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# Leadership in Organizations and the PR Department Work Quality

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## Abstract:

**Research question:** This paper examines the influence of individual leadership dimensions on individual public relations dimensions. The transformational and transactional leadership dimensions, as well as the ethical leadership behavioural dimensions were considered as the independent variables in the study. As the dependent variables, the dimensions of the PR department work quality were considered: Ethical and Responsible Action, Proactive and Quality Performance, Strategic and Effective Action, Media Relations and Internal Public Relations. The paper also analyzes the moderating effects of leaders' gender and leaders' age on the observed relationships. **Motivation:** Previous research linking leadership and public relations can generally be divided into two groups. One group of such studies addresses the impact of leadership on public relations (Topic, 2021; Meng & Neill, 2021). The other research group relates to examining and defining the characteristics of leadership in public relations (Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017; Killingsworth & Flynn, 2016; Hamrin, 2016). However, the impression gained is that there is a lack of research which focuses on measuring the direct impacts of individual leadership dimensions on individual public relations dimensions, especially at the organizational level. This is even more emphasized when examining the influence of the dimensions of transformational leadership and ethical leadership behaviour. **Idea:** The idea is that leadership in organizations has an impact on a number of individual and organizational performance indicators, including public relations and effectiveness in public relations. The paper also analyzes the moderating effects of leaders' gender and leaders' age on the observed relationships. **Data:** The research was carried out in Serbian companies. The respondents included PR managers, PR practitioners and marketing professionals. A total of 236 questionnaires were collected from 78 companies. **Tools:** The descriptive statistics for all of the observed dimensions. The correlation coefficients between the leadership dimensions and the PR department work quality dimensions. Regression analysis the leadership dimensions on the PR department work quality dimensions. Leaders' gender and age as a moderator of the observed relationships. **Findings:** Transformational leadership has a greater impact than transactional. The influence of the Contingent Punishment Behaviour dimension can be negative as can that of Intellectual Stimulation. Female and older leaders have a greater influence on the PR department work quality dimensions. The impression is that female and older leaders have a stricter, more decisive and emotional management style, so the results of the PR department are more aligned with such requirements. **Contribution:** Such research can create a theoretical basis for the practical action of leaders in the promotion of public relations, especially in terms of individual public relations dimensions.

**Keywords:** public relations, PR department work quality, transformational and transactional leadership, ethical leadership, Serbia

**JEL Classification:** L29, M19, M59

## 1. Introduction

There is a growing knowledge about leadership in management and business. Similarly, the knowledge about leadership styles grows (Thompson, 2000). Leadership in organizations can have a significant impact on work quality in PR departments because leadership provides direction, fosters communication, motivates teams, ensures resource availability, makes effective decisions, encourages innovations and resolves conflicts. A positive and effective leadership style contributes to a motivated and engaged PR team, ultimately

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leading to higher work quality. According to Meng (2013) the most desired leadership qualities for older PR managers were: strategic decision-making capability, ability to solve problems and produce desired results, and communication knowledge and expertise. For younger PR managers, the top three desired leadership qualities are: ability to solve problems and produce desired results, being trustworthy and dependable and relationship-building abilities (Meng, 2013).

Previous research linking leadership and public relations can generally be divided into two groups. One group of such studies addresses the impact of leadership on public relations. The idea is quite clear here: leadership in organizations has an impact on a number of individual and organizational performance indicators, including public relations and effectiveness in public relations. The influence of leadership is reflected on the quality of communication in the organization (Men & Jiang, 2016; Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015), PR professionals' engagement and satisfaction (Meng & Berger, 2019), the ethics of PR practitioners (Han et al., 2013; Ki et al., 2012), and effectiveness in public relations (Meng, 2012). The relationship between leadership and public relations is also indicated by Willis (2019). In a study conducted among PR practitioners in Russia (Erzikova & Berger, 2016), gender differences in the perceptions of professional leadership were examined. Russian women were shown to attach greater importance to leadership than Russian men.

The other research group relates to examining and defining the characteristics of leadership in public relations. Summarizing the results of these studies, it may be concluded that public relations require leadership with: strategic orientation (Meng & Berger, 2013; Luo & Jiang, 2014; Luo et al., 2015), human orientation and support (Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015; Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017), ethical orientation (Meng & Berger, 2013), professional competencies (Killingsworth & Flynn, 2016), and the ability to achieve quality communication (Meng & Berger, 2013; Hamrin, 2016; Hamrin et al., 2016; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015). These references, in fact, indirectly show that transformational leadership and ethical leadership behaviour are desirable leadership styles in public relations at the level of PR departments. It can be assumed that such leadership styles are also desirable at the organizational level, i.e., that such leadership styles by the CEO would generally favour public relations.

