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THE EVOLUTION AND IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

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Abstract. This study aims to investigate the evolution and the professional and organizational impact of female leadership over the past few years and focuses on the importance of creating an environment more conducive to organizational identification, speaking with the community orientation to act in favor of the organization aspiring feminine leadership positions. A qualitative methodology was applied, and an interview survey was carried out. The results show a remarkable evolution of women in the labor market, specifically in leadership positions. There is also a clear difference, at the behavioral level, between female and male leadership and a subsequent professional/organizational impact.

Keywords: leadership, female leadership, organizational context, diversity management, Portugal.

JEL Classification: G40.

Introduction

The theme addressed began to be a matter of research as women began to occupy influential positions in different sectors, such as education, business or politics. This is a topic with research potential as several studies have been carried out but most of them do not find a consensus on the results obtained.

Organizations remain competitive due to the successive transformational and continuous changes they implement in their business model (Gilley et al., 2008) and, in this sense, it is useful to understand if female leadership faces the same resistance to change as male leadership (O'Neil et al., 2008, 2015).

This article is developed precisely within this type of framework, with the main objective of studying female leadership and its evolution, the differences with regard to male leadership, and its impact on organisational and professional development. In order to better understand the relevance

and pertinence of this theme, according to the study "Gender Diversity in Companies in Portugal" promoted by Informa D&B, "In management positions [executive management positions: first line directors], management positions [governing bodies: management, administrative and managerial bodies] and leadership positions [functions of the first manager: chairman of the board of directors and manager], the situation of female participation shows practically no evolution compared to 2019, with the representation of women in these positions registering, respectively, 28.3% (+0.1 p. p.), 29.7% (−0.2 p.p.) and 26.8% (+0.2 p.p.)". The specific objective of this research is to identify if the causes that lead to the stagnation of female participation in leadership positions are related to the organisations or to the possible perception of the existence of differences between a female leader and a male leader. It also intends to understand how the participants characterise female leadership in the organisations where they work and what is the impact of female leadership in the professional context.

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This qualitative study used a semi-structured interview and also different strategies were developed to produce a sustained and realistic study. A content analysis was carried out in order to organize and structure the direct testimonies of the interviewees.

1. Literature review

1.1. Leadership, its evolution and the current trend

Today's business world is characterised by volatility, complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty – VUCA (Schoemaker et al., 2018). The modern leader needs to be ready to face any kind of adversity, since in this VUCA business reality, a unique genre of leadership is required to be able to succeed in keeping organisations competitive and sustainable. Leadership has long been a subject of research, since, although it is easy to identify in practice it is difficult to construct in theory, thus there are several definitions.
For Moller and Gomes (2012) leadership can be understood as the intentional process exercised in order to influence the action of one person in relation to another, with the aim of leading, structuring and simplifying the relationships and activities within the organisation. On the other hand, leadership is defined as the level of influence achieved over employees with a view to a positive transformation of their behaviours and attitudes (Rua & Araújo, 2013). Being a leader requires a set of characteristics capable of gradually conditioning and influencing the behaviours and attitudes of others, demonstrating that there is a team beyond individual interests (O'Neil et al., 2008, 2015). Leadership is a complex process that comprises the technique and mastery in influencing others, characterised by a two-way relationship between leader and followers as well as the entire internal and external context adjacent to the organisation and is, therefore, a dynamic process (Cunha et al., 2016; O'Neil et al., 2008, 2015).

1.2. The evolution of female leadership

In recent decades to the present day women have gained more and more space in the labour market. From 1970 to 2012 the female workforce increased from 37% to 47% worldwide (Seo et al., 2017). According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, cited by Powell (2014), the number of women in management positions increased from 17% in 1971 to 51.4% in 2012, yet women remain underrepresented at higher organizational levels (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009).

Also, according to the 2018 annual report of the International Labour Organization (ILO), there is, on a global scale, a higher percentage of unemployed women (6%) compared to unemployed men (5.8%). The ILO's 2018 annual report also found that there is a higher percentage of women than men in unpaid family work. Even women who are embedded in the labour market continue to encounter barriers when it comes to reaching management positions and business positions.

