



**TRANSEARCH Paris study**

**June 2021**

**"Women's Values of Sustainable Leadership"**

## Introduction

It is clear that the issue of Sustainability is part of a collective awareness within civil society, business and politics, which strives to respond to these paradigm shifts and the resulting contradictory injunctions. How do we reconcile the need for immediacy, reinforced by the expansion of digitalisation, with the long-term reconstruction? How do we instill a shared value at the time of a new era marked by individualism?

These transformations profoundly modify the fundamental principles of our society and tend to define new balances, such as developing our business models towards a tripartite balance "People, Profit, Planet", or paying more attention to gender stereotypes.

Diversity and Inclusion are founding principles of a more sustainable business model, and even if they encompass several components, including that of gender equity, it is obvious that good intentions are not enough. The principle of reality still bears witness to this in France, with so few women in leadership positions.

The introduction of quotas at board level, and soon within management committees has surely started demonstrating its virtues. But doesn't strengthening a company's performance in the deployment of its "Sustainability" imply the development of a new, more balanced leadership model that upholds both feminine and masculine values? Wouldn't promoting women's values be an additional performance lever? Is it not time to design a woman leadership model, similarly to the way the men leadership model that has prevailed so far?

In the continuation of their first study conducted in 2020 on the definition of a "Sustainable Leader", TRANSEARCH Paris wondered about the feminine components of a new sustainable leadership, its assets to support the tall orders of Sustainability, the actions to be taken and the challenges to be met to promote sustainable parity.



## Thanks

This study is the result of an analysis of testimonies from about fifty women leaders including **Karine DUQUESNE, Aline VALANTIN, Aliette LELEUX, Bettina AURBACH, Nathalie BŒUF, Petra ZALABAK, Julie COINE, Eva HENRY, Nathalie ROOS, Fatima ZEMMOURI, Cathy COLLARD GEIGER, Patricia TRANVOUEZ, Marie VIDEAU, Eglé de RICHEMONT, Nathalie DUSART DUCHEMIN, Sabine BONNARD, Nathalie des ISNARDS, Valérie VEZINHET, Laurence NOEL, Marie-Anne AYMERICH, Martine GRAZIOSO, Dominique VEROT, Charlotte DAVID, Caroline HERNU, Audrey RICHARD, Elisabeth BLOCH, Anne GAUTIER, Claire GOMARD, Estelle LEGRAND, Marie VEZY, Sophie MOREAU-FOLLENFANT, Christine LAURENS, Laure-Marine JEANNEL, Marie-Ange DEBON, Anne GILBERT, Marie de LA ROCHE KERANDRAON, Hélène MARCHAND, Camille HUYGHES DESPOINTES, Isabelle ROHAN, Claire DU PAYRAT, Annette MATHON, Deborah PARDO**, whom we warmly thank for participating with great sincerity, in this reflection.



## Preamble

This study, conducted in June 2021, reflects the testimony of 50 French women leaders (50% Executive Management, 20% Branch Management, 20% HRD and 10% Comex members), from 39 companies (including 20 French groups), various sectors (45% in consumer goods, 30% in services, 25% in industry) and various types of shareholdings (listed groups, family-owned or mixed capital mid-size companies, cooperatives, start-ups). Besides its structuring data, the reflection of this study takes into account the diversity of personal experiences, the uniqueness of family origins as well as professional backgrounds. Addressing the challenges of "Sustainability" means having a holistic, systemic view that tends to align different stakeholders' vision.

While women from the most remote tribes in the world have been close to nature since the dawn of time and care about climate dangers to protect the survival of their families, as the Covid 19 crisis has highlighted the feminine values of health and care, why not accompany the challenges of "Sustainability", by strengthening women's values within a new leadership?



## 1. Study of women's values of Sustainable Leadership

After fighting stereotypes, many refuse to assert the existence of female leadership. Some admit having had the chance to be encouraged by male managers attentive to their success, while others prefer to avoid the anachronistic clichés of a certain feminism. But many, especially those who have broken through the glass ceiling and become CEO or entrepreneur, agree having had to fight to get there and to have experienced a strong sense of injustice.

Certainly, this difference, perceived or experienced, refers to the uniqueness of a personal experience, and varies according to the nationality and the evolution of the company's governance. Although Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon cultures have long advocated for gender equality, it is clear that the culture of Latin countries still maintains this disparity.

With that in mind, there likely is a woman leadership style that is not related to gender but to the position of women in society. Promoting a balanced leadership, giving pride of place to both women's and men's values, also means considering the convergence of men and women's positions in civil society as well as in business.



