below are based on participating observations, as well as interviews with women holding managerial functions in organizations who participated in coaching. The conclusions drawn on the basis of the interviews justified application of coaching in the context of women's managerial development. It should be noted that women participating in the coaching process were at the beginning of their professional careers. The interviews were conducted within a year of the end of the coaching process with women who during that period carried out their managerial careers.

The objective of conducting the coaching processes included

- strengthening managerial competences of women such as: delegation; management organization of own and team work; assertive attitude towards subordinates and superiors; motivating employees; strengthening business thinking (including concentration on strategic goals of the organization);
- building the sense of one's own value and effectiveness in the leader's role;
- reconciliation between personal and professional life, developing abilities, setting up priorities, undertaking actions aimed at their achievement;
- team management in the conflict situation;
- developing strategic management abilities.

Five coaching processes were selected for this paper. Each process included seven coaching sessions lasting from 90 to 120 minutes. The duration of the shortest process was five months, the longest one - eight. The duration depended on the coachee's availability. Each coaching process was carried out in accordance with the standards of ICF, ICC, Coaching Chamber, as well as the coach ethical code.

The most frequently used coaching tools for women already holding or applying for managerial positions comprise: the circle of priorities, work with

hard questions, the Walt Disney method, personal SWOT analysis, visualization, and work with beliefs.

The section below presents comments from women who concluded their coaching process. They were asked about the impact of coaching on their managerial careers. Their replies:

In my work, managerial coaching means mainly extending knowledge about people, their perceptions, ways of communication, their driving force and reasons for its lack. It developed in me humility toward my own perspective, awareness of the role I perform as a woman and strengthen the focusing on others; it always helps in more complete understanding or reaching the needs and motives which are difficult to notice in superficial contacts. Knowledge and awareness which cannot be overestimated in everyday team management or non-professional relationships. (Female manager in training company)

The coaching process gave me a better understanding of employees, [and] better communication with the team. It influenced my patience towards employees, but also toward completed goals. It definitely gave me greater strength and energy;, it revived my awareness that "I can", helped understanding that each day is a good day for changing something and that failures may provide lessons for the future. It significantly increased my realization that as a woman I may be a good leader. (Female manager in service company)

Coaching sessions increased my motivation and self-confidence. My determination to compete for a managerial position also increased, I believed that I could be a good leader and gender does not have any influence on this. Moreover, I understood that the reality can be really beautiful; it is enough to believe in this and adequately focus on the goal. Thanks to the coaching process, I also became more humble toward the surrounding world and the people I cooperate with. [Coaching sessions] made me pay great attention to my own development, which has had considerable impact on my career development. (Female manager in clothes company)

The most important impact that coaching has allowed my career is awareness of my real expectations from myself and the world. This results in entirely different relations with customers, partners and the team. Clear communication with the team bore the fruits of effective cooperation with the loyal team and allows avoiding employee's frustrations. We all know where we stand and thanks to this, we

can made effective and satisfactory to all decisions. (Female manager in financial branch)

Coaching taught me how to better organize my work and to separate things that are really significant from those which are less important. During sessions we analyzed the way of implementation of processes introduced in the managed enterprise and their perception of myself and the staff. Sessions are very good times to reflect about one's own behavior and behavior of the closest environment, in reaction to the introduced changes. I apply many conclusions drawn during these sessions to my everyday work. In addition, coaching showed me how much our private life influences our professional life, and that sometimes you have to stop in order to move forward with greater strength to further work and development. Coaching is an exhausting way of solving problems, but I have a feeling that it is one of the best. Each of us needs to talk, when we must answer awkward questions, it turns out during work that we are able to ask these questions not just to other people but to ourselves as well. (Female manager in motorization branch)

These results provide an argument for further surveys, on a larger scale, concerning the role of coaching on managerial careers of women.

All female participants achieved the goals which they had marked. Their assessments – most often declarations of coaching assessment – regarded:
- greater self-confidence;
- greater courage in undertaking business and relations-oriented actions;
- better communication with others;
- increased awareness of one's own needs and a greater understanding of the needs of others;
- greater determination to achieve established professional and business goals.

As a result of coaching, some of them took up successive professional challenges, for example founding a new managerial job in accordance with newly recognized professional needs, evoking the feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment.

Conclusions and recommendations

Development of women's managerial careers is, without a shadow of a doubt, significant for female leaders themselves. However, it is also important from the point of view of building the company's competitive supremacy. The analysis of literature

and surveys presented in this paper does not exhaust the topic. Successive papers should focus on the issues related to determinants of learning, and the gender-related styles of functioning and management.

Another important matter is implementation of surveys concerning the roles that women perform on the company board in the context of companies' results and building their competitive advantages. The indicated impact of diversity in company management on the company's financial performance requires separate and more thorough analyses.

A significant research aspect is the role of coaching in development of women's managerial competences. The studies described in this paper may only be an introduction to this issue. The earlier studies are mostly based on descriptive knowledge: declarative answers of female participants in the coaching processes. It would be useful to conduct a survey via the "360 degrees" method asking for the assessment of co-workers and clients from the surveyed women's environment. Empirical surveys, by contrast, will permit determination of variables and obtain knowledge about relations between coaching and the career path. They will lead to more reliable picture of the impact of coaching on development of women in their leader's roles. The female leaders and managers participating in the coaching process univocally declare a change and increase in effectiveness of their functioning, which translates directly into their professional successes.

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