Although women are more strongly represented in middle and senior management positions compared to 20 years ago, few women are appointed to top positions, especially when it comes to large companies (Dasgupta, 2015). Most often we find women in positions at lower hierarchical levels or in careers that are stereotyped for having feminine characteristics, such as the area of health and education (Ellemers et al., 2012). According to Santos and Diógenes (2019) the stereotype linked to gender delays the process of women's ascension to higher hierarchical positions because there is still a masculinised perception of strength, authority, and confidence, while the feminine is often associated with the concepts of delicacy and empathy. Dias (2018) explains that black and poor women still suffer from job precarisation and this may have an influence on low wages. According to Proni and Proni (2018), there are still problems of inequality regarding remuneration. The same authors also add that it is necessary to modify the organizational culture and for this reason this is still a slow process. Sommer (2018) confirms that the discriminatory social construction interferes in the remuneration of women, even if they have the same performance as a man. Cotrim et al. (2020) also states that the wage gap is caused by the devaluation of women and not by the difference in productivity.

However, female under-representation is differentiated depending on the country's economic situation and also on labour policies. The difference in participation rates between men and women is decreasing in developed and developing countries but continues to increase in emerging countries. According to a study where 4,000 companies were analysed in 45 different countries, women have a higher percentage of presence in leadership positions in industrialised countries than in countries with emerging markets. Public policies also play an important role. For example, family support policies, which aim to improve the relationship between work and personal life, rights to paid leave and an equivalent return to work, and affordable childcare services for working parents. In developed countries where these types of policies function effectively, it has been possible to note a substantial growth in the rates of women, especially mothers, entering the labour market (Thévenon, 2013). Although this female under-representation in management positions still exists, women are increasingly entering the labour market and in positions that have a higher hierarchical level (Fagenson & Jackson, 1993; Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

It is socially recognised that women face more obstacles to achieve higher hierarchical positions compared to men, and when they do, they are subject to greater scrutiny, criticism and negative evaluations, and on the other hand, it also seems to be clear that leadership positions occupied by women are likely to be less promising than those of men (Rodrigues, 2017; O'Neil et al., 2008, 2015). Research around this topic has been gaining emphasis, academically and socially, which, as female leaders grow

professionally becomes more urgent and imperative. In this context the foundations for the 21st century debate, directed towards the role of women in organisational life and management, have been created (Moller & Gomes, 2012).

Data collected from Eurostat show that, at national level, the number of women in top positions is lower than the European Union average (Eurostat, 2017). It is then verified the widely accepted fact that men have priority access to hierarchically higher positions ("glass cushion"), compared to women who tend to be allocated to precarious positions (Ryan et al., 2016). However, organisations are determined to keep up with the social and cultural transformations taking place, which forces top managers to reformulate and adjust leadership models with regard to gender and the expectations associated with the roles (Moller & Gomes, 2012) given that, although it is men who have held the dominance of leadership positions until very recently coming to this day it cannot be concluded that they are better than women when it comes to leadership, since, as we will have the opportunity to address, the essential characteristics for an effective and positive leadership are sometimes more easily found in female leaders than in male leaders (Teixeira, 2001; O'Neil et al., 2008, 2015).

Despite the increase in women in leadership positions, Prado and Augusto (2018) add that women still have lower positions in the hierarchy, low salaries and low access to leadership positions.

There are still inequalities of opportunities faced by women in the labor market, namely in leadership positions (Chagas et al., 2022). To overcome these barriers, it is necessary to have persistence, awareness of the path, evolution, ability to learn from mistakes and the ability to understand, in the short and long term, adversity. Understanding these phenomena enables organizations to clarify the imposed beliefs and limits (Chagas et al., 2022).

Ferigato and Conceição (2020) state that women face unique challenges in leadership, which are not recognized and it is urgent that leadership evolution strategies are innovative, to consider their specific needs.

1.3. Female leadership vs male leadership

Even before addressing the subject of female and male leadership, it is important to remember that over several decades several studies have been carried out with the aim of determining different models of leadership. Within the various management theories and according to the existing bibliography, it is possible to identify the following leadership models: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Charismatic Leadership, Passive Leadership (Laissez-faire), Distributed Leadership, Ethical/Moral Leadership, Contingent Leadership/Situational, Postmodern Leadership, Emotional Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Participatory Leadership and Servant Leadership (Gougas & Malinova, 2021).

