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ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT: DRIVING INNOVATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the challenges faced by women in leadership positions, highlighting how sexism and patriarchal culture influence their trajectories. The research uses a bibliographic methodology, complemented by quantitative data, to analyze the evolution of female participation in the labor market. In addition, the study addresses how gender inequality affects decision-making and proposes strategies to promote greater inclusion and equity in companies, encouraging ethical leadership and valuing the female role.

Keywords: Women's Leadership, Machismo, Gender Equality, Labor Market, Patriarchate.

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INTRODUCTION

This work aims to investigate the challenges that women face in the labor market, especially in leadership positions. For a long time, women have been seen as responsible for taking care of the house, and this has made it difficult for them to enter higher areas of the market. Today, even with advances, women still face barriers caused by machismo and patriarchal culture. These barriers include the prejudice that women are not as capable as men to lead, as well as work overload, as many still have to balance work outside with household chores.

The theme was chosen because it is necessary to talk more about gender equality in the labor market. Even though women have gained more space in recent years, machismo is still very present, and it is common for their decisions to be questioned, or for them to have to behave in a way that is not natural to be accepted. This often makes them feel pressured or devalued in the workplace.

The methodology used was bibliographic research, that is, an analysis of books, articles and other texts on the subject was made. In addition, some numerical data on women's participation in the labor market were collected. This data has been transformed into graphs that show the female presence in different positions over the years.

The objective of the study is to better understand the obstacles that women face and propose solutions so that they can grow in the labor market without these limitations. Companies need to adopt policies that encourage gender equality and give more opportunities for women to occupy leadership positions, without being seen as inferior or less capable.

DEFINITION AND FOUNDATIONS OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Ethical leadership involves more than managing a team; It is a practice that encompasses values and morals. It involves the leader's commitment to moral values that guide their decisions and interactions within the organization. For Monteiro (2023), ethical leadership is defined as a process in which the leader acts based on solid ethical principles, positively influencing the behaviors and decisions of his subordinates. This is key to creating a fairer and more inclusive work environment, where employees feel respected and motivated to contribute to collective success. Ethics, therefore, is not only a complement to leadership, but a central component that shapes organizational culture and interpersonal relationships.

According to Alencastro (2010), the main fundamentals of ethical leadership include integrity, fairness, and accountability. Integrity refers to the coherence between the actions

and values of the leader, that is, the leader must act according to the principles he defends. Fairness refers to impartial decision-making, considering the interests and rights of all members of the organization. Finally, responsibility implies the leader's commitment to answer for the consequences of his actions, both internally and externally. These elements are essential to ensure that organizational practices are aligned with desired ethical standards and to strengthen employees' trust in the leadership system.

According to Porto, Lima and Melo (2014), ethical leadership contributes significantly to people management, especially in promoting a more balanced and inclusive work environment. When a leader acts ethically, he establishes a pattern of behavior that is reflected throughout the organization. This means that the processes of recruitment, evaluation, and promotion of employees are conducted in a fair and transparent manner, avoiding favoritism or discrimination.

It is observed that this type of leadership also encourages employees to develop professionally, knowing that their skills and competencies will be recognized in a fair and meritocratic way. Fairness in the treatment of employees creates an atmosphere of trust, which is essential for the smooth functioning of any team.

Esper and Almeida Cunha (2015) point out that one of the most important impacts of ethical leadership is the creation of an organizational culture focused on collective well-being. When leaders adopt ethical practices, they directly influence the behavior of employees, promoting attitudes of cooperation and respect. This approach allows team members to feel valued, as they realize that their contributions are recognized and that leaders are committed to everyone's well-being. In addition, an ethical culture favors the reduction of internal conflicts and increased productivity, since employees start to work in a more harmonious and transparent environment.

Carvalho (2023) reinforces that ethical leadership also plays a crucial role in promoting an ethical organizational culture. In companies where ethical leadership is a priority, moral values are disseminated at all levels of the organization, creating a solid foundation for the development of healthy working relationships and responsible decision-making, being important in times of crisis, when organizations are challenged to maintain their ethical standards while seeking effective solutions to problems. Ethical leadership ensures that, even under pressure, decisions are made in a fair and balanced manner, preserving the integrity of the organization and strengthening its reputation in the market.