The foregoing points to the existence of a significant number of papers that examine the influence of leadership on public relations, as well as the factors of effective leadership in public relations. However, the impression gained is that this topic does not receive enough attention from researchers, and that there is a lack of research focusing on measuring the direct impacts of individual leadership dimensions on individual public relations dimensions, especially at the organizational level (top management leadership). This is even more emphasized when examining the influence of the dimensions of transformational leadership and ethical leadership behaviour, i.e., those leadership styles that are identified as desirable in public relations. Such research would create a theoretical basis for the practical action of leaders in the promotion of public relations, especially in terms of individual public relations dimensions.

The paper examines the influence of individual leadership dimensions on individual public relations dimensions. In doing so, the transformational and transactional leadership dimensions, as well as the ethical leadership behavioural dimensions, are viewed as independent variables. Transactional leadership is taken into account because this leadership style is favourable and useful when making comparisons with transformational leadership. The dimensions of the PR department (office, section) work quality are considered as dependent variables. Five dimensions of the PR department's work quality are observed: Ethical and Responsible Action, Proactive and Quality Performance, Strategic and Effective Action, Media Relations and Internal Public Relations. The paper also analyzes the moderating effects of leaders' gender and leaders' age on the observed relationships. The research was realized in companies in Serbia.

In a theoretical sense, the paper aims to discover the relationships between the observed leadership dimensions (the independent variables) and the observed PR department work quality dimensions (the dependent variables). It is also important to consider the effects of observed moderators (leaders' gender and leaders' age). This reflects the scientific contribution of the research, especially bearing in mind that these important relationships have not been investigated to a sufficient extent, either in Serbia or in general. In a practical sense, the aim of the paper is to, through the observation and understanding of observed relationships and moderating effects, identify the preferred directions of action of leaders towards raising the quality of the work of PR departments. The study results in the definition of certain practical implications and recommendations for optimizing the leadership approach in public relations, and in the function of improving the quality and effects of the work of this important business segment.

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

### 2.1 The relationships between leadership and public relations

Leadership establishes clear goals and encourages open communication. This allows the exchange of ideas, information and feedback, fostering a collaborative, and transparent environment in PR departments (Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017). Effective leaders help and motivate the teams and enhance engagement between employees, leading to higher work quality (Andersen et al., 2018), and this is important for PR since creativity and enthusiasm can significantly impact the success of campaigns. In addition, the leadership role in any organization is to provide support and resources, and having the right information can certainly impact the work quality in any PR team (Benn et al., 2010).

Some research studies address the impact of leadership on public relations at the organizational, strategic level. According to (Men & Jiang, 2016), authentic leadership, the organizational culture of supportiveness, emphasis on rewards and stability are significant predictors of an organization's symmetrical internal communication, as well as high levels of employee-organization relationships. Organizational culture and leader performance are strongly influenced by PR professionals' work engagement, trust and job satisfaction (Meng & Berger, 2019). Strategic leadership in public relations plays a significant role in facilitating effective public relations practice (Meng, 2012). In a study conducted in China (Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015), the impact of corporate communication channels on employee engagement was examined. It was shown that face-to-face interactions and social media are the most effective channels in building organizational transparency, authenticity and employee engagement. According to (Kim et al., 2017), organization-employee relationship quality is positively associated with organizational justice and negatively linked with authoritarian organizational culture. It should also be borne in mind that face-to-face interactions, organizational justice and authoritarian organizational culture are significantly influenced by leadership.

When PR department employees trust their leaders to make well-informed decisions, this can reduce uncertainty, improve trust and allow them to better focus on high-quality work (Jin, 2010). Higher trust in PR employees can also lead to better understanding, as leadership sets clear expectations and holds team responsible, it leads to higher commitment (Yang, 2012) and higher work quality. The relationship between leadership and the desired leadership behaviours, even more, the importance of reflexivity to leadership learning in the work place of public relation practitioners was investigated in the reference (Willis, 2019). A seven-dimensional model of excellent leadership in public relations was created by Meng et al. (2012). Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018) stated that gender considering studies about leadership in public relations can be found in a small number of references.

Organizational factors associated with leadership also impact the public relations ethical practices. Research into the antecedents of the professional ethics of PR practitioners in Korea (Han et al., 2013) found that organizational factors (such as: rewards, punishment, and peers' ethical behaviour) had a significant influence on the PR practitioners' professional ethics, especially among in-house practitioners. Similarly, Ki et al. (2012) found that an organization's ethical climate, along with top management support, positively and significantly affected the ethical practices of PR professionals in public relations firms. There is a link here in the opposite direction too: the ethical values and codes of professional PR associations give rise to six dominant themes regarding global ethical values and common cultural codes: (1) professionalism, (2) advocacy, (3) moral standards, (4) clients' interests, (5) expertise, and (6) relationships (Taylor & Yang, 2015).

