

## GENDER BALANCED MANAGEMENT APPROACH IN POST-PANDEMIC TIMES

*Alina-Nicoleta BÎRSAN*<sup>a\*</sup>, *Lupedia Genoveva DA COSTA*<sup>b</sup>, *Cristina STATE*<sup>c</sup>,  
*Leonard-Alin RIZOIU*<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a, b, c, d</sup> *Bucharest University of Economic Studies*

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### ABSTRACT

*Our empirical research, started in March 2021, showed that the majority of affected entrepreneurs have implemented changes to their pre-pandemic management model. Of the total 485 respondents, more than 60% represent women owned businesses. We have analyzed what are the main leadership styles that Romanian entrepreneurs have used before and after the pandemic to assess how this impacted their business performance in connection with their gender.*

**KEYWORDS:** *crisis, gender balance, leadership, management.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The pandemic outbreak is a turning point of humanity itself, as nowadays one of the most addressed subjects is artificial intelligence and its capacity to substitute and even overcome human abilities, to show us that only together, we can thrive. The extreme crisis it brought, followed by economic challenges, pushed managers to take on their leadership hat and drive change with unprecedented speed and openness. Sustainability has become the word of the day even more today than in 2015 when the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Assembly, 2015) along with Paris Agreement on climate change mentioning "Gender Equality" as its fifth goal.

And to be able to obtain this sustainability one needs to fully understand management and leadership as two distinctive and complementary systems of action while differentiating management from leadership, as management provides control and solves problems while leadership provides motivation (Kotter, 2001). While doing so, equal access to management and leadership positions is key in enlarging the spectrum of challenges that can be faced.

The COVID-19 pandemic impact significantly slowed down gender equality as women recorded an enormous increase in unpaid care work, thus even the minimal progress previously recorded being threatened. The Gender Equality Index score for the EU improved with only 4.9 points in more than a decade (Equality, 2022) therefore continuous efforts need to be undertaken.

## 2. STUDY METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

### 2.1 Study methodology

Through this research, in the first stage, we analyzed literature on management and leadership models currently practiced by Romanian entrepreneurs, as public institutions have a totally different approach. Subsequently, we identified how these models came to be adapted as a crisis result and show resilience to better understand gender balance benefits and influences. Databases used in this

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\* Corresponding author. E-mail address: [alina@ab-traduceri.ro](mailto:alina@ab-traduceri.ro).

research include, but are not limited to, JSTOR, ResearchGate, Web of Science. Also, websites such as Google, Google Scholar, etc. were used. Information from public databases such as EUROSTAT, INS, OECD, UN and UNCTAD was also processed.

To determine the conclusions regarding the features of management and leadership models currently practiced by Romanian entrepreneurs that can prove successful in times of crisis, for a sustainable development, we undertook a research based on a questionnaire as a research tool, disseminated for research, in the Romanian entrepreneurial environment.

The targeted statistical sample met several criteria of representativeness, according to the information available on [https://www.marketingsondaje.ro/04determinare\\_volum.php](https://www.marketingsondaje.ro/04determinare_volum.php), accessed on 04.03.2022. Thus, we considered as a representative sample the statistical population comprising enough people to allow statistical studies to be carried out, quantitative criterion, but also ensuring random addressing, qualitative criterion, and its value determination considered the following elements: *maximum permissible error* → *accuracy* ( $D_x$ ), *probability of guaranteeing results* → *response confidence coefficient* ( $p$ ) and *variance* → *level of spread of the study population* ( $D_2$ ).

According to procedures, both  $p$  and  $D_x$  were chosen in strict accordance with econometric theory: „[...]  $p$  is chosen between 95% and 99%;  $D_x$  can take acceptable values between 1% and 5%” (according to [https://www.marketingsondaje.ro/04determinare\\_volum.php](https://www.marketingsondaje.ro/04determinare_volum.php), accessed on 04.0.2022). According to the same source of documentation,  $D_2$ , if no data on the study population is known, it is considered at a maximum level of 2 500 persons.

And, for  $D_2 = 2500$  and for different values of  $p$ , respectively,  $D_x$ , the sample volume ( $E$ ) is given in Table 1.