In addition, ethical leadership has positive impacts not only on the internal environment of organizations, but also on their external image. Leaders who act ethically inspire trust not only among their employees, but also among customers, suppliers, and the

community at large. According to Alencastro (2010), companies that adopt ethical leadership practices tend to attract more talent and build customer loyalty, as they are perceived as organizations committed to social responsibility and collective well-being. In the long run, this translates into competitive advantages, since positive reputation strengthens the company's brand and contributes to its sustainable success.

In this context, it is possible to observe that ethical leadership is consolidated as a determining factor for innovation and the strengthening of labor relations. Monteiro (2023) states that, by promoting leadership based on ethical values, leaders are able to inspire their teams to act with more creativity and responsibility, contributing directly to organizational development. In addition, the trust generated by this type of leadership favors the creation of an environment where employees feel free to innovate and propose solutions. This collaborative dynamic translates into better financial results and greater competitiveness in the market.

It is important to mention that Esper and Almeida Cunha (2015) highlight that ethical leadership also has direct implications for employee engagement and turnover reduction. Organizations that value ethics in their leadership processes usually have lower turnover rates, since employees identify with the company's values and feel motivated to stay and grow within it. This engagement directly reflects on the team's performance and the organization's success, creating a virtuous cycle of positive results and organizational sustainability.

EVOLUTION AND HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE LABOR MARKET

The evolution of the role of women in society can be understood from different historical moments. In past centuries, the traditional role of women was restricted to the domestic environment, with their main function being to take care of the home and family, while men were responsible for providing for sustenance and participating in public decisions. Schlickmann and Pizarro (2013) state that women did not have the right to work outside the home or to directly influence social and political affairs, reflecting a deep-rooted structure of gender inequality.

The term "housewife" emerged during the industrialization process, being the result of the historical, political and economic context of that time. According to Bruschini (2007) and Hirata (2001), its origin is intrinsically connected to the emergence of capitalism, which brought with it an ideology that divided society into two spheres: the private, intended for women, and the public, reserved for men. Saffioti (1976, 1979) also reinforces that this

division resulted in the sexual separation of labor, where the productive function was attributed to the man and the reproductive function to the woman.

In this context, the nuclear family, idealized by the emerging bourgeoisie, assigned well-defined gender roles. Women were denied an active role in the public sphere, confining them to domestic life. According to Bruschini (2007), Hirata (2004) and Saffioti (1987), arguments based on biological characteristics such as menstruation, pregnancy and breastfeeding were used to justify this confinement, establishing its role as "natural" in the private space.

This naturalization of biological differences resulted in the sexual division of labor, where the productive function was attributed to the man, and the reproductive function to the woman. Biasoli-Alves (2000), Diniz (1999, 2004) and Moraes (1997) point out that society began to prepare women to be exemplary mothers and wives, idealizing the role of "queen of the home" and recognizing them only for their performance within the private sphere, which made it difficult for them to be inserted in other social spaces.

In this way, valuing women's domestic role served not only to keep them away from the labor market and public life, but also to reinforce gender inequalities, transforming these differences into significant social barriers. The following image illustrates how the woman was seen.

Figure 1 Female housewife



Source: (Pedagogical Blog, online, 2015).

In the seventeenth century, the first feminist movements began to emerge, with women claiming their rights and fighting for equality. Silva (2020) mentions that the female sex has tried to gain equality since this period, a moment when the feminist movement began to take shape in political action.

In the nineteenth century, with the consolidation of the capitalist system, there were several changes in the production and organization of women's work. Probst (2015) observes that, with technological development and the intense growth of machines, many

women were transferred to factories. In this scenario, women began to leave domestic chores and gain space in the labor market. However, this entry was marked by the exploitation of labor, with wage inequality and long working hours.

Women began to be included in the workforce when men were ahead in wars, and they took over the family business and men's job positions. Probst (2015) points out that, with the end of the war, many men died or were unable to return to work, and women felt the need to carry on the work that was previously done by their husbands.

Decree number 21,417, of 1932, established working conditions for women, without distinction of sex, with equal pay and a workload equivalent to that of men, in addition to prohibiting the work of women in mining, quarries, and public or private construction works. Schlickmann and Pizarro (2013) add that another right conquered was the guarantee that pregnant women could not be disconnected from work during pregnancy. In the 1934 Constitution, important rights were created, such as the 8-hour workday, equal pay, paid vacations, paid maternity leave, and the prohibition of women in unhealthy work.