Leadership of women in public relations was investigated in a number of research works (Topic, 2021; Madden & Levenshus, 2021; Meng & Neill, 2021; Neill & Meng, 2021). The reference (Meng & Neill, 2022) investigated ethical leadership from the point of view of female public relations professionals. In the aforementioned study it was found that female professionals state that multiple strategies are needed for one to become an ethical leader in public relations (Meng & Neill, 2022). According to (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Jin, 2010; Meng et al., 2012), examining leadership in PR, there were no significant differences between men and women as regards their leadership qualities and effectiveness.

### 2.2 Covenant leadership in public relations

A significant number of papers address the problem of covenant leadership in public relations, i.e., what kind of leadership is desirable in public relations. The research (Meng & Berger, 2013) proposes a model of excellent leadership in public relations, which has six major dimensions: self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship building, strategic decision making capability, and communication knowledge

management capability. Killingsworth and Flynn (2016) point to the importance of the competencies, skills and credentials of senior public relations / communications management leadership. Viewed from the perspective of employees, communicative leadership has significant advantages over authoritative leadership (Hamrin, 2016). Viewed from the perspective of enhancing co-worker agency, communicative leadership should include: facilitating autonomy, sharing responsibility, mutual participation, responsiveness and dialogue (Hamrin et al., 2016). Gambetti and Biraghi (2015) highlight the importance of the humanistic nature of the corporate communications officer as well as conversational leadership. Many leaders still see public relations as a source of positive publicity (Benn et al., 2010). Therefore, a greater involvement of PR professionals and leaders in CSR activities is suggested. Societal culture shapes leadership in public relations, and informal leadership development activities in particular (Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017).

Leadership is involved in addressing conflicts and challenges in a constructive manner, and leaders that can mediate conflicts within PR department create a better work environment (Jin, 2010). In the end, leaders foster a culture of innovation and adaptability, which is crucial in an industry such as PR, because it is constantly evolving. A leader that encourages experimentation and creative thinking can significantly innovative PR strategies and ultimately influence work quality (Zerfass & Huck, 2007). This should be taken into account in public relations leadership training.

The paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a statistically significant correlation between the leadership dimensions (transformational, transactional and ethical leadership behaviour) and the PR department work quality dimensions.

H2: There is a statistically significant predictive effect of the leadership dimensions (transformational, transactional and ethical leadership behaviour) on the PR department work quality dimensions.

The paper also examines the moderating effects of leaders' gender and leaders' age on the observed relationships. In this part of the research, the following hypotheses are posed:

H3: There is a moderating effect of leaders' gender on the relationship between the leadership dimensions and the PR department work quality dimensions.

H4: There is a moderating effect of leaders' age on the relationship between the leadership dimensions and the PR department work quality dimensions.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Survey instruments (measures)

##### PR department work quality

The questionnaire Quality of the work of the PR department in organizations was developed in the research (Nikolic et al., 2020). The questionnaire consists of 16 items arranged in 5 dimensions: Ethical and Responsible Action, Proactive and Quality Performance, Strategic and Effective Action, Media Relations and Internal Public Relations (Nikolic et al., 2020). The respondents evaluated the items on a seven point Likert scale.

##### Leadership

*Transformational leadership.* The Transformational Leadership Behaviour Inventory (TLI) questionnaire was used to measure transformational leadership (Podsakoff et al., 1990; MacKenzie et al., 2001). The questionnaire comprises 14 items arranged in four dimensions: 1. Core Transformational Leader Behaviour, 2. High Performance Expectations, 3. Supportive Leader Behaviour and 4. Intellectual Stimulation. The respondents evaluated each item on a seven point Likert scale.

*Transactional leadership.* For the measurement of transactional leadership, the questionnaire developed in the following references was used (Podsakoff et al., 1984; MacKenzie et al., 2001). The questionnaire consists of seven items distributed in two dimensions: 1. Contingent Reward Behaviour and 2. Contingent Punishment Behaviour. The respondents evaluated each item on a seven point Likert scale.

*Ethical leadership behaviour.* For the measurement of ethical leadership behaviour, the Ethical Leadership Scale was used (Brown et al., 2005). The questionnaire consists of 10 items (one dimension). The respondents evaluated each item on a seven point Likert scale.