Each of these models can be adopted by leaders, regardless of their gender. However, it is important to understand the main evidence between female and male leadership.

History presents Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela and Winston Churchill, among others, as great world leaders. These leaders have in common the male gender, confirming the historical stereotype of a great (or good) leader as typically male (Koenig et al., 2011). These stereotypes of male leaders can create a disadvantage for women who aspire to play leadership roles and perhaps because of this it is more difficult to be perceived as good leaders. There is found to be a mismatch or incongruence between role expectations for women and the role for leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Research contrasting female leadership from male leadership unfolds around various topics as it controls the development of an organisation. Leadership effectiveness is essentially due to the leader's performance, in the success of the set goals and the ability to influence employees to pursue those goals (Abolade, 2014; O'Neil et al., 2008, 2015). Lau Chin et al. (2011) in response to the question of whether or not there is a difference in the way men and women lead, peremptorily stated that yes and no, thus reflecting once again the paradox and complexity of this issue. Male leaders are perceived as competent and ambitious individuals, endowed with rationalism, authority, assertiveness, confidence, competitiveness and sometimes aggressiveness, whereas female leaders are more altruistic, human, warm and sensitive, leading the literature to integrate the male leadership style in a more authoritarian or transactional level and the female leadership style in a participatory or transformational level.

Female leaders are endowed with a certain diplomacy, empathy, generosity, sensitivity, helpfulness, and excellent negotiation and communication skills oriented towards the organisation and the professional development of those they lead (Moller & Gomes, 2012). Female leadership as more efficient compared to male leadership, as the former is characterised as being more participative essentially people-oriented, as opposed to male leadership, which is considered more autocratic and obligation/results oriented (Faizan et al., 2018). To corroborate with these findings, another study reported that female gender in leadership has a direct impact on transformational leadership when compared to male leadership (Chen & Shao, 2022). Also, Guillet et al. (2019) conducted a study that concluded that the representations of the participants showed that women have a multiplicity of leadership styles and that individual or organisational culture-related differences are still quite relevant.

The current market needs a balanced form of both male leadership qualities (characterised by competitiveness, aggressiveness, and authority) and female leadership characteristics (recognised essentially by cooperation and concern for others), that is, an "androgynous" leadership style, which contributes to the construction

of a more independent, social, stimulating leader with greater self-esteem.

All these differences described so far between the male leader and the female leader are justified mainly by the neurological differences existing in the male and female brains.

Female leadership has the advantage of being more effective compared to male leadership, since for the authors, in today's business world, female qualities such as cooperation with others will translate into greater harmony at the organisational level, with the "we rather than the I" prevailing (Moller & Gomes, 2012). Silva and Berrá (2018) of women within organisations, demystifying some socially constructed assumptions about female leadership. The same authors state that women have many advantageous characteristics compared to men, for example, the fact that women can generate life, perform several tasks at the same time and the predisposition to look at problems in a more human way in relation to the organisations, seeking harmonisation in the workplace. To confirm these claims, also another study found that female leaders can improve the contextual performance of employees, demonstrating that transformational leadership with feminine traits suggests that organisations should be aware and implement measures (e.g. training) to promote the acceptance and application of leader's gender and gender role diversity as it reduces the prevalence of gender stereotypes and helps leaders to benefit from the effective combination of leadership and feminine traits (Chen & Shao, 2022).

However, with regard to leadership without gender distinction, it is important to note that men as women are embedded in the same social system leading to the exercise of the role of leaders, and these roles are directly related to their performance as leaders and not as gender (Cunha et al., 2016; Rego et al., 2015). A leader should be appointed to a leadership position according to their effectiveness and commitment in the development of their working relationship, and not according to gender roles, but rather occupational roles.

In conclusion, a true leader will always need to bring together a range of characteristics, such as vision, education, experience in team management, ability to motivate, intelligence, curiosity, communication skills, academic background, assertiveness, organisation and competence regardless of being a man or a woman, thus there are many conditions capable of influencing a certain leadership style (O'Neil et al., 2015).