In 1932, there was a decree that allowed women the right to vote, an achievement that came after several years of claims and discussions, guaranteeing the right to vote and to be elected to positions in the executive and legislative branches. Baranov (2014) observes that the right to vote was the result of great struggles that began before the Proclamation of the Republic, being partially approved, allowing only married women, with the authorization of their husbands, and widows or single women with their own income to exercise this basic right for full citizenship. In 1934, this restriction was eliminated and compulsory voting, previously restricted to men, was extended to women.

It is noteworthy that Brazil was the second country to win the right to vote for women, behind only Ecuador. According to RBA (2016), currently more than 52% of voters are women and, in addition to voting, they have started to run for elective office.

In July 2005, Senator Patrícia Saboya launched the campaign for 6-month maternity leave. Troiano (2007) explains that, with the creation of this program, companies that pay the full salary of employees during these extra months receive tax incentives, such as a reduction in income tax. In 2010, Law 11770 of 2008 was regulated by the National Congress and sanctioned by the President of the Republic, extending maternity leave from 120 days to 180 days.

THE ROLE OF FEMINISM IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The feminist movement has evolved through several waves, each focusing on different aspects of gender equality and women's rights. In the first wave of feminism,

during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the focus was on legal issues, especially the right to vote. Women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony led the suffrage movement in the United States, while Bertha Lutz led the fight for women's right to vote in Brazil, which culminated in the approval of women's suffrage in 1932. This phase of feminism primarily sought equality in legal rights, including the right to vote, property, and access to education.

In Brazil, the first wave of feminism had great visibility in the struggle for women's right to vote, led by Bertha Lutz, a prominent biologist who, after studying abroad, returned to Brazil in the 1910s to start this campaign. Bruschini (2007) points out that Lutz was one of the founders of the Brazilian Federation for Women's Progress, which organized a public campaign for the right to vote, including a petition presented to the Senate in 1927, which sought the approval of a bill by Senator Juvenal Lamartine. Hirata (2001) and Saffioti (1979) add that the right to vote was finally conquered in 1932, with the promulgation of the New Electoral Code.

In addition to the campaign for the vote, an important movement of workers with anarchist ideology also stood out. The workers of the "Union of Seamstresses, Hatters and Attached Classes" fought against exploitation in the workplace. Bruschini (2007) and Saffioti (1987) mention that, in 1917, in a manifesto, the female workers highlighted the difficult conditions faced by women in the factories, denouncing the devaluation of their work.

This initial feminism, both in Brazil and abroad, lost strength from the 1930s onwards, resurfacing only in the 1960s, when the book *The Second Sex*, by Simone de Beauvoir, brought to light the famous phrase: "one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman" (Hirata & Kergoat, 2007).

Second-wave feminism began in the 1960s and broadened the struggle beyond legal issues to encompass broader social and cultural concerns such as reproductive rights, sexuality, and equality in the workplace. Feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, who published *The Second Sex* in 1949, questioned traditional gender roles, stating that "one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman," a claim that challenged the biological determinism of gender roles.

In the United States, Betty Friedan, with *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), inspired women to challenge the limits of domesticity. The second wave also brought greater activism around reproductive rights, leading to battles over access to contraception and abortion.

The 1960s were a period of great cultural and social effervescence in the Western world. Biasoli-Alves (2000) and Diniz (1999) observe that, in the United States, the hippie movement and the Vietnam War were in the spotlight, while in Europe, the "May 68" in Paris brought questions to the established academic and social order.

In this context, feminism gained strength and began to discuss not only the right to work and public life, but also issues related to women's autonomy over the body and freedom in gender relations. Pinto (2003) and Diniz (2004) explain that Betty Friedan, with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, boosted this movement in the United States, where women began to directly question the power relations between the sexes.

In Brazil, the second wave of feminism followed a different path due to the military dictatorship established in 1964, which restricted freedom of political expression. Bruschini (2007) reports that, in the 1970s, feminist movements began to emerge, although under strong control of the regime. Despite these limitations, Brazilian feminists initiated protests and fostered debates about women's rights, even under constant government surveillance.

