

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN MEXICO

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, Mexican women, as in the majority of the developed countries and the Third World, have noticeably increased their presence in the labour market.

There are many reasons for this growth. First of all in our country, we have to consider migration of Mexican men to the United States seeking better labour opportunities. Women are increasingly the economic support for their homes in most of the big cities in our country, whether they are the unique source of income for their families or shared income responsibilities with their husbands. However, women's lives continue to be restricted by cultural patterns and power relationships between men and women at home, the workplace, and in their communities.

Nevertheless, the level of female participation in Mexico as Principals or Directors in Educational Institutions, in the public and private sector, is still lower than that reported in developed countries.

Women's participation as Principals in Educational Institutions is significant in Elementary Schools, but their presence diminishes considerably in other educational levels.

Women leading Educational Projects are increasingly sharing responsibilities with men in our country. However, women in Mexico are still fighting to legitimize their presence as Principals or Directors in Education and struggling to have their professional contributions to the workplace valued.

It is very important that we understand the ways in which our national culture impacts women's leadership development. Culture influences the thinking structure of every individual due to the social context in which the individual lives and interrelates with others; the way people feel, the way an individual determines what is correct or incorrect and the roles an individual plays in society. The gender roles are a set of behavioural norms associated with males and with females in a given social group. Many researchers recognize that the individual behaviour is a consequence of both socially enforced rules and values, and individual disposition whether genetic, conscious or unconscious. We recognize that cultures and societies are dynamic and change over time. There are differing views about how much gender roles depend on biological sex or culture, however it is clear that there is a strong influence of cultural patterns and individual needs in the gender roles. In other words, it is not the same to live as a woman in small villages vs. large cities, in Europe, Latin America, North America, Middle East, Africa or Asia.

Cultures influence diverse kinds of behaviour including an individual's choice of work, clothing and personal relationships. One of these behaviours is the way women assume a leadership role while being a Principal or Director in an Educational Institution.

It is important to get information about the development and current situation of women's leadership and how it is related to our culture, to improve the effectiveness of Educational Administration.

2. Key concepts

Leader - a person who leads followers towards goals achievement, interacting with them and influencing them. Leaders motivate groups to accomplish goals, influencing without necessarily having a direct hierarchical authority.

Leadership - the process of influence on people or one's self to take action and/or to reach a common goal.

Stereotypes – conventional and oversimplified conceptions, opinions or images which assume that some group of people will act in the same way, often formed because of cultural expectations.

Masculine leadership style - stereotypical style connected with domination, ranking, task orientation, limited information flow, etc.

Feminine leadership style - stereotypical style connected with higher sensitivity towards people needs, linking, people orientation, unlimited information flow, etc.

Gender roles - sets of cultural expectations that define the ways in which the members of each sex should behave in a society, group, etc. based on expectations placed on people and acceptance of these roles by individuals.

Discrimination - making distinctions on the basis of class, gender, race, and ethnicity rather than on individual merit.

3. Overview of the Mexican Context

The United Mexican States is better known as Mexico. It is a country of roughly 2 million square kilometres. Its population is over 100 million inhabitants. 53 million inhabitants are women and 50 million inhabitants are men. Mexico is the world's largest and most populated Spanish-speaking country. Mexico is almost four times the size of Spain and two times and a half of Spain's population. Our country went from 25 million inhabitants in 1950 to 100 million inhabitants in 2005. Around 75 % of Mexico's population lives in urban centres. Most of the best educational and work opportunities are located in big cities.

The ethnic composition of our country is around 70 percent "*mestizo*" (a mixture of Indian and European, mainly from Spain), 20 percent Amerindian, 9 percent white, and 1 percent other. Mexico is a Federal Republic. Spanish is the official language of Mexico, although around 100 Indian languages are also still spoken in little communities. English is widely understood by educated people and in urban centres. There is no official religion, but almost 90 percent of Mexicans are Roman Catholic. Protestants account for around 7 percent and 3 percent of other religions or none.

Mexico is one of the United States' most important trade partners due to their geographical proximity. It is the third largest exporter to the United States, and its international trade products include oil exports, tourism, and the products of its many assembly plants (called "*maquiladoras*").

A smaller amount of the population still remains in the country land and their main source of income comes from their crops. They are "*ejidatarios*" which means that they own a small piece of land that has been inherited. They have limited resources to exploit the land and very little technology. For these reasons many agricultural workers that used to be working in the agricultural sector in Mexico, are migrating to the United States of America, looking for better job opportunities and better salaries. Some of these workers that were not able to cross the northern border of Mexico towards the United States, established themselves in the cities of the Mexican border, such as Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez. Others have been migrating to the big cities of Mexico, such as Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey. This is the main reason of the extensive concentration of the population in the urban cities.

Most of the income of Mexican people comes from employment with major manufacturers, retail, transportation and financial services. This income is registered by official statistical sources. However there are many people working in what is considered as informal economy. They sell merchandise walking in the streets or in ambulatory markets. They do not pay taxes but they also do not have a secure source of income, no pensions and no medical benefits.

In our Economy, the main source of income comes from the money that is sent by Mexican people living and working abroad, mainly in the United States of America. In second place we have the income that comes from oil & international trade.

The Mexican society is highly polarized in relation to income distribution. This situation has consequences on the school that parents have to choose to educate their children.

The Mexican educational system is divided into three educational levels:

1. Basic education
2. Middle Education
3. Higher education.

1. Basic education is mandatory in our country. It includes three stages:

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| 1.1 Pre-school | (3 years) |
| 1.2 Elementary school | (6 years) |
| 1.3 Secondary school | (3 years) |

2. Middle Education known as

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|--------------------|-----------|
| Preparatory school | (3 years) |
| Technical Schools | (3 years) |

3. Higher Education includes two stages:

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|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 3.1 Undergraduate | (4 to 6 years) |
| 3.2 Graduate | |
| 3.2.1 Specialization | (1 year) |
| 3.2.2 Master degree | (2 years) |
| 3.2.2 Doctoral degree | (from 2 to 4 years) |

Education in Mexico is provided by public and private educational institutions in all these levels.

