

Leadership in the cultural & creative industry (CCI)

Can women leaders effect change?

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About the CCI

If you think of a famous architect, writer, fashion designer, what name comes into your mind? There's a pretty good chance you think of **a man** talking about a creative professional: Gaudi, Le Corbusier, Ernest Hemmingway, William Shakespeare, Giorgio Armani, Karl Lagerfeld, etc.

Other question. If a man reaches a top position, he's often considered as an "audacious" manager, although that doesn't say anything about his character. But an intrepid female leader is often called "a bitch" and that is close to an evil creature...

These two introductory examples are rather stereotypical references to the subject of the theme: creativity and management in the cultural and creative industry.

As former CEO of Flanders Fashion Institute I saw quite a few business failures in fashion, design, media, publishing, arts and music. But these failures made me understand the hardships

that the creative and cultural industries encounter and the challenges they are facing.

The so-called CCI is a fairly young industry, lacking the tradition-based legacy of other professions and being built on the endless desire for innovation and originality.

Management, entrepreneurship and leadership in the CCI are a calling, a vocation. All people involved are quite passionately in the work they are doing.

Generally speaking CCI refers to: “industries that have their origin in individual creativity, talent and skills, which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”.

CCI is a collective term for 15 sub-industries, comprising businesses and not for profit organizations: literature, music, performing arts, visual arts, film, museums and libraries, heritage services, publishing, sound recording, television and radio, video and computer games, advertising, architecture, design and fashion.

CCI businesses and organizations

The CCI differs from other sectors through its informal organizational structures and focus on creative decisions and processes.

Most *businesses* operate on a small-scale. You will find more micro-enterprises in this sector than in other.

Referring to *business entities* there are three layers: small to very small independent producers; quasi-independent subsidiaries serving larger firms; and very large companies (often multi-nationals) in fields, such as filmmaking, fashion and publishing.

As far as not-for-profit *organizations* are concerned, a substantial number is subsidized and currently going through hard times because money is being cut all the time.

Globally the CCI continues to grow at an overwhelming pace.

As to ensure future economic success the CCI has to cope with technology “the Internet of things”, new business models, mobility, diversity and migration.

To meet the CCI's demands its leaders have to take responsibility AND excel in operational management: they need to develop a strategy, elaborate a convincing business plan, take care of budget control and cash flow planning, negotiate with banks and other investors, consider public-private partnerships or crowdfunding.

How does the profile of a leader in the CCI look like?

Is it a creative person with management skills, or a general manager with affinity for culture and creativity?

In fact we can distinguish two types. I have met some culturally-creatively oriented business school-trained managers with their cultural heart in the right place, and a few artistic leaders with a well developed management toolbox.

Approximately 80% of the workforce in the CCI has a creative background and little or no experience in leadership. Many of them lack the appropriate skills to lead a team of creative professionals. They are more concerned with delivering their creative product, rather than actually stepping into the

management and leader role. Now, inexperienced management and leadership capabilities may affect the organization or business in such way that it ends up with burnouts, loss of talent, fall in sales and finally bankruptcy.

Following this tension, there is a great need to strengthen organizational and entrepreneurial competences of talented creative professionals.

Over the years I have experienced that many artists, designers, musicians, and others are not really 'interested' in the business side. Consequently, training them in leadership and entrepreneurship is not obvious at all.

Women can make the difference

Researchers of the University of Arizona and McGill University had already indicated and once again have reinforced the view that organizations and businesses with women in senior roles and on the Board tend to provide more inspiring environments for other women to rise to leadership AND show improved

performance, better growth and return on equity.

That's why the CCI, which is highly risky, very client driven with tight and demanding deadlines, definitely needs more women in business; as manager, CEO, director, chairwoman, entrepreneur, business associate, coach or mentor in order to make a strong bond with creative talents.

Now, **why** women? What do women have more than men? And I'm not referring to sexiness, and I'm not particularly a feminist either. No, it's simple: *wherever people are more willing to try new things, you'll find a place where women are better able to flourish and there is a relatively fast career path to leadership.*

So, the CCI is the ideal environment because it has to reinvent, renew continuously, and has a lot to recommend, when it comes to encouraging women into leadership roles. It's not perfect, of course. As in all other sectors, it can be a struggle to be a working mother in the CCI, but again due to the sector's willingness to innovate and try new things, it is a good habitat

for female leadership.