The 1960s in Brazil were marked by the military coup of 1964, which imposed a dictatorship and repressed social movements, including feminism. Pinto (2003) and Hirata (2004) point out that, in 1975, the UN declared the "decade of women", which led to the organization of debates in Brazil on the role and behavior of women in society. That same year, Terezinha Zerbini launched the Women's Movement for Amnesty, which was crucial in the fight for political and civil rights.

With the redemocratization in the 1980s, feminism in Brazil entered a phase of great mobilization, with the formation of numerous feminist groups and collectives, addressing issues such as violence against women, equal rights in marriage and at work, and the right to health. Bruschini (2007) and Diniz (1999) state that the creation of the National Council for Women's Rights (CNDM) in 1984 was an important milestone, being essential to ensure the inclusion of women's rights in the 1988 Constitution. During the first government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the Special Secretariat for Women's Policies was created, with the status of a ministry, and the CNDM was restructured to resume its activities in defense of women's rights (Diniz, 2004; Pinto, 2003).

In the 1990s and 2000s, feminism in Brazil went through a process of institutionalization, with the creation of NGOs focused on the defense of women's rights, especially in the fight against domestic violence. Bruschini (2007) and Hirata (2004) observe that the approval of the Maria da Penha Law in 2006 represented a significant advance, creating mechanisms to protect women against family and domestic violence.

The National Conferences on Women's Policies, held in 2005 and 2007, mobilized thousands of women and produced important documents on the situation of women in the country, consolidating feminism as an active and relevant movement (Pinto, 2003).

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The incorporation of women into the labor market has become a continuous and persistent social phenomenon. In Brazil, female participation has increased significantly in recent decades. According to Barbosa (2014), the participation rate of women between 15 and 59 years old grew from 52.5% in 1992 to 61% in 2012. D'Alonso (2008) also addresses this expansion of areas occupied by women, highlighting that they are no longer just housewives to also assume roles such as mothers, wives, workers, nurses, teachers, architects, judges, bus drivers and bank employees, professions that were previously predominantly male.

In recent decades, the position of women in the economy and society has undergone profound and accelerated changes. These changes allowed women to take the lead in households, and couples began to share responsibilities and commitments. As a result, the female presence has increased both in the economic and social spheres. Women's work has consolidated itself as an essential component of the capitalist economic structure.

Bruschini and Lombardi (2012) analyze these achievements, associating the advancement of women in scientific and artistic careers with the political and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, including the feminist movement, the change in cultural values, and the increase in female schooling.

Silva et al. (2005) point out that the growth in female participation in the last fifty years is the result of economic and cultural factors. They point out that industrialization has transformed the productive structure, the urbanization process has continued and fertility rates have fallen, which has increased job opportunities for women. Thus, these changes opened up more space for women to occupy positions in the labor market.

Baylão et al. (2014) highlight that, in order to understand the role of women in society, it is essential to know their historical trajectory. Only through this knowledge is it possible to understand the construction of their identity, their participation in social groups, their role in the family environment and their performance in the labor market.

This is how Pinheiro (2012) explains:

> For Karl Marx (2008), the history of the production and reproduction of the social being, that is, its realization, is only effective through work. Professional activity is presented as the genesis of the realization of the social being, a condition for its

> existence, thus constituting the starting point for its humanization. Within this context, the citizen is only completely inserted through work activity, where she fulfills herself as a person. This aspect is very interesting because it marks the qualitative evolution of the female workforce in Brazil in recent years. If before women in Brazil were mostly domestic workers and small artisans, from the 70s onwards they conquered space in various professions considered until then as masculine (Pinheiro, 2012 apud Feitosa~; Albuquerque, 2017, p. 7).

According to Abramo (2010), a stereotyped view of women places them in the role of "provider" only when there is no other option or when circumstances prevent them from performing their traditional role as "caregiver". This results in an image of women as having low commitment to work and a tendency to abandon their economic activities as soon as possible. Abramo (2010) also observes that this idea of "secondary" insertion of women is at the base of gender prejudice, directly impacting their careers. Their professional trajectories become unstable and interrupted, the social importance of their income is diminished, and their rise to higher hierarchical positions is hampered.