Public education is sponsored by government funds. Private education is paid entirely by the students or their parents.

Public education is based on a non-religious framework and is almost free, being targeted towards the low income class of our society.

Private schools on the contrary are frequently owned by religious organizations, targeting the middle and higher classes of the society, who can afford private education.

Public Elementary Schools have professors that are paid by the government. To be promoted to become a Principal it is necessary to have a proven record of years of teaching experience as professors and frequently good networking support. This does not always imply that the individual has developed leadership or managerial skills.

4. Leaders and Leadership

Leaders are people that lead followers towards goals achievement, interacting with them and influencing them. Leaders motivate groups to accomplish goals, influencing without necessarily having a direct hierarchical authority.

There are many definitions of leaders such as:

Leaders are able to express themselves fully, says Warren Bennis. "They also know what they want", he continues, "why they want it, and how to communicate what they want to others, in order to gain their cooperation and support." Lastly, "they know how to achieve their goals". (Bennis,1998).

The term "leadership" can be defined as "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members" (House, 2004)

Leadership involves the ability to inspire and influence the thinking, attitudes, and behaviour of other people

No matter how one defines leadership, it typically involves an element of vision -- except in cases of involuntary leadership having to take action or make others take action to resolve an immediate contingency. A vision provides direction to the influence process. A leader (or group of leaders) can have one or more visions of the future to aid them to move a group successfully towards a given goal.

Leadership has existed in all human societies throughout history. However, Burns (1978) considers that “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth”.

Leadership is a term often in our minds these days. It is considered as a key factor for effectiveness in organizations.

Leadership in educational organizations has been recently considered as a powerful source of a strong motivation for the members of the organization.

5. Culture

Culture, is a body of learned behaviours common to a given human society: socially transmitted behaviour patterns. Culture resides in all learned behaviour and in some shaping template or consciousness prior to behaviour.

Geert Hofstede (1991) a social psychologist considered that “culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. Culture is learned, not inherited. It derives from one's social environment, not from one's genes.”

Hofstede, born in the Netherlands in 1928, was a Mechanical Engineer, with a Ph. D. at Groningen University. He founded and managed the Personnel Research Department of IBM Europe and was a Professor of Management in prestigious universities in several European countries. He wrote several studies about cultural diversity and intercultural communication.

Hofstede’s theory provides guidelines to understand cultural differences. We consider Hofstede’s cultural dimensions model as general but useful guidelines.

Geert Hofstede’s research on cultural differences has important practical applications for those who work in international studies. We tend to have a human instinct that “deep inside” all the people are the same, but this is a partial truth. Therefore if we try to understand a social phenomenon like women’s leadership development in a particular culture, we have to know the way their people react or behave according to their values and social accepted rules of behaviour.






Hofstede found distinct differences in basic cultural assumptions which had an effect on the way people work, and on the way they relate to each other at work. We also consider that the way people work and relate to each other, is completely linked with the way they think and the way they feel. Hofstede compared culture to an “onion” with different layers. The outer, more visible, layers, concerned with practices (such as customs, clothing, housing, rituals and ceremonies) are relatively easy to observe and to understand. The innermost core values, however, remain hidden. The latter are the assumptions inherent in the culture;

they define the norms by which people of the same culture live, although they are rarely articulated, or even overtly recognised, as they are taken for granted. One's upbringing, particularly in the first ten years of life, is thought to exert a powerful effect on the values one holds. This "core of the onion" is the central aspect of culture. (Barzanò et al, 2003)

By collecting data from different countries, Hofstede found significant differences, and classified the different cultures according to five "dimensions". He defines a dimension as "an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures" (Hofstede, 1991,). We would rather say that a dimension is just an aspect of a culture that can be estimated to establish some important differences on ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. Hofstede decided to use quantitative tools to measure each dimension for the different nations he studied.

We found it useful to consider Hofstede's dimensions model as a useful guideline to provide context to women's environment in Mexico. We will make a brief reference to Hofstede's model below from ITIM international website (<http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>) which contains a reference to Hofstede's work.

Hofstede's Five Dimensions are:

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|---|--------------------------------|-------|
|  | 1. Power distance Index | (PDI) |
|  | 2. Individualism | (IDV) |
|  | 3. Masculinity | (MAS) |
|  | 4. Uncertainty Avoidance Index | (UAI) |
|  | 5. Long-Term Orientation | (LTO) |

1. Power Distance Index (PDI) focuses on the degree of equality, or inequality, between people in the country's society. A High Power Distance ranking indicates that inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society. These societies are more likely to follow a caste system that does not allow significant upward mobility of its citizens. A Low Power Distance ranking indicates the society de-emphasizes the differences between citizen's power and wealth. In these societies equality and opportunity for everyone is searched.

2. Individualism (IDV) vs. Collectivism. This dimension focuses on the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships. A High Individualism ranking indicates that individuality and individual rights have superior power and influence within the society. Individuals in these societies may tend to form a larger number of looser relationships. A Low Individualism ranking typifies societies of a more collectivist nature with close ties between individuals. These cultures reinforce extended families and social groups where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group.

3. Masculinity (MAS) focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power. A High Masculinity ranking indicates the country experiences a high degree of gender differentiation. In these cultures, males dominate a significant portion of the society and

power structure, with females being controlled by male domination. A Low Masculinity ranking indicates the country has a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders. In these cultures, females are treated equally to males in all aspects of the society.

4. Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society. A High Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. This creates a rule-oriented society that institutes laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty. Culture influences its members to feel either comfortable or uncomfortable under unstructured situations. A Low Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has less concern about ambiguity and uncertainty and has more tolerance for a variety of opinions. This is reflected in a society that is less rule-oriented, more readily accepts change, and takes more and greater risks.