**Table 1. Levels for statistical samples according to the values of  $p / D_x$   
 (Probability of guaranteeing results / maximum permissible error)**

$p / D_x$	+ / - 1%	1.5%	2%	2.5%	3%	3.5%	4%	4.5%	5%	5.5%	5.7%
95%	9 603	4 268	2 400	1 536	1 067	784	600	474	384	317	296
99%	16 641	7 395	4 160	2 262	1 849	1 359	1 040	821	665	532	389

Source: adapted from [https://www.marketingsondaje.ro/04determinare\\_volum.php](https://www.marketingsondaje.ro/04determinare_volum.php), accessed on 04.03.2021

Table 2 shows the maximum permissible errors for the probability of guaranteeing the results ( $p$ ) for the different levels of sample volumes considered.

**Table 2. Statistical sample size levels according to values  $D_x$**

$D_x(\%)$	1	..	5.5	5.6	5.7	5.8	5.9	6	.	6.5	...	7	...	7.5	...	8
95%	9 603	..	317	306	296	285	276	267	.	227	...	196	...	171	...	150

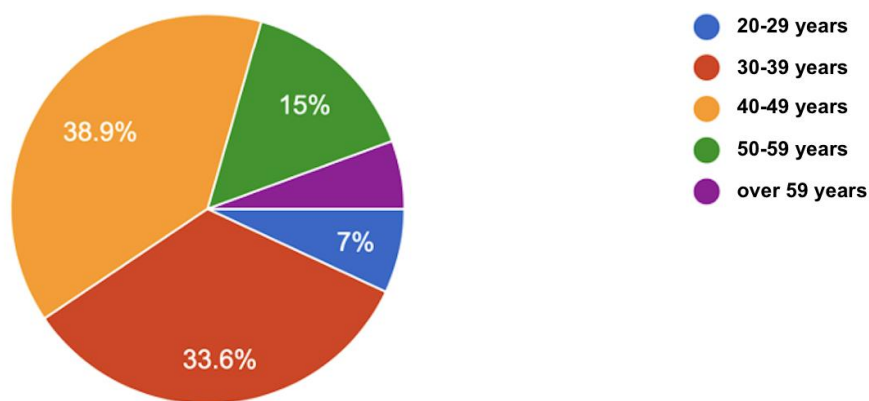
Source: adapted from [https://www.marketingsondaje.ro/04determinare\\_volum.php](https://www.marketingsondaje.ro/04determinare_volum.php), accessed on 04.03.2022

From this we have chosen a probability of 95%, with a maximum allowed error coefficient of 4.5%.

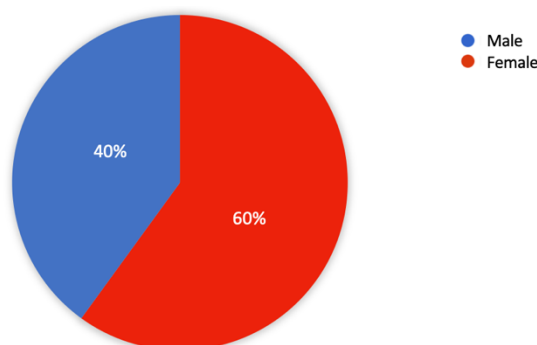
## 2.2 Study results

The study being based on quantitative research, where the questionnaire was used as a basic tool, which was carried out with through Isondaje.ro. The questionnaire was addressed to a number of

485 respondents, during a period of 6 months, between April and September 2022, remaining open to update our research for a time span of 24 months after the pandemic is considered ended, targeting more than 1000 respondents. The study respondents comprise 60% female and 40% male, most respondents belonging to the group of 40-49 years.



**Figure 1. Answers to the question "What age group are you part of?"**  
*Source: Processing carried out by the authors as part of the research*



**Figure 2. Answers to the question "What is your gender?"**  
*Source: Processing carried out by the authors as part of the research*