Through this review, it is verified that the issue of female leadership has attracted more and more attention and has shown broad perspectives for development. However, several studies demonstrate a lack of consistency in the research and no consistent conclusions have been formed. Female leadership brings knowledge into the real world rather than emphasizing the myth that women are inherently disadvantaged. It is necessary to promote change in the current management process, encourage more women to understand and recognize their

leadership capacity and develop confidence in their abilities. The same authors argue that society as a whole must gradually get rid of the misunderstanding of female leadership and create a competitive environment of equality (Zhang et al., 2022).

1.4. The impact of female leadership in a professional context

According to Milenkovska and colleagues (2017), without a true sense of leadership, organisations cannot achieve their objectives; on the contrary, they may even stagnate or be overtaken due to market competitiveness, thus requiring leaders who are able to counteract this instability. Leadership is thus one of the key factors capable of interfering in the development of an organisation, given that a leader, besides being an excellent professional with enormous technical competence, also has the ability to know how to stimulate, encourage and guide their followers, as well as to achieve the established objectives.

For some organisations, female leadership is characterised by the ability to achieve the outlined goals and objectives, since this type of leadership is recognised for its common effort, focus on problem-solving and team decision-making, and always taking into account the other collaborators, which allows for a better organisational performance (Abolade, 2014). However, if we effectively analyse what determines whether leadership is effective and efficient, or in other words, if we compare the leadership styles of men and women, we quickly conclude that the characteristics of these two genders are essential to achieve a good organisational performance (O'Neil et al., 2008, 2015).

In the study conducted by Marques and Ferreira (2015), when applying the ILIDER indicator, they confirmed that, despite the fact that there are fewer female leaders represented in management positions, the latter have similar leadership parameters to those observed in men. On the other hand, the study conducted by Abolade (2014) concluded that the more maternal impetus of women, often linked to their more emotional and supportive leadership style, promotes organisational effectiveness and development, while the more authoritarian style exercised by men in most cases does not promote the evolution of the organisation in the same way. Another study conducted by Sousa (2015) validates previous research, reinforcing the guideline that female leaders are considered those who most promote well-being, happiness and quality of work in organisations, as well as having the opportunity to verify that the well-being and happiness felt in the workplace motivated by female leadership increases effectiveness and efficiency by 37%, thus making it possible to achieve the defined objectives more quickly, increasing employee productivity and consequently developing the organisation.

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these two genders are absolutely essential to achieve good organisational performance.

It can then be seen that, although there may be a deficit in the representation of women in leadership and top management positions, social prejudices and the still masculinised vision of the leader are justified with outdated and antiquated arguments, since the effectiveness and efficiency of women in this type of functions is clearly visible.

2. Methodology

This qualitative study used a semi-structured interview which incorporated a set of themes through a script that were addressed as the interview unfolded. The interviews aimed to respond to the gaps mentioned above and which may help explain some phenomena. In the qualitative methodology, reality is dynamic and should be associated in a contextualized way (Brandão et al., 2018). This methodology favours data collection by participants, thus allowing understanding the problem and making it possible to answer a subjective question. It aims to understand the perspectives and the meaning that an individual has in relation to the topic under analysis (Bogdan et al., 1994).

Different strategies were developed to produce a sustained and realistic study, always emphasising the interviewee and giving him/her all the conditions to reliably express his/her opinion on this issue. The qualitative methodology thus enables the researcher to obtain detailed knowledge about the experience of individuals and act on it (Brandão et al., 2018). The participant composes the research narrative and makes known his/her experience and opinion about the evolution of female leadership and its impact in a professional context.

Regarding the treatment of the information collected during the interviews, a content analysis was performed in order to organize and structure the direct testimonies of the interviewees.

2.1. Participants

This qualitative study used a sample universe of 5 participants (N = 5). A semi-structured interview was conducted where data were obtained through non-probabilistic convenience sampling.

This methodological decision regarding the number of participants chosen was due to the exploratory nature of this research, and, in this sense, the sample responded in a more realistic way and could be analysed with the detail that this study requires.

From the perspective of gender distribution by professional category of the sample, 20% of the participants were male and 80% were female.