### 3.2 Participants and data collection

The research was carried out in Serbian companies. The survey was conducted on the respondents completing questionnaires. The survey was conducted using interviews with respondents. The respondents included PR managers, PR practitioners and marketing professionals. A total of 236 questionnaires were collected from 78 companies. The sample included 147 (62.3%) male leaders and 89 (37.7%) female leaders. The sample comprised 127 (53.8%) leaders below 45 and 109 (46.2%) leaders over 45 years of age.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

The results of the descriptive statistics for the observed dimensions are shown in Table 1. In this table, the names of the dimensions, the short name for each dimension, the mean values, the standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha for each dimension can be seen. The Cronbach's alpha values are high and in the range from  $\alpha = 0.782$  to  $\alpha = 0.973$ .

**Table 1:** The descriptive statistics for all of the observed dimensions

Dimensions	Short name	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cron. alpha
Core Transformational Leader Behaviour	L1	236	1.000	7.000	5.250	1.521	0.952
High Performance Expectations	L2	236	1.000	7.000	5.236	1.093	0.846
Supportive Leader Behaviour	L3	236	1.000	7.000	4.821	1.506	0.928
Intellectual Stimulation	L4	236	1.000	7.000	4.697	1.636	0.944
Contingent Reward Behaviour	L5	236	1.000	7.000	4.982	1.575	0.918
Contingent Punishment Behaviour	L6	236	1.000	7.000	4.904	1.438	0.939
Ethical Leadership Behaviour	EL	236	1.000	7.000	5.191	1.445	0.973
Ethical and Responsible Action	PRQ1	236	1.000	7.000	5.586	1.297	0.900
Proactive and Quality Performance	PRQ2	236	1.000	7.000	5.195	1.270	0.782
Strategic and Effective Action	PRQ3	236	1.000	7.000	5.379	1.359	0.807
Media Relations	PRQ4	236	1.000	7.000	5.714	1.500	0.954
Internal Public Relations	PRQ5	236	1.000	7.000	5.427	1.369	0.912

Descriptive statistics show high average scores for the observed dimensions, especially for the PR department work quality dimensions. From the leadership dimensions, dimensions L1 - Core Transformational Leader Behaviour and L2 - High Performance Expectations earned the highest average ratings, while dimensions L4 - Intellectual Stimulation and L3 - Supportive Leader Behaviour earned the lowest ratings. Among the PR department work quality dimensions, the dimension PRQ4 - Media Relations stands out the most, while the dimension PRQ2 - Proactive and quality performance is the weakest.

### 4.2 Correlation analysis

The correlation coefficients between the leadership dimensions (transformational, transactional and ethical leadership behaviour) and the PR department work quality dimensions are given in Table 2. Pearson's correlation was used: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 2:** The correlation coefficients between the leadership dimensions and the PR department work quality dimensions

	PRQ1	PRQ2	PRQ3	PRQ4	PRQ5
L1	.645**	.634**	.564**	.596**	.654**
L2	.467**	.422**	.402**	.421**	.464**
L3	.599**	.644**	.584**	.498**	.574**
L4	.483**	.540**	.597**	.418**	.471**
L5	.497**	.529**	.524**	.404**	.495**
L6	.196**	.095	.114	.250**	.182**
EL	.662**	.636**	.582**	.602**	.657**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

The results from Table 2 show that the leadership dimensions (transformational, transactional and ethical leadership behaviour) have a statistically significant effect on the PR department work quality dimensions. Such dependence exists in almost all of the analyzed cases, at the level  $**p < 0.01$ . From the leadership dimensions, the dimensions EL - Ethical Leadership Behaviour, L1 - Core Transformational Leadership Behaviour and L3 - Supportive Leadership Behaviour have the highest impact on PR department work quality. The lowest impact on the PR department work quality dimensions was recorded for the dimension L6 - Contingent Punishment Behaviour.

### 4.3 Regression analysis

The predictive effect of the leadership dimensions (independent variables) on the PR department work quality dimensions (dependent variables) was examined using multiple regression analysis. The results in Table 3 where there is a statistically significant predictive effect are indicated by bold font and the shaded fields.