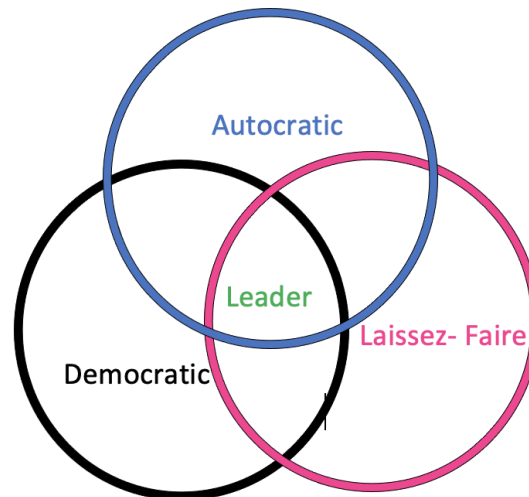
And along with analyzing the entrepreneurial structure of respondents we also analyzed the literature on how the presence of women in decision-making bodies established not just at national, but also at European and global level to tackle COVID-19 was extremely low, despite calls for this to be redressed (WHO, 2022). Even if women represent 70% of health professionals and more than 80% of health professionals associated in the EU (EIGE, 2020), this majority does not mirror into leadership roles in the health sector, or in public leadership roles in general. During the pandemic and by March 2021, just one in four EU health ministers and 4 out of 10 junior/vice-ministers were women.

The small number of women holding decision-making positions or present as experts in key roles impacted the structure of the national task forces empowered to tackle the pandemic. Assessing the gender gap in these bodies, a recent study on gender gaps in COVID-19 decision-making (van Daalen KR, 2020) emphasized the exclusion of gender-diverse voices. Investigating 87 UN Member States, the study found that only 3.5% COVID-19 decision-making and expert task forces (which amounted to 115) had gender parity. In 85.2% of cases, men were in the majority. Such

extensive gender gaps in decision-making strengthens unequal power structures and weakens COVID-19 responses, potentially costing lives.

Taking gender as key determinant of health, women's inclusion in crisis response decision-making is crucial (Davies, 2016) The European Commission (2021) has also recognized the need for more women to be part of pandemic response decision-making to take gender differences into consideration, women's presence and involvement bringing visible benefits.

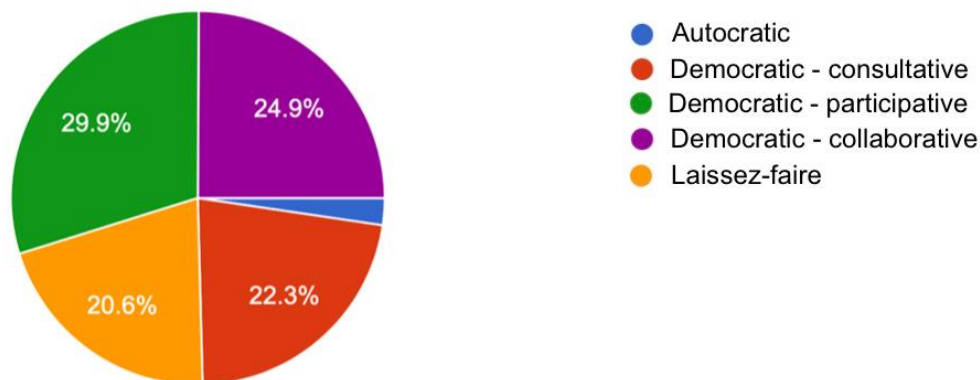
From the analysed companies that respondents filled in the questionnaire we have observed the following:



**Figure 3. Kurt Lewin leadership styles**

*Source: Lewin, K., Lippitt, R. and White, R. (1939)*

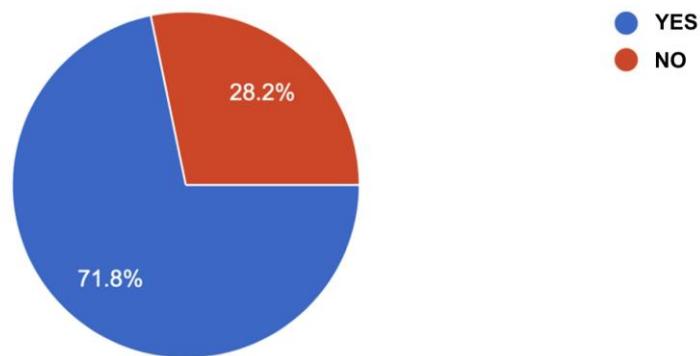
Latest interpretations of Kurt Lewin's leadership styles inspired our research and based on these types we analyzed how they drive business performance when applied by different genders to fight crisis effects. Thus, we looked how autocratic, democratic and laissez faire styles (Lewin, 1939) drove business resilience in times of profound challenges along with if and how gender balance brought any influence.