While the core leadership competencies of a responsible leader have already been defined (in our previous study), this analysis shows that women's values embody them differently or help reinforce new ones.

(This study is based on leadership skills, according to the exclusive model of TRANSEARCH International, Orxestra Method®, by John O. Burdett, Leadership Advisor of TRANSEARCH International)

The Responsible Leader must:

- In her ability to think and give direction (HEAD), be a **visionary, a strategic thinker, must succeed in a world of great uncertainty and lead through purpose and values.**



The woman leader carries her vision on a *naturally long-term temporality*, by agreeing to act today without having the immediate result, supported by values of *transmission* and by an innate concern to have an impact on future generations. With a *clear vision of the ultimate stakes* as well, she is less concerned about the factors of personal competitiveness that often prevent seeing the final destination.

She leads with a stronger ability to *explain the why of a strategy* (or the intended purpose) and gives *meaning*, rather than quickly achieving a result.

She carries a *different instinct* that anticipates other trends, willingly appropriates "Sustainable" markers to have an impact beyond the understanding of today's issues.

Rather, she embodies more **managerial courage**: Bold. Embraces the challenges that intimidate others. Recognises that today's point of difference is tomorrow's commodity. Makes the hard decisions. Doesn't duck out of the difficult conversation. Comfortable speaking to power. Asks the questions that others avoid.

- In her operational skills (HAND), **foster collaboration, be comfortable with ambiguity and manage complexity**

The woman leader, with a *less visible ego* (less prone to trivial quarrels) seeks constructive solutions in collaboration and brings a different kind of *collective* value, that of being a source of long-term performance.



She embodies multiple lives combining several roles, having managed change many times, constantly changing her agenda, and pacing her time differently.

- In her ability to engage (HEART), **work at level of mindset, show coaching mastery as well as speed and agility of learning**

The woman leader is a *more attentive listener*, is more involved in relationships and does not measure herself against others as if she were in a fight. Her *empathy* and *sensitivity* build and strengthen long lasting relationships.



The woman leader dares to go into the unspoken field, beyond the consensus, and willingly develops constructive communication. She *shares information* and does not retain it as a source of power; naturally advocates for the principle of *mutuality* (sustainable benefit only exists if it is shared) or subsidiarity (as a "good mother").

She carries the so-called *impostor syndrome* which certainly inhibits, but also leaves room for doubts, questioning, and the ability to learn as well as unlearn.

It is **optimistic and affirmative**: Self-confident. Draws out self-confidence in others. Addresses doubt and despair by focusing on possibility and potential. Emphasises the meaning in the work. Goes out of their way to catch people "doing it right". Celebrates early wins.

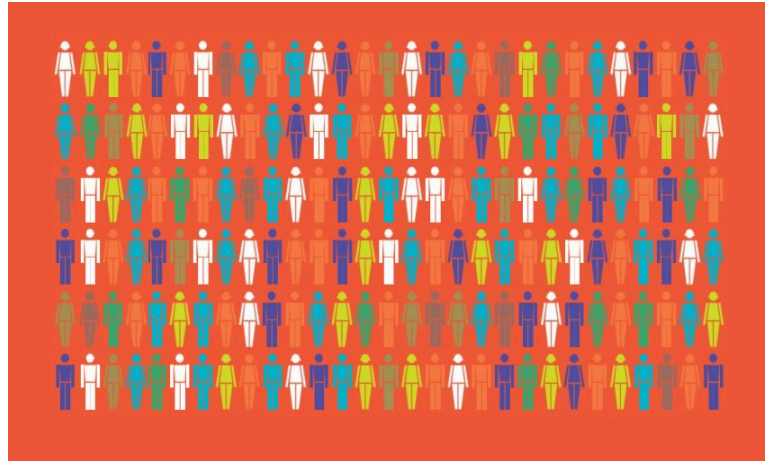
- In her ability to inspire (SPIRIT), **be resilient, build great teams and build community**

The woman leader tends to promote the collective more, knows how to personalise her relationship with each team member, detects weak signals, anticipates conflicts, and strengthens commitment.