**Table 3:** Regression analysis (independent variables: the leadership dimensions; dependent variables: the PR department work quality dimensions)

Depend.	L1	L2	L3	Indep. L4 β	L5	L6	EL	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.
PRQ1	<b>0.264</b>	<b>0.257</b>	<b>0.212</b>	<b>- 0.318</b>	0.144	<b>- 0.125</b>	<b>0.310</b>	<b>0.517</b>	34.816	0.000
PRQ2	<b>0.305</b>	<b>0.232</b>	<b>0.300</b>	- 0.102	<b>0.214</b>	<b>- 0.282</b>	0.024	<b>0.532</b>	36.959	0.000
PRQ3	<b>0.192</b>	<b>0.184</b>	0.078	<b>0.277</b>	<b>0.213</b>	<b>- 0.287</b>	- 0.017	<b>0.461</b>	27.912	0.000
PRQ4	<b>0.276</b>	<b>0.162</b>	0.098	<b>- 0.289</b>	0.006	0.030	<b>0.409</b>	<b>0.417</b>	23.309	0.000
PRQ5	<b>0.322</b>	<b>0.273</b>	<b>0.124</b>	<b>- 0.321</b>	<b>0.190</b>	<b>- 0.152</b>	<b>0.298</b>	<b>0.520</b>	35.232	0.000

From Table 3, it can be seen that the leadership dimensions (transformational, transactional, and ethical leadership behaviour), in most cases, have a statistically significant predictive effect on the PR department work quality dimensions. The strongest predictive effect is dimension L1 - Core Transformational Leader Behaviour, followed by dimensions L4 - Intellectual Stimulation, L2 - High Performance Expectations, and L6 - Contingent Punishment Behaviour. There are also negative predictive effects, concentrated around dimensions L6 - Contingent Punishment Behaviour and L4 - Intellectual Stimulation. All the corrected determination indices R2 are statistically significant.

### 4.4 Leaders' gender as a moderator of the observed relationships

The results of the correlation analysis between the leadership dimensions (transformational, transactional and ethical leadership behaviour) and the PR department work quality dimensions, given separately for companies in which the leader is male and companies in which the leader is female, are presented in Table 4. The research into the moderating effect of leaders' gender was carried out using hierarchical regression analysis. The results in which the moderating effect was confirmed are indicated by the shaded fields.

**Table 4:** The correlation coefficients between the leadership dimensions and the PR department work quality dimensions, given separately for companies where the leader is male and companies where the leader is female

Leaders'gender		PRQ1	PRQ2	PRQ3	PRQ4	PRQ5
Male	L1	<b>.514**</b>	<b>.526**</b>	<b>.437**</b>	<b>.534**</b>	<b>.579**</b>
	L2	<b>.349**</b>	<b>.331**</b>	<b>.251**</b>	<b>.353**</b>	<b>.435**</b>
	L3	<b>.498**</b>	<b>.582**</b>	<b>.516**</b>	<b>.387**</b>	<b>.441**</b>
	L4	<b>.385**</b>	<b>.500**</b>	<b>.530**</b>	<b>.395**</b>	<b>.474**</b>
	L5	<b>.434**</b>	<b>.553**</b>	<b>.500**</b>	<b>.335**</b>	<b>.477**</b>
	L6	<b>.009</b>	<b>-.033</b>	<b>-.005</b>	<b>.104</b>	<b>.085</b>
	EL	<b>.573**</b>	<b>.554**</b>	<b>.479**</b>	<b>.581**</b>	<b>.588**</b>
Female	L1	<b>.926**</b>	<b>.869**</b>	<b>.850**</b>	<b>.761**</b>	<b>.818**</b>
	L2	<b>.618**</b>	<b>.523**</b>	<b>.607**</b>	<b>.494**</b>	<b>.523**</b>
	L3	<b>.790**</b>	<b>.765**</b>	<b>.719**</b>	<b>.705**</b>	<b>.828**</b>
	L4	<b>.686**</b>	<b>.635**</b>	<b>.745**</b>	<b>.465**</b>	<b>.491**</b>
	L5	<b>.631**</b>	<b>.510**</b>	<b>.581**</b>	<b>.547**</b>	<b>.551**</b>
	L6	<b>.462**</b>	<b>.258**</b>	<b>.295**</b>	<b>.450**</b>	<b>.331**</b>
	EL	<b>.814**</b>	<b>.775**</b>	<b>.771**</b>	<b>.655**</b>	<b>.777**</b>

\*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01.

According to Table 4, the moderating effect of leaders' gender is highly emphasized and is shown in the way that the correlations are significantly stronger in cases where the leaders are women. When women are leaders, PR department work quality is particularly influenced by the following dimensions: L1 - Core Transformational Leadership Behaviour, L3 - Supportive Leader Behaviour, L6 - Contingent Punishment Behaviour and EL - Ethical Leadership Behaviour.