**Figure 4. Answers to the question "What management style would best describe your approach?"**

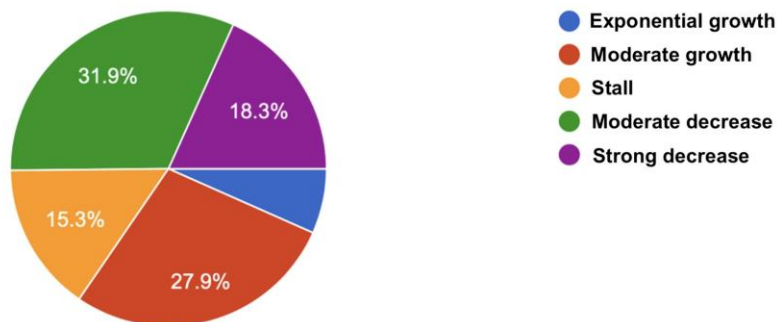
*Source: Processing carried out by the authors as part of the research*

From recorded answers we have seen that most of represented companies recorded challenges due to pandemic influences (more than 70% of respondents), though their vast majority has also managed to overcome them and adapt to new circumstances, in quite surprising ways as approximately 35% of companies recorded growth, 7% of respondents finding innovative ways to register exponential growth, despite the majority of companies (slightly more than 50%) recording strong and moderate decreases of their turnover.



**Figure 5. Answers to the question "Has your company been impacted by pandemic challenges?"**

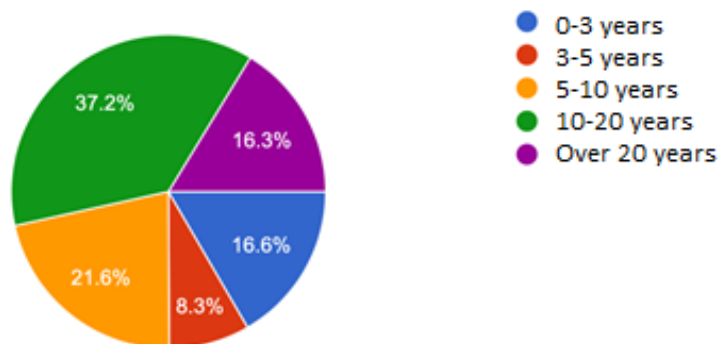
*Source:* Processing carried out by the authors as part of the research



**Figure 6. Answers to the question "How was the pandemic impact managed?"**

*Source:* Processing carried out by the authors as part of the research

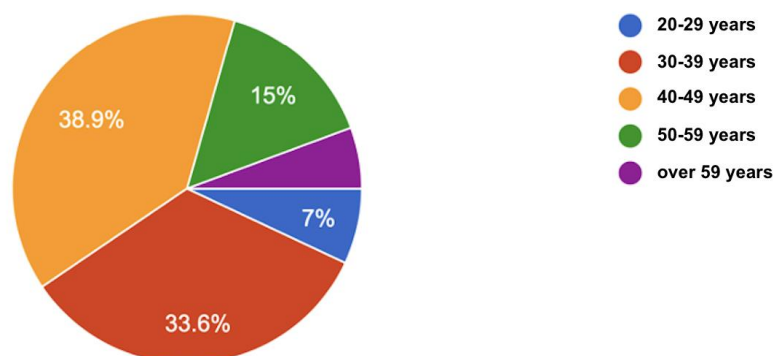
By analyzing gathered data, we could see that the majority of respondents did not change their leadership style after the pandemic, therefore the positive recorded results in fighting crisis side effects can be used as proof that most used leadership style, respectively the democratic one (more than 75% of respondents) helped businesses survive and even thrive under such circumstances as the pandemic.