5. Long-Term Orientation (LTO) focuses on the degree the society embraces, or does not embrace, long-term devotion to traditional, forward thinking values. High Long-Term Orientation ranking indicates the country prescribes to the values of long-term commitments and respect for tradition. This is thought to support a strong work ethic where long-term rewards are expected as a result of today's hard work. However, business may take longer to develop in this society, particularly for an "outsider". A Low Long-Term Orientation ranking indicates the country does not reinforce the concept of long-term, traditional orientation. In this culture, change can occur more rapidly as long-term traditions and commitments do not become impediments to change.

We find it relevant to share Mexico's rankings on each dimension based on G. Hofstede's referenced at the website cited above (<http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>).

1. Power Distance

This is a Dimension in which Mexico ranks higher than other Latin countries, with a rank of 81, compared to an average of 70. This is indicative of a high level of inequality of power and wealth within the society. This condition is not necessarily subverted upon the population, but rather accepted by the culture as a whole.

2. Individualism

Mexico has a low Individualism (IDV) ranking (30), but is slightly higher than other Latin countries with an average 21. The score on this Dimension indicates that the society is Collectivist as compared to Individualist. This is visible by observing Mexicans' close long-term commitment to the member 'group', such as their immediate family, extended family, or extended relationships. Loyalty in a collectivist culture is paramount, and overrides most other societal rules and regulations. The society fosters strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group.

We consider our Mexican Culture, as a complex paradox because it is a culture in which it is important to belong to a group, but team work is a weakness in most of Mexican organizations.

3. Masculinity

Mexico has the second highest Masculinity (MAS) ranking in Latin America (69). This indicates that the country experiences a higher degree of gender differentiation of roles. The male dominates a significant portion of the society and power structure. This situation generates a female population that becomes more assertive and competitive, although not at the level of the male population.

Those who are born and grown in Mexico agree that Mexico is a country in which men have concentrated the power of leading and making decisions in politics, in the family group and in most aspects of the day to day life. The Mexican culture shows the predominance of masculinity. But on the other hand, women in the role of mothers, are almost venerated in Mexico. Anyway the important decisions at most of Mexican families are taken by men. Women as mothers are considered almost sacred. The strongest family link is with the mother. However this relation is an emotional link, similar to a love and hate relationship simultaneously, because women do not make the important decisions of the family and sometimes even nowadays often cannot make decisions about their own life. For all these factors, we consider that this Dimension in our culture is also a complex paradox.

4. Uncertainty Avoidance

Mexico's highest Hofstede Dimension is Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) (82), indicating the society's low level of tolerance for uncertainty. As a result of this high Uncertainty Avoidance characteristic, the society does not readily accept change and is very risk adverse.

We also agree with Hofstede in relation to this Dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance. We have seen all around Mexico, that it is very hard for most of Mexican people, to face uncertainty. We have a low level of tolerance for uncertainty. For this reason, many people prefer to be an employee rather than an employer. In our culture, you have to struggle very hard with your traditional cultural limitations if you dare to become a successful entrepreneur. Most of the people prefer to feel secure. For that reason Mexican people usually choose to look for a job, instead of taking the responsibilities of starting their own business.

5. Hofstede has not included the fifth dimension, Long Term Orientation (LTO) in his studies about Mexican Culture. However, we have the experience that in Mexican Culture, we find more often a short term orientation. It has always been hard to design long term plans and to follow them, specifically in the government sector in our country. We are more concerned about what is urgent, but not as often about what is really important. It is very hard to follow long term plans successfully. However, private institutions of all types, are pushing hard to change this aspect of our Mexican society, developing long term plans and following up on their adequate execution.

Hofstede with his theory helps us to classify and understand cultures around the world. However culture is a dynamic reality and it is not so simple to classify in these fixed

categories. Mexico is changing gradually. Women are becoming competitive professionals. But cultural changes bring challenges with them.

Geert Hofstede gives us a glance of Mexican culture, seeing it from the outside of it.

There are other authors that have studied our culture from the inside of it. One of them, was Octavio Paz, a world wide recognized Mexican writer, Nobel Prize of Literature in 1990. The prolific critic and cultural analyst Octavio Paz is considered by many to be the foremost poet of Latin America.

Octavio Paz has long been recognized as Mexico's foremost writer and critic. *The labyrinth of solitude* is a beautifully written study about Mexico's quest for identity. According to Octavio Paz this work was an exercise of the critical imagination; a vision and simultaneously a revision of our identity.

In this text, Octavio Paz revises, expands and rectifies his ideas of his country, history and culture; some thoughts of the peculiarities of the Mexican political system; and lastly an original scrutiny that delves into the principles on which Mexico and the United States were founded and into the relations between the two countries.

Octavio Paz asked himself and their readers this question:

“What are we? How can we fulfil our obligations to ourselves as we are?”

He thought that the answers we give to these questions are often influenced by history. Paz considered that although there might be a certain national character that influences an individual's perception of what we are and our expectations, there is also the possibility that in certain situations the answer may differ to what would be considered a national character.

Octavio Paz said that the Mexican character is not an essence, but a history. (Paz,1985). He was intrigued not so much by the “national character”, as by what that character conceals. As Octavio Paz wrote: “by what is behind the mask”.

Octavio Paz considers that Mexican people are always “behind the mask”. It means that we are trying to protect ourselves, through hiding our own reality, maybe because we are reluctant to accept what we really are.

He thinks that there was a terrible wound caused by the Conquest and that our gestures and expressions even today, attempt to hide this wound, which is still always open, always ready to catch fire and burn under the rays of a stranger's glance (Paz, 1985).

Octavio Paz wrote about the “mestizo” condition of the Mexican culture. He concluded that Mexicans hardly recognize their Indian origins.

There is a historical exclusion of La Malinche (the female slave given to the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés) who started with the mixed ethnic reality of the Mexican people. But Mexicans do not want to be neither Indians nor Spaniards. For that reason, our “*mestizo*” reality is contradictory, not feeling proud of neither their indigenous ancestors nor of the warrior conquerors that made the indigenous people of Latin America their slaves. This attitude is revealed in the course of our history and even today, in our daily lives, to the extent that to call someone an “*indio*” is used in a discriminatory and insulting manner. The indigenous people were defeated and their land and richness was taken away from them. Even nowadays the small indigenous communities in Mexico often lack resources to find their way in life.