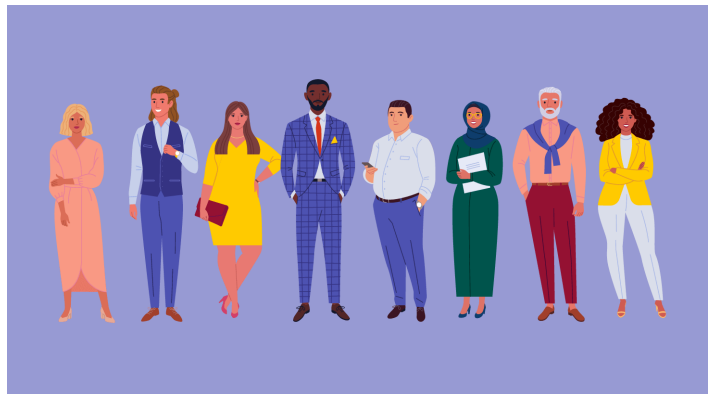
She naturally carries a resilience embodied by the battles she has already fought and has already had to give up some fights (the way all minorities have for that matter). She advocates for **authenticity**: Genuine. Comfortable with who they are. Lets their real self come through. Willing to be vulnerable. Meaning is more important than compensation. Caring comes before career. An individual who people gravitate to during times of change or crisis.



## 2. Actions and challenges to overcome to strengthen sustainable parity

If we refer to a study conducted by Mc Kinsey in 2020, the long-term performance of a company is strengthened if there is a gender balance within the management committees, just as the performance of a company is often recognised when the CEO is a Woman (*"If Lehman Brothers had been called 'Lehman Sisters', the situation of the banks in 2008 would have been very different"* Christine LAGARDE).

As "Sustainability" make its mark over the long term but requires decision making over a short period of time, hasn't the time come to act and reinforce this awareness? It is not just about setting quotas (even if the coercive and legislative aspect is and will be an integral part of "Sustainability's" successful implementation), but rather about raising awareness of this new balance, changing the organisations, implementing training on unconscious bias that our companies and civil societies need... to reach sufficient critical sizes.



### So what are the actions and challenges to be taken up to ensure sustainable parity?

- It is above all **the commitment of the CEO**, who establishes this gender equity as one of the pillars of their strategy in the same way as "Sustainability" in the composition of his Executive Committee as well as in the "Purpose & Values" of his company. But this prerequisite must be extended to **governance bodies** and probably **to shareholders** to strengthen the company's DNA and raison d'être. This substantive investment must also be part of all recruitment and promotion decisions by these stakeholders.
- The implementation of a **system with holistic processes and tools** around training, human resources policies, which cannot be effective without **monitoring indicators, barometers, measurement tools or indexes** (the publication in the annual report will have its impact on the reputation of the company as will the introduction of new KPIs regarding the number of women who apply for General Management positions).

Rethink **career paths and Succession Planning**: setting up the systematic support **of middle management** for their next career stage, introducing **two-headed management** in order to strengthen working time flexibility, promoting **more lateral than vertical moves** or even a **gender alternation** in key positions.

- The implementation of dedicated **training for women** to better understand their positions within Executive Committee, or teach them how to build a network,



support them in their ability to dare asking for a raise, speak in public or learn a positive "assertiveness".

In general, encourage the implementation of **training on diversity** and **understanding stereotypes**. It is indeed time to desacralise the syndrome of the good student and the need for over-performance, as well as redefine the criteria to justify a certain legitimacy.

Furthermore, give them the means **to convince, embark and value the men** involved in the implementation of this new balance.

- Rethink **work time flexibility** (extending paternity leave is already a first step) but likely be innovative on the employment contract (working hours flexibility, allowing time for experiences for the benefit of humanitarian causes or associations), similarly, to encourage promotion on each maternity leave return.
- Establish support measures for young women leaders in their career plans, through female or mixed **mentoring, sponsorship** dynamics.
- Develop a **new managerial culture** around **Emotional Quotient**, by introducing recruitment and evaluation criteria that combine behavioral skills, such as promoting women to technical positions by valuing their managerial performances or thinking in terms of team performance and not just individual performance.
- Communicate more to establish the figure of a desacralised role model (who must find its balance between the expected seduction and the tomboy virtues), by valuing her authenticity, by sharing experiences within school training (from the youngest age through higher education), in companies or with various stakeholders.
- It is time to promote intergeneration, because the time of experience is not the time of immediacy!



Undeniably, women's values can strengthen companies' performance and commitment level in the deployment of their "Sustainability". Hasn't the time come to rethink our governance models, the support of the new generation and the training of the next...?



**TRANSEARCH International Paris** ([www. transearch.com](http://www.transearch.com)) support our clients in the evaluation of these future responsible leaders and in the transformation of their leadership. In our research of executives and leadership consulting, we focus on the identification of values, on the construction of collaboration, on the impact of questioning, on a new performance approach and the improvement of diversity and inclusion.

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