#### 4.5 Leaders' age as a moderator of the observed relationships

The results of the correlation analysis between the leadership dimensions (transformational, transactional and ethical leadership behaviour) and the PR department work quality dimensions, given separately for companies in which the leader is under 45 and companies in which the leader is over 45 years of age, are presented in Table 5. The moderating effect of the leaders' age was tested using hierarchical regression analysis. The results in which the moderating effect was confirmed are indicated by the shaded fields.

**Table 5:** The correlation coefficients between the leadership dimensions and the PR department work quality dimensions, given separately for companies where the leader is under 45 and companies where the leader is over 45 years of age

Leaders age		PRQ1	PRQ2	PRQ3	PRQ4	PRQ5
Under 45 years	L1	.607**	.602**	.515**	.675**	.676**
	L2	.294**	.243**	.310**	.446**	.272**
	L3	.460**	.629**	.524**	.455**	.439**
	L4	.378**	.447**	.505**	.387**	.193*
	L5	.443**	.398**	.368**	.364**	.338**
	L6	.157	-.083	-.042	.339**	.075
	EL	.552**	.568**	.471**	.657**	.588**
Over 45 years	L1	.656**	.612**	.565**	.547**	.618**
	L2	.565**	.484**	.437**	.383**	.552**
	L3	.680**	.612**	.611**	.504**	.603**
	L4	.521**	.533**	.632**	.403**	.565**
	L5	.509**	.536**	.579**	.393**	.526**
	L6	.212*	.182	.204*	.174	.238*
	EL	.710**	.630**	.615**	.562**	.661**

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01.

Based on the results in Table 5, it can be said that the moderating effect of leaders' age is averagely emphasized (weaker than leaders' gender) and is shown in the way that the correlations are significantly stronger in cases where the leaders are older. When leaders are older, the PR department work quality is particularly influenced by the L2 - High Performance Expectations dimension.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Correlation analysis - discussion (checking hypothesis H1)

The results from Table 2 show that leaders who exhibit consistent ethical behaviour and a clear strategic orientation, combined with understanding for their employees and respect for their feelings, have a high chance of positively influencing the quality of work of the PR department. Such conditions (respect for ethical principles, strategic orientation and personal understanding) are consistent with the nature of the work performed by the PR department, but also with the PR practitioners themselves.

This result is similar to those of existing studies which examine the most favourable leadership styles for managing PR departments. As stated in the introduction, these are: ethical orientation (Meng & Berger, 2013), strategic orientation (Meng & Berger, 2013; Luo & Jiang, 2014; Luo et al., 2015), and human orientation and support (Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015; Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017). It has now been confirmed that such leadership styles applied by the CEO, at the organizational level, also have a beneficial effect on the quality of work of the PR department.

More precisely, the greatest impact on PR department work quality is shown by the dimensions EL - Ethical Leadership Behaviour, L1 - Core Transformational Leadership Behaviour and L3 - Supportive Leadership Behaviour. These results are also consistent with the findings of previous research. Thus, they have a favorable influence on numerous aspects of the work of PR departments (motivation, trust, communication, quality of work, etc.): different variables on Ethical Leadership Behaviour (Han et al., 2013; Ki et al., 2012); different variables on Core Transformational Leadership Behaviour (Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017; Andersen et al., 2018; Jin, 2010; Yang, 2012), as well as various variables on Supportive Leadership Behaviour (Benn et al., 2010; Yang, 2012; Men & Jiang, 2016).

On the other hand, dimension L6 - Contingent Punishment Behaviour has the weakest impact on the PR department work quality dimensions. This is an expected result: it is highly unlikely that leadership based on monitoring poor performance and punishment would have any major effect on the quality of the work of the PR department. Dimension L5 - Contingent Reward Behaviour also has positive, but weaker effects (relative to the other leadership dimensions). It follows that transactional leadership (represented through these two dimensions) has a weaker impact on PR department work quality than transformational leadership. A number of authors have favoured transformational leadership over transactional leadership, for example (Ensley et al., 2006; MacKenzie et al., 2001; House et al., 2002; Carpenter et al., 2004; Ling et al., 2008; Colbert et al., 2008). The results obtained here may be considered consistent with existing research.

Among the PR department work quality dimensions, the dimensions PRQ1 - Ethical and Responsible Action, PRQ2 - Proactive and Quality Performance and PRQ5 - Internal Public Relations are under the strongest influence of the leadership dimensions. Thus, leadership at the organizational level has the greatest influence on the work of the PR department in providing accurate and complete information, transparent action with respect for the public interest, developing relationships between the organization and the target public, as well as internal communication in the function of public relations. Existing research shows similar results, according to which different aspects of leadership have effects on: ethics in the work of PR professionals (Han et al., 2013; Ki et al., 2012), work quality of PR professionals (Jin, 2010; Yang, 2012), internal communication in the organization (Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017; Men & Jiang, 2016). A slightly weaker impact exists in case of the remaining two dimensions: PRQ3 - Strategic and Effective Action and PRQ4 - Media Relations. Although these correlations are lower than the others, they are still statistically significant and high.