Historically, women were assigned the "natural" role of caregivers, while men were considered the financial providers of the family. Passos et al. (2017) explain that this model consolidated the idea that family responsibilities belonged to women, while work was reserved for men, strengthening a cultural division in which the public sphere was associated with men and the private sphere with women, reinforcing the separation between genders in the social context. In addition, Passos et al. (2017) state that these social attributions imposed pressures and oppressions on women both inside and outside their homes. The daily dedication to the care of the family was accompanied by the exclusion of women from the productive world, consolidating a model in which their participation outside the home was, in a way, denied. Thus, based on these socially instituted roles, a sexual division of labor was formed, which ended up being unequal and unfavorable to women.

In this context, discourse exerts the power to naturalize gender relations and the sexual division of labor, making these dynamics widely accepted and rarely questioned. This process, according to Passos et al. (2017), validates and strengthens the distinction between spheres such as the "labor market" and the "domestic environment". The insertion of women in the labor market causes changes in the family structure, demanding new arrangements and dynamics in the functioning of families. One of the main challenges faced by women is balancing their domestic, academic, and professional responsibilities, while many still take on childcare. Simões et al. (201) observe that this difficulty occurs in a context in which family forms are moving away from the traditional model.

As already discussed, there are elements that sustain and reproduce hierarchies between men and women, perpetuating patterns of discrimination and gender subordination. Alves et al. (2009) argue that unraveling the mechanisms that generate these differences is essential to understand how, even with changes, the complete overcoming of these inequalities has not yet been achieved. This discussion goes beyond the labor market and includes other dimensions of social life. The explanation for this inequality, according to Alves et al. (2009), lies in the way in which the relations between masculine and feminine are constructed in society, limiting the space for female participation, as evidenced by the historical analysis of women's insertion in the labor market.

Cunha et al. (2009) point out that women are still often ignored by development and labor policies. When these policies do not take gender issues into account, they end up aggravating women's poverty in terms of material resources, time, and knowledge. These stereotypes, which devalue women's work, are ingrained in both society and the business environment, and their transformation is slow and uncertain. Although Brazilian labor legislation contains several norms that seek to eliminate discrimination in the workplace, the data reveal that women and black people continue to be systematically discriminated against (Alves et al., 2009).

In this context, Gomes (2005) identifies a series of challenges faced by women in the labor market: lower salaries compared to men for similar activities; the overload of the double shift, the result of a sexual division of labor that delegates most of the domestic responsibilities to women; the lack of adequate social policies, making it difficult to access support services, such as daycare centers and other essential resources for low-income women; fewer training opportunities in more lucrative areas, where most vacancies are occupied by men; and the lack of representation in decision-making spaces, which limits women's ability to negotiate collective bargaining agreements, due to gender inequalities present even in union relations.

The growth of female participation in the economy, according to Castells (1999), represents a break with the historical pattern of society. Women's work is no longer just a complement to family income, but a social transformation of great impact, which modifies individual expectations, family dynamics and the need for public services. Castells (1999) also points out that these transformations manifest themselves in various ways: first, the wage gap persists, even with the increase in female schooling; second, interpersonal skills, more developed in women, are increasingly valued in a context where people management is more important than resource management; and third, women's flexibility in the labor

market is a crucial factor for the new economy, which requires adaptation in terms of schedules and permanence in the market.

It is important to highlight that the insertion of women in the labor market goes beyond the position of employees, also including their role as employers. Chiavenato (2008) observes that education has been the main means for women to confidently enter professional careers. The current scenario values both knowledge and interpersonal skills, such as innovation and intuition, which are fundamental to assuming leadership positions. It is not only about technical and intellectual skills, but also about interpersonal skills.

In this way, the role of women in the labor market is in full transformation. Although they still face challenges, the increase in the presence of women in leadership positions demonstrates an important evolution, which confronts stereotypes and prejudices, creating new opportunities and spaces for action. The continuity of this advance is linked to the implementation of effective public policies, cultural changes and the strengthening of education as a means of empowerment and social ascension. Considering the contexts of social transformation, despite the barriers faced, society's awareness of these issues, together with the struggle of social movements and the continuous debate on gender, has opened paths for women's achievements.