Octavio Paz wrote this study in the eighties, but around 50 years before, we had another Mexican writer: Samuel Ramos who wrote, in 1934, “The profile of Man and Culture in Mexico” (“*El Perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en México*”). In his research he establishes the basis of the same thesis that Octavio Paz used in his work in relation to our culture.

Samuel Ramos was born in 1897 and died in 1959. He studied Philosophy and wrote several studies along his life. He received his doctoral degree at the National University of Mexico “*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*”, one of the most prestigious public institutions of higher education in Mexico. He was a professor there but he also worked with the Ministry of Education.

His philosophical speculations on man and culture in Mexico influenced post-1945 writers.

In his work, titled “*The profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*”, he elaborated the first study about a phenomenon that is not exclusive from Mexico: the cultural male-chauvinism also known as “*machismo*”. Ramos has a critic perspective about this behaviour.

We believe that the male-chauvinism or “*machismo*” is a cultural pattern that influences some men, which has become as a stereotype of Mexican male. It is important to mention that this attitude is not necessarily a deliberate choice of all men, but a significant influence of the education they received at home, at school and the influence of role models in their communities. It is also a gender role for male Mexicans.

It is a characteristic behaviour of some men that try to look excessively masculine and who frequently have a violent behaviour. Samuel Ramos considers that the “*machismo*” is the result of an inferiority complex. He traces its origins in the Conquest; as we know, Mexico was conquered by the Spaniards in the XVI century and the original cultures disappeared when the Western Civilization was imposed by force.

Ramos considered that the “*machismo*” is characteristic of a stereotype of men that was commonly named as the “*pelado*”. He sees the “*pelado*”, the “urban bum” of the 1920s and 1930s, as “the most elemental and clearly defined expression of national character”. The “*machismo*” of the “*pelado*”, he argues, is the result of an inferiority complex. Since the “*pelado*” represents for Samuel Ramos a symbol of the entire country, the “character study” is extended to all of Mexico, and was one of the first post-Revolutionary attempts to define and assess the national character.

In our days most of the people do not use the term “*pelado*” to designate a non-educated person whose behaviour is socially unacceptable. Nowadays, most of the people use another word to designate this kind of persons. We just say “*macho*”.

In our culture “*machismo*” implies a behaviour that in the recent years has been widely criticized by educated people. We think that “*machismo*” or male chauvinism in Mexico is like the 2 sides of a coin. One side of it is the violent, ignorant, rebel, disrespectful and insecure male individual, who often shows himself as a dominant vs. women and sometimes even acts violently against them. The male-chauvinist does not like women to be more educated than him, verbally insults women and takes action even as professionals with the intention to deliberately minimize and criticize the contributions of women in the work place. They often label women with despicable adjectives and live under the paradigm that women cannot be successful in the work environment since their role belongs at home, growing children and watching soap operas. The male-chauvinist often shows an insolent attitude and will likely engage into physical fights with others to show his power.

However, the other side of the coin of the “*machismo*” was not only tolerated, but also considered as completely natural and even as desirable in some social classes. You can see examples of this stereotyped behaviour in Mexican movies from the 1940’s and 1950’s with actors such as Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete who were actors and singers of traditional Mexican songs. They became idols for Mexican people, through their charismatic, cheerful, and courageous personality often adored by women. They established the concept of how a male in Mexico should act like, to be a model of manhood, men who should never cry, who should be served by women in their meals, in their laundry, etc. they however, should be respectful to women and specially adore their mothers, considering that their mothers and sisters are the most pure images of women. However, there charismatic characters would seek to be attractive to women and make several women fall in love with them. These women often seek to be “protected” by these charismatic male individuals.

These are the 2 sides of what “*machismo*” means for Mexican people and since it is not an entirely negative social image, women often continue to educate their male children in a different way than they do their female children, which contributes to perpetuate this 2 sided coin in the Mexican culture.

Ramos and Paz were two important writers that depicted an image that many Mexicans do not want to see. Their works are like mirrors that show us the hidden aspects of our identity, in other words, what is “behind the mask”.

We would like to add that “*machismo*” is an attitude that some men in Mexico have, but it does not necessary have to be related to a specific social-economic level.

It is important to say that these studies present some generalizations that reflect the stereotypes we have conformed through the centuries. However, culture is a dynamic reality and many of these features of our culture are nowadays gradually disappearing.

Culture and values

It is not possible to examine culture without considering values, the core of the culture. Values reflect a culture's view towards such central issues such as politics, economics, religion, aesthetics, interpersonal relationships, ethics, morality and the environment. Cultural differences and even conflicts arise from the fact that individuals, regional groups and national societies order these values in differing hierarchies. (Brislin et al, 1986)

Brislin defines some characteristics of culture:

- Culture consists of ideals, values, and assumptions about life that guide specific behaviours
- Culture is transmitted from generation to generation, with the responsibility given to parents, teachers, religious leaders, and respected elders in the community. (Brislin, 1993)

As we mentioned before, Hofstede compared culture to an “onion” with different layers, where the values would be the central part of the “onion”. He describes values as “broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (1991).

Brislin and partners, explain values as: “the weights with which people evaluate or judge their world. People make judgments or conclusions about what is and what is not of value; about what is well seen and what is not. These give rise to certain presuppositions from which every human group behave with little or no conscious awareness”. (Brislin et al, 1986)

Their arguments are that cultural values are attached to groups of people, and that such groups are often defined by national identities.

It is important to determine the values that guide people’s behaviour, to understand it in its context.

Culture and leadership

Culture influences the way people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitudes toward life. (Geertz, 1973). Culture is supported by beliefs, values and ideologies that distinguish one group from another. (Dimmock and Walker, 2000).