Based on the results from Table 2, where the correlations are statistically significant in most cases, as well as based on the discussions, it can be concluded that hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

## **5.2 Regression analysis - discussion (checking hypothesis H2)**

Table 3 shows that, from all of the leadership dimensions, the L1 - Core Transformational Leadership Behaviour dimension has the strongest predictive effect, which is consistent with the results of the correlation analysis. The difference between the results of the correlation analysis is that although the dimensions EL - Ethical Leadership Behaviour and L3 - Supportive Leader Behaviour have significant predictive effects, they are weaker than the predictive effects of the L4 - Intellectual Stimulation, L2 - High Performance Expectations and L6 - Contingent Punishment Behaviour dimensions. Hence, insistence on the best results and high performance can also have a major impact on the quality of work of the PR department. Such circumstances are obviously a motivating and guiding factor for PR practitioners, who are then more engaged and thus achieve better results.

The regression analysis revealed the negative predictive effects of dimension L6 - Contingent Punishment Behaviour on almost all of the PR department work quality dimensions. The weaker correlations for this dimension may have indicated this result in the regression analysis. Thus, as part of an integrated observation of multiple independent variables, a management style based on pointing out poor performance and punishing negative one affects the quality of the work of the PR department. Similar to that, Han et al. (2013) have, among other things, shown that punishment has a strong effect on PR practitioners. The regression analysis shows that the L5 - Contingent Reward Behaviour dimension has the weakest predictive effect, so this section confirms the conclusions from the correlation analysis regarding the impact of transactional leadership.

However, the predictive effect of the L4 - Intellectual Stimulation dimension comes as a surprise at first glance. In the regression analysis, due to the effect of a greater number of independent variables, the predictive effect of the L4 - Intellectual Stimulation dimension turned out to be statistically significant and negative in three cases. This phenomenon can be explained as follows: some of the items that make up this



dimension relate to the degree to which leaders encourage employees to think about the way they work and the degree to which leaders encourage employees to rethink their work. PR practitioners may see this as directly interfering with the way they do their jobs. Considering that the work in the PR department is largely based on creativity and specific professional knowledge, any excessive or direct meddling on the part of leaders in the manner of the realization of PR activities can easily be met with a negative reception by PR practitioners. This explanation is supported by the statistically significant and positive predictive effect that dimension L4 - Intellectual Stimulation exerts on the PRQ3 - Strategic and Effective Action dimension. Thus, viewed from the perspective of a PR practitioner, it is justified ("allowed") for the leader to appear as an advisor on strategic issues and the effective use of available resources, but this is not justified ("not allowed") when it refers to those issues related to the immediate realization of the strategies set. A research finding can be considered to have a similar result (Zerfass & Huck, 2007), according to which a leader that encourages experimentation and creative thinking (which is actually intellectual stimulation) can significantly improve PR strategies and work quality.

The dimensions PRQ1 - Ethical and Responsible Action, PRQ2 - Proactive and Quality Performance and PRQ5 - Internal Public Relations are under the strongest predictive effect of the leadership dimensions, while dimensions PRQ3 - Strategic and Effective Action and PRQ4 - Media Relations are under a slightly weaker predictive effect. It should be borne in mind that all the corrected determination indices  $R^2$  values are statistically significant and have high values ranging from 0.417 to 0.532 (Table 3). These results are completely consistent with the results of the correlation analysis, so the same explanations apply.

Based on the results from Table 3, where the predictive facts are statistically significant in most cases, and all  $R^2$  values are statistically significant, but also based on the discussions, it can be stated that hypothesis H2 is confirmed.

### 5.3 Moderating effects of leaders' gender - discussion (checking hypothesis H3)

The results of the examination of the moderating effects of leaders' gender (Table 4) show stronger relationships between the observed variables when the leaders are women than when the leaders are men. From this, it may be concluded that female leaders have a wide range of styles through which they exert a powerful influence: from a clear and inspiring vision, support on a personal level, marked ethical behaviour, to the application of punitive measures. The impression gained is that at least when it comes to the impact on the PR department, female leaders are more inspiring, more ambitious, more committed, more determined, more powerful, and they have a clearer idea of what they want. In such cases, the employees in the PR department align their work and behaviour with the high expectations of their female leaders. However, when a female leader is not so inspirational, ambitious, ethical, or supportive, employees will be more adaptable and the results of the PR department will be more in tune with such circumstances than when the leader is male. The moderating effect of leaders' gender encompasses all the PR department work quality dimensions, most of all PRQ1 - Ethical and Responsible Action and PRQ3 - Strategic and Effective Action. Some previous research examining the difference between male and female leadership in PR (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Jin, 2010; Meng et al., 2012), come to somewhat different results, according to which there were no significant differences between men and women concerning their leadership qualities and effectiveness.