BENEFITS OF GENDER DIVERSITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

The concept of gender refers to the socially constructed differences between men and women, often confused with the term sex, which refers to the physical and biological distinctions between male and female. However, gender encompasses more than these biological distinctions, being a social identity shaped by the attributions of behaviors and qualities between the sexes. As Dos Santos Canabarro and Salvagni (2015, p. 90) explain, "[...] men and women are built from practices and relationships that institute various aspects such as gestures, ways of being and being in the world, ways of speaking, ways of acting, appropriate and distinct conducts and postures". These social constructions reflect how gender is perceived and acted upon in different contexts, and it is important to understand the divergences about its meaning.

In the workplace, these distinctions are often used as a justification to limit the rise of women, perpetuating an inferior view of them, similar to what occurs with other historically marginalized groups, such as blacks and indigenous people (Vilela, Hanashiro, and Costa, 2020). This perception that gender can negatively impact women's professional development reflects a social construct that needs to be challenged. Costa, Sampaio, and Flores (2019) point out that these differences are often used as an argument to justify the

lower presence of women in leadership positions or on boards of directors. However, gender diversity in organizations, when properly recognized and valued, can bring significant benefits both to the performance of companies and to the cohesion of work teams.

The objective, therefore, is to show that, by treating gender equally, all individuals, regardless of their identity characteristics, can contribute to the success of organizations. The inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making positions should not be seen as a concession, but as a competitive advantage for companies that seek innovation and diversity in their management strategies. According to Vilela, Hanashiro and Costa (2020), such gender distinctions need to be analyzed from a perspective that challenges the social and institutional barriers that still exist. In addition, the authors suggest that the understanding of gender goes beyond biological distinctions, encompassing aspects related to personality and behavior, which should be taken into account when discussing issues of equality at work.

However, they add that "if the body itself is always socially interpreted, then 'sex' cannot be totally independent of 'gender'; on the contrary, sex, in this sense, must be understood as something subsumed by gender" (p. 385). Thus, gender is seen as "the social organization of sexual difference [...], although it cannot be dissociated from its implication in a wide spectrum of discursive contexts" (p. 386). This suggests that the construction of gender does not depend exclusively on biological sex, although physical identification is still an important indicator, even if socially constructed.

Regarding the social construction of gender, Dos Santos Canabarro and Salvagni (2015) emphasize the relevance of "analytical tools to understand the articulation of various differences and inequalities" (p. 95). The authors highlight a systemic reading, where the interaction between different forms of subordination allows overcoming the idea of a simple superposition of oppressions, in addition to adopting constructionist approaches that emphasize the dynamic and relational aspects of social identity. These approaches are fundamental to understanding the constant power disputes related to hegemony in gender relations.

The demographic, cultural and social changes that have occurred in Brazil have also influenced women and their families. One of these changes was the reduction in fertility rates, which allowed for greater insertion of women in the labor market, especially in the more developed regions of the country. In addition, the educational level of women has surpassed that of men, and their entry into universities has opened up new job

opportunities, including in prominent positions within organizations (Costa, Sampaio, and Flores, 2019).

On a daily basis, women have shown their capabilities and skills in leading teams and running businesses. However, it is essential that they overcome the social prejudices that still restrict their full recognition in the spheres of power and leadership (Dos Santos Canabarro and Salvagni, 2015).

For Menda (2004, p. 57):

> [...] The position that women occupy in the world of work structures interests and many of everyday behaviors. This leads us to think about women's work and the place they occupy in this world, as a situation of equality between men and women

According to Vilela, Hanashiro and Costa (2020), male prejudice towards women in the workplace is still significant, especially because men often associate women only with family and domestic roles, which, according to them, would limit women's ability to insert and perform in their professions.

The authors also mention that, over time, gender relations have undergone important transformations, with women becoming more autonomous and independent, which has changed their relationships with work, family and sexuality. In the professional field, these changes are also observed in hierarchical positions occupied by women and in the skills and competencies required for their development, corroborating the studies of Costa, Sampaio, and Flores (2019).

In addition, there is much discussion about the attitudes and skills necessary for women in leadership positions to be able to balance their personal and professional lives, without one overloading the other. As highlighted by Dos Santos Canabarro and Salvagni (2015), contemporary good practices in organizational management value trust, dialogue, openness, tolerance for mistakes and encouragement of the entrepreneurial spirit.