Leadership practices and styles are also influenced by culture. Culture gives leadership different and varied forms. Some aspects of leadership are universal and others are particular to a culture (Slater et al, 2003).

Women’s leadership practices are clearly influenced by culture. It is imperative to understand how culture and values are related to women’s leadership development if we want to improve educational administration and the quality of education in educational institutions led by women.

6. Methodology

We decided to use Focus Groups and Open-Ended interviews, to explore the perceptions that women who are Principals or Directors in Educational Institutions have about women's leadership in Mexico. Both data gathering methods belong to qualitative research.

- **What are focus groups?**

There are many definitions of a focus group in the literature, but features like organized discussion, collective activity, social events and interaction, identify the contribution that focus groups make to social research.

David Morgan (1998) considers that focus groups are a Research Method. They are first and foremost a method of gathering research data to explore people's perceptions about a specific topic. Focus groups are designed by researchers for a well defined purpose. A fair amount of planning goes into focus groups. Focus groups create concentrated conversations that might never occur in other contexts.

A focus group is a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment from personal experience on the topic that is the subject of the research. It involves organized discussion to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic.

Focus group interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic. One of the benefits of focus group research is that it helps us to gain insight into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation. (Gibbs,1997).

For this exploratory research, we selected a group of female and male Principals and Directors in Educational Institutions, working in the public and private sector in Mexico to explore their perceptions on women's leadership in Mexico.

Four focus groups were conducted in Mexico City in the spring of 2006. A convenience sample of Principals and Directors in Education was selected to be invited to participate. They were all in a range between 30 and 50 years of age.

Two of the focus groups were composed by Principals of Basic Education Institutions (10) and the other two groups were composed of Principals and Directors in Higher Education. (10).

In addition to Focus Groups, we conducted Open Ended interviews with Directors of Educational Institutions, including Museums and an Institute for women development as well. (10).

- **What are Open Ended interviews?**

Open Ended interviews are conducted face-to-face with the respondent so the subject matter can be explored in detail. They allow the respondent (interviewee) to provide additional information, ask broad questions without a fixed set of answers, and explore paths of questioning which may occur to the interviewer spontaneously during the interview. An open-ended approach allows for an exploratory approach to uncover unexpected information, used especially when the exact issues of interest haven't been identified yet.

Structured and open-ended approaches may be combined. For instance, an interview can begin with structured questions, and once the quantifiable data is covered, open up discussion with the interviewee into other areas. In fact this was the situation: structured questionnaire and open-ended interviews. Both data were very important for this research. The oral responses from the individual open-ended interviews enriched the information they already gave through answering the questionnaire in a written form.

Open-ended interviews invite long answers. Pre-coding loses the rich detail in the data. They require qualitative analysis techniques.

We had a total of 30 women, Principals and Directors in Education, who were interviewed through these two methods.

Open Ended interviews were conducted with 30 male Principals of Basic and Higher Educational Institutions to explore their perceptions about women's leadership in Mexico.

In the end we interviewed 60 individuals in total, 30 female and 30 male Principals and Directors from Basic and Higher Educational Institutions in Mexico City.

The Focus Groups sessions lasted around 90 minutes and the Open Ended personal interviews lasted around 30 minutes each.

In both cases, the participants responded in writing and orally to the following questions:

1. Which is the impact of culture and values in women's leadership development in Mexico?
2. What are the most important values of women's leadership in Mexico?
3. Which is the leadership profile of women Principals and Directors of Education in Mexico?
4. How does women's leadership impact the educational institutions' development?

We added a one more question to the 4 original research questions:

5. Which are the main challenges that women Principals and Directors of Educational Institutions face in Mexico?

All participants received the same written questionnaire which they filled out prior to the Focus Groups and the Open Ended interviews.

The written responses were used as a starting point to explore the thoughts of the participants about these aspects. The oral responses from the focus groups, constituted valuable group generated knowledge about this matter. Their answers revealed how they found empathy or differences with the responses of the other members of the focus groups.

Qualitative analysis seeks to capture the richness of people's experience in their own terms.

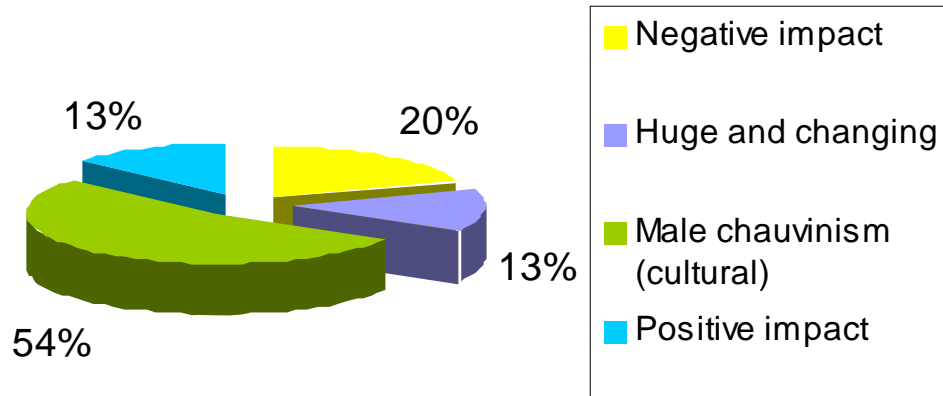
For this study, we used the qualitative research methodology for data analysis, grounded theory and narrative summary analysis, but we also used quantitative tools to have a visual representation of our findings.

7. Findings

We have summarized the types of answers that were gathered through the Focus Groups and the Open Ended interviews and developed the following quantitative and graphical findings.