Age ranged between 23 and 38 years. The inclusion criteria established were the presence in the labour market in various areas, such as education, human resources consultancy, sports limited company and a company in the automotive sector, as well as having been led by a

female manager for at least one year, as shown in Table 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Description of the participants (source: own elaboration)

	Age	Gender	Academic Qualifications
Interviewee 1	35	Female	Bachelor's in Economics
Interviewee 2	38	Female	Business Relations Degree
Interviewee 3	23	Male	Bachelor of Business Administration
Interviewee 4	26	Female	Post Graduate Degree in Human Resources Management
Interviewee 5	28	Female	Master's Degree in Marketing

Table 2. Identification of sector, function and years of experience (source: own elaboration)

	Sector	Role	Experience
Interviewee 1	Education	Economist	10 years
Interviewee 2	Services	Office Leader HR	12 years
Interviewee 3	Services	Manager	1 year
Interviewee 4	Services	Manager	3 years
Interviewee 5	Sport	Marketing Director	6 years

2.2. Information collection tools

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview follows a script composed of open-ended questions which should have the flexibility to follow a planned sequence in the initial script and, at the same time, allow the interviewer to propose additional questions to more clearly understand the theme under analysis (Quivy, 1995). In this way, the interview script was designed so that participants could freely explore the topic, without inducing a response (Flick, 2005). Participants were asked to describe female leadership, how they see the development of women in the labour market and what they consider to be the main differences between the female leader.

3. Results

Next, the results from the interviews will be presented. The purpose of the answers is to obtain the participants' perception of the issues under analysis, i.e. to understand how the participants' organisations are formed, to check whether there are differences in female and male leadership and, finally, to understand the impact of female leadership in the professional context. The results will be analysed in detail in the following chapter, namely the analysis of question 1is presented in the Table 3, of question 2 – in the Table 4, of question 3 – in the Table 5, of question 4 – in the Table 6, of question 5 – in the Table 7

Table 3. Results of Question 1 (source: own elaboration)

Question 1: Overall in terms of gender, how is your organization composed?	
Interviewee 1	My company invests a lot in diversity, however there is a growing tendency in recruiting female elements for the most diverse reasons, and speaking in general terms I think that more than 60% of the employees are, like me, female.
Interviewee 2	My organization is part of a Spanish group. But speaking of the Company in Portugal, and speaking first from a regional perspective, I can say that in the various offices I have the opportunity to manage over 80% of employees are female. At national level, although I don't have data to support my opinion, I think it is close to this figure.
Interviewee 3	In general, 75% are men and 25% women. However, in the offices there is a predominance of women.
Interviewee 4	The majority of people in my organisation are female, about 70%, although in the management positions the majority are male.
Interviewee 5	55% male and 45% female.

Table 4. Results of Question 2 (source: own elaboration)

Question 2: How do you look at the evolution of women in the labour market, more specifically in leadership positions?	
Interviewee 1	It is without a doubt inspiring and motivating to look around and see so many examples of women occupying leading positions in various companies. First of all it makes you feel more responsible and you have the will to believe that if "she" can do it, I can do it too. The business world is taking big steps towards including women in the same way it includes men. As we know there was a kind of "doctrine" until a few years ago that basically defended that only men were technically competent and had the necessary authority to manage people and make them achieve common objectives. But this idea is completely wrong, and we know that women are as good or better managers than men.
Interviewee 2	It is very gratifying to see the development of female leadership in the world of work in general. If we look back and think about our mothers and grandmothers and make the comparison with today we see quite significant differences. For example, in the company where I work at the moment the CEO is a woman, in the company where I worked before I came to this one, also in the human resources area, there is a CEO and if we look around we see that the trend is the same. In other words, there is a brutal evolution of women in professional terms and this makes me very happy and motivated.
Interviewee 3	I am looking forward to it, the first experience I had with female managers went very well. I think that the ideology that women are not fit to assume management positions is slowly disappearing with the excellent proof they are giving. They are excellent professionals, have good organisation, communication and multitasking skills, which makes them fully capable of assuming any leadership position in a company.
Interviewee 4	In recent years, the role of women has assumed greater relevance. In the past, the woman was seen as domestic, without establishing a great direct contact with the world of work. Today, women are considered a support in the vast majority of organisations, whether in the human resources department or in the accounting department or in any other because women assume their role as businesswomen, they are able to coordinate teams, to transmit the necessary measures to ensure the success of the organisation. A woman is an example to be followed, she guarantees transparency and confidence which makes us believe that we are capable and that if a woman has the power to transform an organisation, then we live in a more heterogeneous world where it is not only men who can do it, women also have the right to assume a management position, if they deserve it, a political position, because no one is defined by their gender but by their professionalism and dedication.
Interviewee 5	The evolution of women in the workplace is obviously inspiring and as a woman I am very grateful to those who came before me and helped "pave" the way. Over the years, women have had to fight for all the rights they have today and there is a lot we can do today that wasn't even a chance before. Despite all this, I believe that people should be celebrated and valued regardless of their gender and I like to believe that we will soon reach a point where it will no longer surprise anyone that the CEO of a successful company is female or that something impressive has been achieved by being led by a woman. I think when we mention these things, we are indirectly belittling and taking away from achievement or success just because there was a woman involved, especially when she holds a leadership position. I think when we put emphasis on the fact that a woman has been involved or has led something, we are contributing to the gender gap.