**Figure 7. Answers to the question "What is your entrepreneurship experience?"**

*Source:* Processing carried out by the authors as part of the research

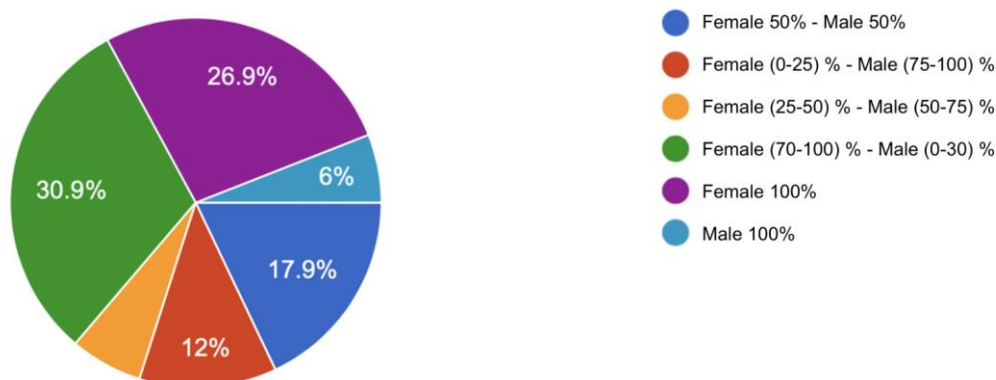
Simultaneously we can look at the average entrepreneurship experience of respondents in years and see that most of them have over a decade of experience, more than 15% reaching even more than 2 decades of experience. And concatenating this information with the fact that the Romanian entrepreneurial ecosystem restarted only little more than 3 decades ago, we can think that we have managed to obtain some of the most relevant entrepreneurial business opinions available.



**Figure 8. Answers to the question "What is your age group?"**

*Source:* Processing carried out by the authors as part of the research

According to the answers we centralized, most respondents are over 40 years old (almost 60%), while the Romanian entrepreneurial environment practically is barely 30 years old, so that we enjoy the advantage of having had the pleasure to gather responses from some of the most experienced entrepreneurs in the Romanian economic environment. Simultaneously within the respondents, 57% represent female shareholders with more than 70% shares and 75% are represented by female shareholders with more than 50% shares with majority having relevant experience in the entrepreneurship sector (53.5% of respondents with more than 10 years entrepreneurship experience).



**Figure 9. Answers to the question "What is the gender share of entrepreneurship?"**

*Source:* Processing carried out by the authors as part of the research

Looking at prevalent leadership styles (democratic) and dominant female business ownership within respondents we can affirm that there is a high probability that female leadership style used in fighting pandemic challenges has strong roots in democratic leadership style, may it be collaborative, participative, or consultative.

Most of respondents to the questionnaire, over 55%, responded to the pandemic challenges by developing new products, practically generating more value in the context of choosing to reduce working time (Kurzarbeit) and not jobs, thus adapting the managerial approach more creatively.

Respondents' businesses have mostly national (34.6%) and local (23.9%) coverage, partly due to the type of field chosen for the entrepreneurial approach. Their majority, though, would benefit from public funding and governmental support, since 64.8% of respondents never accessed or received funding and used just personal financial accumulations.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Gender imbalances in leadership create inequities that are compounded—rather than redressed—by unequal representation, therefore we have addressed our questionnaire in business environments that promote women in business in an attempt to balance natural national imbalances.

Unlike other crisis in history, which have generally affected men more severely than women, as they were traditionally in business, this pandemic brought harsher economic consequences on women (Cooper, 2021) (Chung H, Covid-19, flexible working, and implications for gender equality in the United Kingdom. , 2021). Therefore, the small advances previously recorded in gender balance management approaches, not just public policies, saw quite an important discouragement due to the enormous increase in unpaid care during the COVID-19 crisis, especially by women underlining the long-standing gender inequalities in the household.

Though gender balanced representation in management positions proved its resilience through trust, creativity, and adaptability to external factors, we have managed to notice the low degree of gender balanced management positions within the Romanian both entrepreneurial and institutional environment. Thus we conclude that there is a real need for gender balanced representation as its potential is definitely insufficiently exploited.

Equal access to management positions fosters inclusion, more balanced approaches and encourages better post-crisis resilience along with economic recovery and even growth as we have seen in the above data.

We will continue to gather more data from the Romanian business and extend to institutional environment while enlarging its coverage, for comparison reasons, towards other countries with

different cultures. We will also monitor some of the businesses whose managers answered the questionnaire to follow up with the consistency of our findings.

Since we have managed to identify complementary studies to our own developed by other research teams in various countries around the world, we have contacted them to join efforts and are looking forward to collaboration.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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