



## **A more altruistic world through female leadership?**

The fight for women to gain access to leadership positions must be at the heart of the evolution of businesses and of our organizational models. This not only means arguing for legitimate equality but also understanding that without women these organizations are depriving themselves of precious assets.

I've often heard the Dalai Lama say he is a firm-believer in feminism. This is how he explains his reasoning: « Nomadic hunting-gathering tribes were equalitarian societies not governed by any chief. Then came the age of sedentary agriculture and the start of wealth accumulation. Trouble-makers emerged and it became necessary to call on chiefs to maintain order. Physical strength being essential to the task, the domination of men began. Then came the age of education, intelligence and reason, fields where men and women are

equal. Though there is still much progress to be made, we have all more or less stepped into the age of equality between men and women».

«If we want to prepare the future, it seems like the ultimate quality, the one society needs most, is altruism, the willingness to take care of others and feel concern for them. And women tend to be more thoughtful and compassionate than men. This may be originally due to their maternal instinct which drives them to be particularly attentive to their child's needs—to wonder if they are aching, if they are thirsty—and to be more willing than men to show affection and compassion. Faced with the need to promote the development of a more altruistic society, it seems desirable then to enter the «age of women». So as far as I'm concerned, I am a « feminist. »

The patriarchal system prevails in most hierarchical businesses and institutions leading to, among other things, women being under-represented in positions of responsibility and power.

The essence of a leader hence resides in his or her influence, meaning the ability to transmit values to the greatest number of people. These ideas of value and influence invite us to choose and determine what we want to be, the organizational framework we wish to embody, as well as decide what we wish to pass on and leave behind for future generations.

What are our intentions? To perpetuate sexist stereotypes which turn women's lives into mazes and convey a false image of masculinity which contributes to social imbalances? Or do we choose to evolve collectively?

Frédéric Laloux worked for a large company for many years, and this has left him deeply unsatisfied. In his outstanding book *Reinventing organizations*, he notes that in many businesses only the masculine part—determination, rationality, rigidity—is valued. The feminine mindset is kept hidden, under veil, or simply abandoned. This rejection of consideration for others, of cooperation, of empathic sensibility, of our vulnerability, leads to emotional imbalance which often leads to a burnout.

Whatever our biological makeup, we are all toyed with diverse emotions. Everyone fears suffering and aspires to happiness. The masculine norms which permeate current management models underestimate the importance of emotions (though they come to play in all our decisions) and don't sufficiently take into account motivations beside personal interest, such as altruism and solidarity.

As economist Denis Sower points out, «it is time to listen to the voice of care, alongside the voice of reason». The voice of thoughtfulness is necessary. It is based on a different interpretation of human nature and can bring into companies and the economy, as in our existence, empathy—the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes—, compassion for those who are suffering, and altruism—which includes all these qualities. Added onto the voice of reason, the voice of care can fundamentally change our willingness to contribute to commonwealth.

Actively pursuing ethical training and the inclusion of women at leadership positions is a true necessity. Being aware of the complementarity that exists between the feminine and masculine mindsets, at the individual as well as at the societal level, within public and private institutions, could allow us to consider situations from a more open perspective, develop our inner potentials as well as collectively bring about a social equilibrium that is crucial for our future.