Table 5. Results of Question 3 (source: own elaboration)

Question 3: What do you consider to be the main differences between a female leader and a male leader?	
Interviewee 1	I believe that a female leader is or should be more sensitive and more attentive to issues related to human resources, more specifically in people management. A male leader can be less attentive to details, but firmer in his decisions and more direct in his speeches.
Interviewee 2	Perhaps the main differences that I identify are resilience, since a woman to reach a management position has to work much harder than a man, to believe in others, to think more in the team than in the individual, and the human sense, more sensitive.
Interviewee 3	I do not highlight major differences, both are able to do their job well. Perhaps highlight the generalised organisational capacity of the woman.
Interviewee 4	In my opinion, the woman has a more human oriented leadership, she can be demanding and authoritarian, but at the level of calming down the conflicts, guaranteeing security and confidence to the collaborators, she is more capable than the men who, in their majority, tend to devalue the more personal side of the collaborator and have a wider and more rigorous vision of the organization's objectives.
Interviewee 5	I don't think there are differences between female and male leaders. I do think that there are differences in leaders in general. Not always the female leaders are more understanding or emotional, as well as not always the leaders are more rigorous. I think it all depends on the person and the characteristics and values they possess.

Table 6. Results of Question 4 (source: own elaboration)

Question 4: If you had to characterise female leadership, how would you characterise it? And why	
Interviewee 1	A female leadership is closer to the people, more sensitive to events. I have had a female leadership from whom I have learned a lot. This close relationship that I built, because it was a woman, gave me a lot of knowledge in the area where I worked and made me grow with someone with a huge degree of experience.
Interviewee 2	I would consider loyal, honest, upright, truthful and fair.
Interviewee 3	Organization, Multitasking, Honesty, Availability, Accessibility, Agile, Capable.
Interviewee 4	Female leadership is more people oriented for their participation in all decision-making moments. On the other hand, it is a type of leadership that assumes a greater predisposition to change, to include new trends, new ways of acting, while male leadership is more traditional and methodical.

Interviewee 5	I have no way of characterising female leadership because I don't think it exists. I believe that what exists are tendencies, that is, a woman leader tends to be more one characteristic than another, but these are always general assumptions. In my opinion, all women are different and female leadership cannot be generalised and hence there is no female leadership.

Table 7. Results of Question 5 (source: own elaboration)

Question 5: Do you consider that female leadership has an impact at a professional and consequently organisational level? And why?	
Interviewee 1	The sensibility of a woman, her wisdom and knowledge dominates a team and take an organization forward. A woman has a great capacity for leadership. A woman leader can create a bond with the people she leads and when she feels that the people are loyal to her and focused on the team goals she will do everything to make them grow together with her.
Interviewee 2	Obviously. A woman is a born leader and when she wants to revolutionize the environment she always succeeds. For a woman, the team always comes first. The female leader always puts the company first.
Interviewee 3	I do not think that it has an impact just because the gender is male or female. I value diversity, and inclusion. No one is less of a leader because they were born female or male. The skills of a leader can be perfectly developed, for example during the academic path.
Interviewee 4	Yes, of course it can! A female leader is able to act in the most diverse areas, to understand the difficulties of their employees and motivate them to achieve their goals, is able to design working methods more focused on employees in order to motivate their performance.
Interviewee 5	I think the impact will always be there, but again, I think the impact will depend on the quality of the leader. If she is a strong leader, the impact will be positive. If she is a weak leader, the impact will be negative. In my opinion, this applies to men and women-the impact will be due to the qualities of the person and not the gender of the person.