Personally, I strongly believe women should become more self-conscious and convinced that they are agile and able to think in new ways, handle risks, be quick on their feet to respond to the external world, find new alliances and partnerships, look ahead and decide where they are going to, irrespective of the challenges to funding, irrespective of the changes in the political and geographical landscape.

Understanding the CCI

Of course, leaders and managers need to have an understanding of how the CCI works. But in my opinion women are more open to gain insight in artistic and creative processes, speak the language of the creative talents and understand their emotions. Women also have a more collaborative approach in the way they lead, looking at working patterns, questioning the long working hours culture, introducing co-leadership, co-working spaces and co-creation. In other words: initiate shifts

and changes. We definitely need more women in key positions AND in the boardrooms of organizations and businesses in the CCI. And it will be interesting to see how those organizations and businesses further evolve under women because they haven't inherited them from men.

I'm well aware - from my experience in the publishing and fashion industry - that it's difficult for startups, micro-companies, to find the right manager to hire at an affordable salary and work in a tight knit.

Nevertheless, it is a prerequisite to the "scaling" of economic activities, something that small-sized creative enterprises need in order to grow, identifying export markets, but also finding paths to enter them, developing demand for new products.

To a certain extent I believe in the advantages of clustering in the CCI. Clusters are vertically disintegrated networks of production units that can function flexibly.

Clustering activities in one place or building creates a sense of community and stimulates peer-to-peer learning. But *respect*

and *privacy* for the individual creativity, and particularly the IP (intellectual property), have to be guaranteed. In these clusters and co-working spaces creative entrepreneurs can network and discuss their own entrepreneurial obstacles with mentors and experts or just have a chat with like-minded people.

Leaders in the CCI operating within *networks of cooperation* in cities or regions are often densely interconnected and a good example of the economics of proximity. The CCI can create local sustainable jobs, which are less prey to the ups and downs of the global economy.

These leaders thrive on informal networks through which they organize work, often supported by friends and family.

They opt for self-employment, freelancing and micro-businesses because of *independence*.

Some of them are ambitious but others want their business to stay small. Their attitude towards money is as ambivalent as their attitude to the market. In ways they are non-materialistic.

They are prepared to earn a relatively small income for long periods *as the price of doing what they want to do*.

However, they cannot cope with their business all by themselves and need to be managed or assisted.

Creative talents want to surprise their audience. That's what makes it difficult for a manager in the CCI. Because the manager has to surprise the creative talents: listen to them, feel their emotions, ambitions and dreams. But always keep the rational insight in mind, guide the creative talents: where are we going, what is our target, how are we going to reach that goal, how are we going to cope with budgetary constraints?

Challenges for women in the CCI

Although the CCI is perceived as "female friendly", women in positions of power and leadership are underrepresented. The movement of women into positions of leadership in business has been slow, despite anti-discrimination legislation and awareness of their leadership capabilities.

A barrier often observed is commonly described as the “glass ceiling”, *women with relevant qualifications and competencies are stopped in their advancement into leadership or positions of responsibility by an invisible barrier*. Gender inequalities may be one of the reasons, but *fear for failure* is another. Often *women themselves are the barrier* because of the way they think and condition themselves.

For many decades already Japanese business society offers an interesting model: the so-called *sempai-kohai relationship*. This senior-junior relationship is primarily a strong male-oriented bond in Japanese organizations (Cole, 1971). In a collectivistic environment as Japan, this “arranged business relationship” actually determines the career success in a corporate environment. Some Japanese consider it worse than marriage because you cannot choose it, you cannot change it, and if the sempai, the senior, is not well respected or connected in the organization, your career is essentially over. The mentor (sempai) and protégé (kohai) work not only inside the

organization, *but also socialize outside the organization.*

Unfortunately this particular bond is not open to Japanese women, limiting their opportunities within the organization.

That is the reason explaining the lack of women in management in Japan as a “demographic time bomb”. But in our Western context, I think we should apply this sempai-kohai relationship model to the CCI’s and especially to women. I believe senior women, 40+, 50+ and 60+ with business and organizational experience can fulfill an important role in the CCI, making a bond with a younger creative professional.

We have to dismantle the stereotypes that have dominated our society far too long: that women have not the skills, neither the intelligence nor the guts to reach goals. What we need is a female forward mindset: women who understand that equality does not depend on external factors, receive passively or obtain aggressively. But women who feel, think and radiate self- confidence. Not against men, but together with them.