Question #1

1. Which is the impact of culture and values in women's leadership development in Mexico?

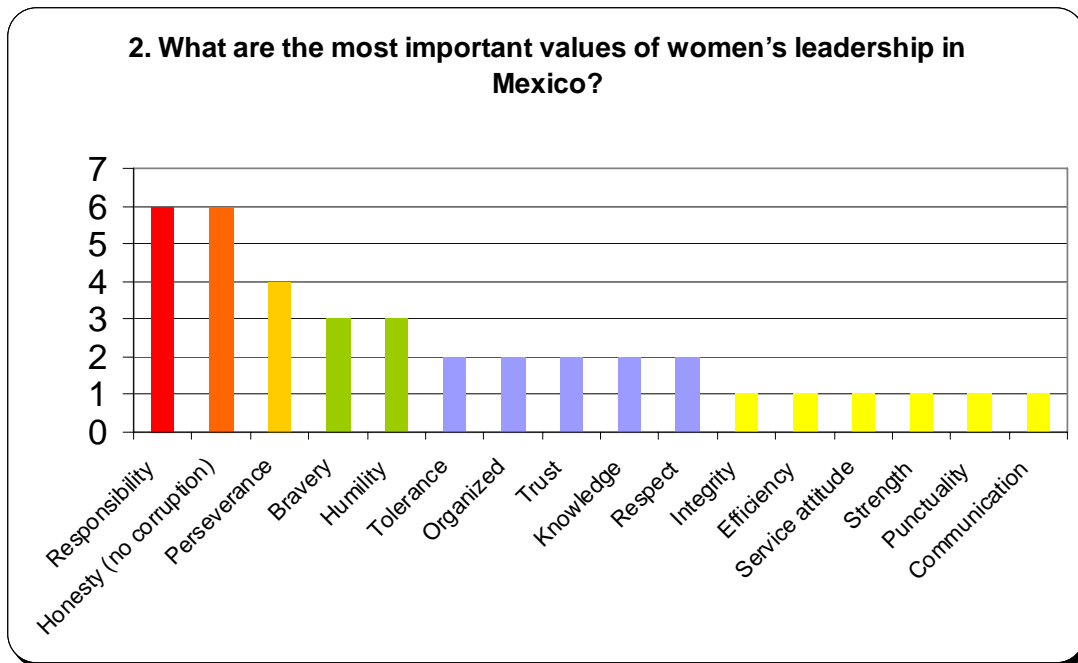


The most relevant finding in the answers to this question is that it is considered that the impact of culture and values in women's leadership development in Mexico is **negative**, mainly due to the **male chauvinist** environment. In other words, that culture limits the acceptance of the abilities of women to succeed in the work environment, therefore influencing as a negative impact. We name male-chauvinism as "*machismo*".

Most people consider that women have many obstacles that limit them from achieving their goals. It is broadly recognized that it is difficult for women in Mexico to do their job without limitations due to cultural factors. Most of these limitations are imposed by male chauvinist attitudes that are tolerated by the society in general.

It was made patent that the group of people interviewed perceived that discrimination against women exists and that it is a barrier for them to develop effective leadership. However, 13% did consider that the culture has a huge impact on women's leadership. In addition, another 13% considered that our culture has a positive impact in women's leadership development in Mexico. This answer could reveal that our culture is gradually changing.

Question #2

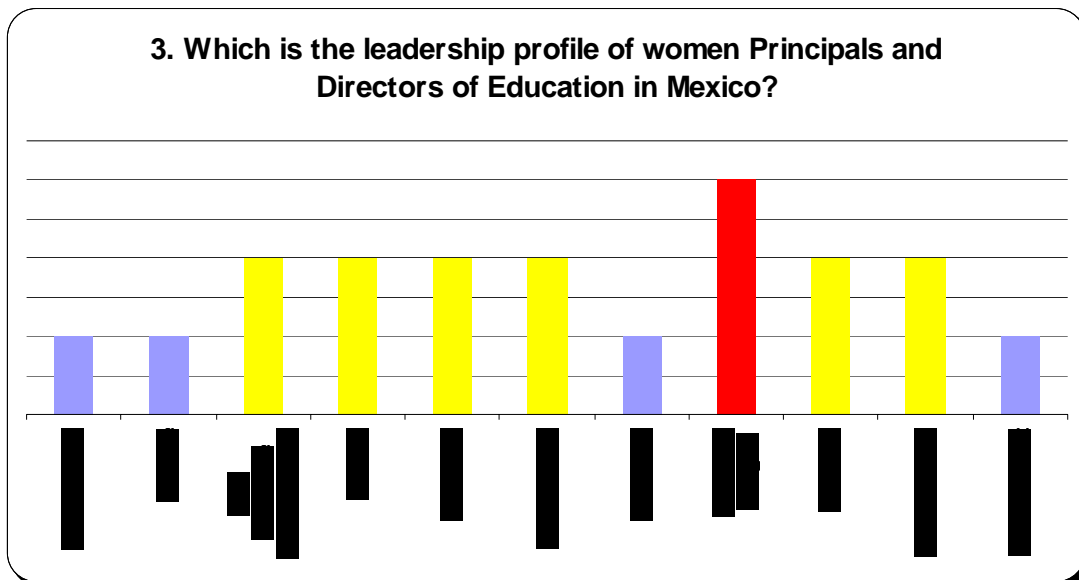


The most important values considered in women's leadership in Mexico are mainly the **Responsibility** and **Honesty**, both with the same ranking. There is another value which appears to be important and characteristic of women in Mexico: **Perseverance**.

It is interesting to mention that there have been some other studies that find the same values as the most important ones for Mexican people. Among these studies, we find a research that was performed around in 1996 which was focused on identifying the most important cultural values for Mexican people, designed and conducted by Alduncin et al, funded by a very important financial institution in our country: Banamex.

Another study titled *Diagnóstico* designed for the Treasury Department of Mexico - *Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (SHCP)*, under the initiative of the *Servicio de Administración Tributaria (SAT)* was developed by Elizabeth Iturbe (co-author of the current study), along with a group of researchers from *Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN)*, which shows significant coincidences with these findings above (Alvarez, Iturbe et al., 2005). This research took place with the objective to perform a national diagnostic study to understand the impact of the values of the Mexican people in relation to a Tax payment culture.