4. Discussion of results and conclusions

In relation to the question that sought to ascertain how the organisation where they work is composed, we obtained the following answer from E1: "My company invests a lot in diversity, however there is a growing trend in the recruitment of female elements for the most diverse reasons, and speaking in general terms I believe that more than 60% of the employees are female, just like me". E2 completed by saying, "My organisation is part of a Spanish group, but approaching the company in Portugal, more specifically in a regional perspective I can say

that in the different offices that I have the opportunity to manage more than 80% of the employees are female. At a national level, although I do not have data to support my opinion, I believe it is very close to this figure".

With regard to the main differences between male and female leaders, with the exception of candidate 5, all the other interviewees considered the female leader to be more focused on the organisation and on people. The main differentiating characteristics that were pointed out were: closer, more sensitive to events, more organised, multitasking, honest, available and accessible. These characteristics can be confirmed by the answers of interviewees 1 and 4, respectively:

"A female leadership is closer to people, more sensitive to events. I have had a female leadership from whom I have learned a lot. This close relationship that I built, because it was a woman, gave me a lot of knowledge in the area where I worked and made me grow with someone with a huge degree of experience".

"Female leadership is more people-oriented for their participation in all decision-making moments. On the other hand, it is a type of leadership that assumes a greater predisposition to change, to include new trends, new ways of acting, while male leadership is more traditional and methodical". "In my opinion, the woman has a leadership more oriented to the human side, she may be demanding and authoritarian, but at the level of calming conflicts, of guaranteeing security and trust to the employees she is more apt than men who, for the most part, tend to devalue the more personal side of the employee and have a broader and more rigorous vision of the organization's objectives."

On the other hand, interestingly, interviewee 5 addressed the following: "I don't think there are differences between female and male leaders. I do think there are differences in leaders in general. Leaders are not always more understanding or emotional, just as leaders are not always stricter. I think it all depends on the person and the characteristics and values they possess." This opinion also meets the authors' view that the current market needs a balanced form of the qualities of male leadership (characterised by competitiveness, aggressiveness and authority) as well as the characteristics of female leadership (recognised essentially by cooperation and concern for others), i.e. an "androgynous" leadership style, which contributes to the construction of a more independent, social, stimulating leader with greater self-esteem. A leader should be appointed to a leadership position according to his/her effectiveness and commitment in the development of his/her working relationship, and not according to sexual but occupational roles.

Finally, regarding the impact of female leadership in professional and organisational context, Interviewee 1 stated: "A woman's sensitivity, her wisdom and her knowledge dominates a team and take an organisation forward. A woman has a great capacity for leadership. The woman leader manages to create a bond with her subordinates and when she feels that they are loyal and

focused on the team objectives she will do everything so that they grow together with her. In some organisations, female leadership is characterised by the ability to achieve the outlined goals and objectives, since this type of leadership is recognised for its common effort, focus on problem solving and team decision-making and always taking into account the other employees, which allows for a better organisational performance (Abolade, 2014). However, interviewees 5 and 3 consider that the gender of the leadership is not a sine qua non condition for the professional development of the subordinate and the organisation, as they argued the following: "I think it will always have an impact, but again, I think the impact will depend on the quality of the leader. If she is a strong leader, the impact will be positive. If she is a weak leader, the impact will be negative. In my opinion, this applies to men and women-the impact will be derived from the qualities of the person and not the gender of the person."; "I don't think it has an impact just because the gender is female or male. I value diversity, and inclusion. No one is less of a leader because they were born female or male. The skills of a leader can be perfectly developed, for example during the academic path".

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Contribution

According to the discussion of the results, it is possible to verify that the contribution of the interviews corroborates with the authors cited, i.e., it is confirmed that women have been gaining more and more space in the labour market. It becomes imperative to create an environment conducive to organisational identification to act on behalf of the organisation aspiring female leadership positions. According to the perceptions of the participants of the present study, the contextual performance of employees through leadership with feminine traits suggests that organizations be attentive and implement measures to promote the acceptance and application of the leader's gender and the diversity of gender roles.

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