Based on the results from Table 4, where a significant number of moderating effects of leaders' gender were confirmed, as well as on the basis of the discussions, it can be concluded that hypothesis H3 is confirmed.

### 5.4 Moderating effects of leaders' age - discussion (checking hypothesis H4)

Test results of the moderating effects of leaders' age (Table 5) show slightly stronger relationships between the observed variables when the leaders are older than when the leaders are younger. Older leaders have high expectations from the work of the PR department, so insistence on high performance is a distinctive characteristic of the leadership style among older leaders, at least when it comes to the influence on the PR department. In such cases the work of the PR department is largely in line with such high expectations. In contrast, if an older leader does not have such high expectations, the results of the PR department's work will be more tailored to the existing circumstances than when the leader is younger.

In addition, older leaders have more emphasized influences on individual PR department work quality dimensions, ranging from intellectual stimulation, rewards, and punishment, to support. Intellectual

stimulation is easier to accept from an older person, respecting the experience and knowledge of such a leader. However, if intellectual stimulation is lacking from an older leader, then PR department employees will also lower their engagement and performance proportionally. Personal support from senior leaders exerts a particular influence on the ethics of PR department actions, and transactional leadership among senior leaders (rewards and penalties) has a distinct impact on the PR department's strategic operations. Thus, among older leaders, ethics in the work of the PR department depend more on the personal support of the leader, while the strategic action of the PR department is dependent on rewards and punishment. The moderating effect of leaders' age is particularly emphasized in dimension PRQ3 - Strategic and Effective Action.

Based on the results from Table 5, where the average number of moderating effects of leaders' age was confirmed, as well as on the basis of the discussions, it can be concluded that hypothesis H4 is partially confirmed.

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## **Conclusion**

All the observed leadership dimensions (transformational, transactional and ethical leadership behaviours) exert statistically significant effects on the PR department work quality dimensions. Those which stand out are the influences of L1 - Core Transformational Leadership Behaviour, L2 - High Performance Expectations, L3 - Supportive Leader Behaviour and EL - Ethical Leadership Behaviour. Transformational leadership has a greater impact than transactional leadership, a result consistent with much of the existing research in this area. The impact of dimension L6 - Contingent Punishment Behaviour can also be negative. What is particularly interesting is the influence of dimension L4 - Intellectual Stimulation, which in the regression analysis turned out to be statistically significant and negative for some dimensions. In certain circumstances, PR practitioners may perceive intellectual stimulation from leaders as exaggerated and as direct interference of the leaders in their work.

Female and older leaders have a greater influence on the PR department work quality dimensions. The impression is that female and older leaders have stronger and more decisive and emotional management styles, so the results of the PR department are better aligned with such requirements. However, if female and older leaders have lower requirements (or lower them), then employees, proportionally, also lower their engagement and performance. On the other hand, it can be concluded that male and younger leaders apply more steady management styles, which do not require as much emotion, personal support, intellectual stimulation, or rewards and punishments. It seems that male and younger leaders create more stable circumstances in which everyone has a better grasp of what is being done and how it is done, with constant pressure to achieve results, and without too much influence from the leader.

It may be concluded that the impacts of leadership on PR department work quality are strongly expressed. Leaders and PR managers need to be aware of this, as well as of their role in these processes. In terms of enhancing PR department work quality, the suggestions to leaders is that they should continually enhance leadership knowledge and skills, and certainly apply the principles of ethical and transformational leadership. In doing so, a tactful approach should be taken to how intellectual stimulation is conducted toward PR practitioners.

The effects of individual leadership dimensions on individual public relations dimensions were examined, practical recommendations for leadership approach and action towards PR departments were defined, thus fulfilling the aims of the paper. The questionnaire for measuring the dimensions of the PR department work quality in organizations has proven to be an extremely convenient instrument for measuring the observed impacts. It is certain that the same questionnaire can also be used to measure other similar relationships, for example, those mentioned in the suggestions for further research.

## **Limitation**

The limitation of the research lies in the fact that it was conducted in Serbia. However, it can be assumed with a high degree of certainty, that similar relationships between the observed dimensions exist in other countries, and especially in those with a similar degree of economic and social development.

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