Question #3

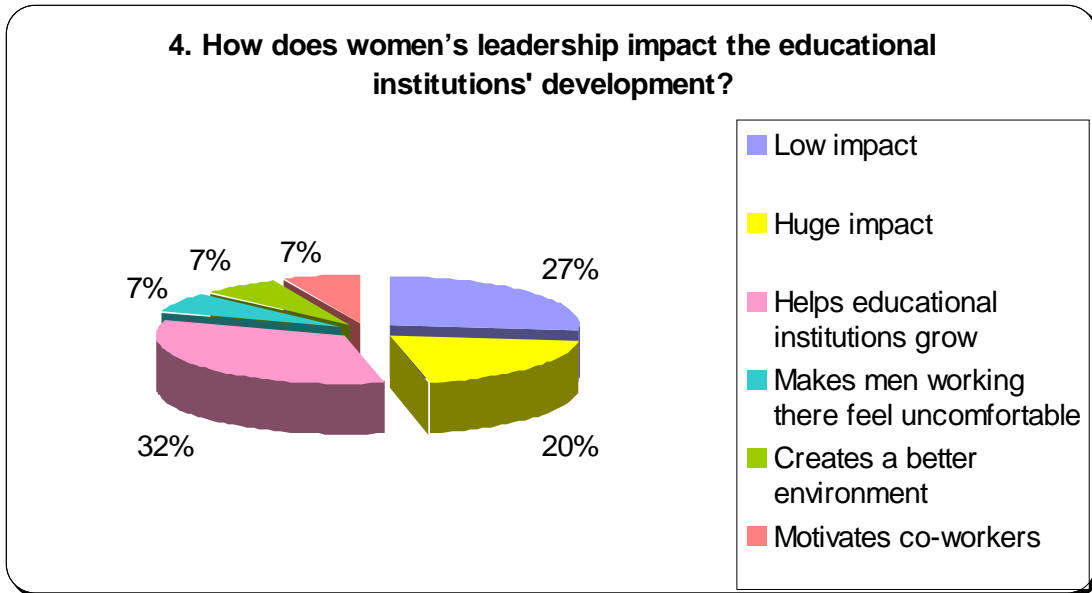


The main leadership profile feature associated with women Principals and Directors of Educational Institutions in Mexico is **being able to delegate** effectively.

The interviewees expressed that women are usually considered to be **good listeners, adaptable, intuitive, sensitive** and **well informed**. However, some people considered that after dealing with all the cultural obstacles that are commonly present, women usually achieve some leadership profile with certain **masculine characteristics**.

The characteristics of the profile mentioned in third place pictured women as **self confident, authoritarian** but **optimistic**.

Question #4

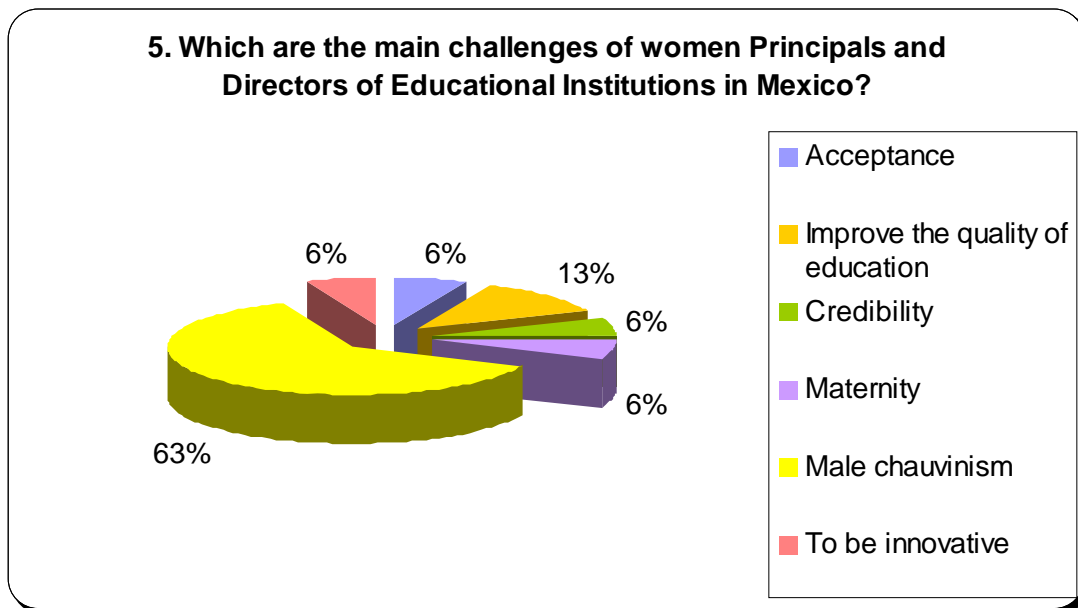


While **32%** of our interviewees considered that women's leadership **helps educational institutions grow** and **20%** that it has a **Huge impact** on educational institutions development, **27%** considered that women's leadership has a **Low impact**.

Some people consider that women's leadership may create a better environment for working (7%) and that it also motivates co-workers (7%).

On the other hand, 7% of the interviewed people considered that women's leadership make men feel uncomfortable when working under a woman's supervision, and that this has a negative impact on the educational institutions.

Question #5



The main challenge of women Principals and Directors of Education in Mexico is dealing with **male chauvinism**: “*machismo*” (63%).

This cultural barrier limits women’s careers and ends up having a negative impact on their access to higher levels in Educational Organizations, as well as in the effectiveness of their leadership in Mexico.

The interviewees also shared that due to the resistance of teachers and professors to accept women’s authority, there are significant challenges for women to lead improvements to the quality of education in their institutions (13%).

This resistance is assumed to come not only from male teachers and professors, but also from their female counterparts, who do not always embrace a positive attitude towards other women’s capabilities.

8. Implications

Women's leadership in Educational Institutions of Basic Education could seem at first sight as legitimized for historical reasons, since to become a teacher in an Elementary School has been a common female profession since the last years of the nineteenth century in Mexico. However, most of the Schools in our country have male Principals. Just in the recent years, women have been designated as Principals in almost half of Elementary Schools of our country. Many men do not find it attractive to become a teacher of a Basic Education institution, since it requires studies that are equivalent to other university professions; teachers have to study for 4 years to achieve their undergraduate diploma. Other university professionals can find jobs with significant higher salaries than those earned by Basic Education institution teachers. This has impacted men's choice while deciding to become a teacher or not. On the contrary, many women are attracted to become teachers, since this profession allows them to combine this job with responsibilities at home, working usually less than 8 hours a day and unlikely required to work overtime to complete their duties. Women who teach in Basic Education institutions play accepted gender role, which has been a traditional profession for women not only in Mexico, but also in many other countries around the world.

Just 25 years ago, it was not necessary to reach even Middle Education to start studies to become a teacher of Basic Education, people were only required to study Elementary and Secondary school as a pre-requisite to start their studies at specialized institutions focused exclusively on training Basic Education teachers.

For all these reasons and others already mentioned in this study, the presence of women as Principals of Basic Education institutions has increased in recent years.

There is a common belief that being a woman makes things harder, because women have to provide additional evidence that they are doing a good job. Cultural stereotypes are slowing down the development of women's leadership in Educational Institutions. Women are sometime trying to impose themselves playing a dominant role in the workplace and in their communities, because they believe that imitating male attitudes is the way to gain respect. This style is however not always welcomed by their subordinates.

We can relate our findings with Hofstede's Dimension of Masculinity that identifies Mexico with one of the highest rankings of Latin America. It has consequences on how roles are assumed in our society. Women have been traditionally dominated by men, and the society is just gradually changing towards a more accepting environment. We coincide with both Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos in the understanding that the male chauvinist environment limits the possibilities of women's leadership in Mexico, including in the Educational Institutions.

The interviewees both male and female from the Basic Education Institutions mentioned with a high emphasis that male chauvinism was an important barrier to women's

leadership, and the incidence of this remark decreased as we interviewed Principals and Directors of Higher Education Institutions.

Male Principals openly recognized the existence of male chauvinism or “*machismo*” in Mexico and considered it to be a barrier to the development of women’s leadership. The fact that there is awareness of the this barrier is the first step to embrace cultural change.

Female Principals and Directors in Higher Education Institutions however shared an optimistic view, with high confidence that the culture is changing and opening more opportunities for female professionals to be successful. This is a vision that is shared by most of the women in high level authority positions in the Ministry of Education in Mexico.

There has been a recent creation of new Institutions focused on supporting the development of women leaders in Mexico, some of which are sponsored by the government while others are sponsored by private education institutions.

We would like to quote some of the most important statements made by our interviewees:

- “Being a female and becoming a Principal, is a big challenge. You have to earn the trust and respect of your male peers and subordinates”.
- “You have to demonstrate to everyone that you are strong enough to be an effective Principal”.
- “I don’t know yet any woman who is a true leader. I know women who are bosses, but not women who are leaders.”
- “I don’t think that women accept their feminine characteristics to develop their leadership style.”
- “Many women don’t believe that women can be leaders.”
- “Mexico doesn’t have a culture in which leader women are appreciated.”
- “Maternity is perceived as a weakness for women at work, it limits their careers and is often an obstacle to be hired or promoted in the workplace”.

9. Conclusions

We consider that the objective of our research was fully accomplished, since throughout the answers of our interviewees we were able to understand broad option of perceptions of one same subject. People’s points of view could be completely opposite in some cases and in others materially uniform.

Our research helped us to relate our findings with the contributions of Hofstede, Ramos and Paz as it relates to the understanding of culture and values. It is clear that their vision is still valid in the current Mexican culture.

The findings in this research as it relates to the values in the Mexican culture in the development of women's leadership coincide with the findings of other researches, performed by ourselves and by other researches like Alduncin.

It is interesting to note that our interviewees underlined the ability to delegate as one of the key elements of the profile of women's leadership. We assume this is related to the cultural environment of uncertainty avoidance in Mexico, which naturally inclines individuals towards norms and regulations to diminish uncertainty. The interviewees shared their expectation that the ability to delegate effectively should be an important skill that women leaders should master.

We found that throughout our research, female and male professionals shared the point of view that women appear to be developing a leadership style that differs from the stereotype of male's leadership style. Starting to leverage from their own feminine nature, incorporating aspects like their sensitivity, intuition, empathy and emotional intelligence into the work place. It was clearly stressed out that women show a significantly higher commitment to work and to succeed and legitimize their contributions in the work environment, their presence and the value that they bring to society. Women are recognized to be often more accurate, more responsible and more honest. They are considered more trustable than men where corruption might be a temptation at work. Some women shared their perception of the importance of sense of humor as a desirable feature in feminine leadership styles.

Some Directors of Higher Education Institutions shared with us that the existence of a "glass ceiling" cannot be denied or hidden. This seems to emphasize the belief that women are still in disadvantage to compete for the top level career opportunities against their male counterparts, not only in the Educational Environment, but clearly in all professions.

The cultural barriers are beginning to collapse, the gender roles have started to change, especially in the latest generations, where men and women contribute to the house income in a extremely competitive economic environment. They share roles and responsibilities as it relates to daily home activities.

In cultural organizations, such as Art Museums, women Directors have found fewer obstacles to succeed and have broken the "glass ceiling".

Women are gradually gaining legitimacy in the Mexican society and it is expected that in the near future they will reach a higher number of Principals and Directors positions in the Educational Institutions. We believe that it is throughout education that a positive cultural change can be accelerated. This is likely going to be the way to reach gender equality in our country in the coming years.

Female Principals and Directors in Higher Education Institutions shared an optimistic view, with high confidence that the culture is changing and opening more opportunities for female professionals to be successful. This is a vision that is shared by most of the young women in high level authority positions in the Ministry of Education in Mexico and in

prestigious Universities and other Educational Institutions. This represents an important hope for the future of our country.

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