In this sense, the modern management model requires that the old, outdated and traditionally masculine concepts of competition and aggressiveness be abandoned, replacing them with cooperation and affective relationships, essential for the process of humanization in the workplace.

In this context, the topic of leadership gains relevance, as the qualities and characteristics of a leader are fundamental to business management. Leading a team involves more than power and authority; It is necessary to develop skills to inspire and coordinate people effectively. Organizations offer training programs for their employees in leadership positions, aiming to improve their leadership skills. However, according to Costa, Sampaio and Flores (2019). Even participating in the same training, individual results may

vary due to the influence of personality on professional behavior. This reflects that leadership styles, whether male or female, are more defined by personal characteristics than by gender.

Finally, for Costa, Sampaio and Flores (2019), leadership is a skill that can be developed. People can learn to be leaders through education and practice by combining the right will, methods, and attitudes.

According to Dos Santos Canabarro and Salvagni (2015), leadership should not be confused with management, but rather with influence. A good leader gets people to follow and contribute enthusiastically, becoming more creative and reaching a potential beyond what they imagined. In other words, leadership is the ability to influence individuals to work enthusiastically to achieve common goals, inspiring confidence through strength of character.

Similarly, Vilela, Hanashiro and Costa (2020) define leadership as the ability of one person to influence the behavior of another through direction, encouragement and support, motivating subordinates to face challenges and achieve goals, both personal and professional, that they believed to be difficult.

Costa, Sampaio, and Flores (2019) also highlight that leadership can emerge spontaneously within a team, when a member acts in the collective interest and, after achieving these goals, returns to their usual activities. This leader can be a co-worker who, even though he does not formally occupy a management position, ends up influencing the group with his actions.

Research indicates that women tend to adopt a more democratic leadership style, similar to a network of connections and exchanges, encouraging their subordinates to share ideas and participate in decisions. On the other hand, as stated by Vilela, Hanashiro and Costa (2020), the male leadership model is often characterized by an autocratic, task-centered style, in which orders are given by superiors and obeyed by subordinates.

Dos Santos Canabarro and Salvagni, (2015), however, in the corporate environment, there is no "correct" style of leadership, as both men and women can contribute in different ways, generating different results for organizations.

In this sense, it is possible for women to use traditionally masculine characteristics in their management, just as men can adopt feminine attributes in their leadership practices. This can create new cultural and behavioral attitudes within companies, always considering the values and organizational culture, in addition to the characteristics of the team led. This concept is close to the idea of androgynous leadership, which, according to Santos (2013, p. 96), combines masculine and feminine attributes, eliminating the rigid division between

genders. The author also states that androgynous leadership can be a solution to promote equal conditions and opportunities, especially for women in leadership positions.

According to Kanan (2010), the diversity of professional attitudes, both of men and women, should be more recognized by managers, since human behavior is never uniform. Success or superiority are not tied to a specific gender, as each individual has unique characteristics that adjust to different situations.

Today, companies demand that results be achieved through people, regardless of gender. These people need to be flexible and able to adapt to changes in the business environment, identifying the competencies necessary to achieve the established objectives (Kanan, 2010).

CASE STUDY: ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN COMPANIES

This chapter will discuss case studies related to ethical leadership and female empowerment in companies, with the aim of understanding how these practices have been applied in the corporate environment and what their impacts are. For a more in-depth analysis, articles were selected that explore the topic, presenting practical examples of how ethical leadership and female empowerment have helped transform organizations.

The article "Evolution of women in the labor market" presented by Feitosa (2019) the author made a detailed analysis of the growth of female participation in the market over the years, focusing especially on women who have assumed leadership positions in different business sectors.

The survey discussed the advances achieved by women, as well as the persistent challenges they face daily, highlighting the relevance of understanding the social role of women and how cultural and historical constructions have influenced their professional trajectory.

The authors highlight the positive impact of education on women's lives, showing that, with the increase in schooling, many have reached positions and professions previously reserved for men. This generated significant changes in social and family dynamics, since women began to accumulate responsibilities both in the domestic and professional environments.

The data reveal that wage discrimination is still present: all four interviewees confirmed that women's salaries are usually lower than men's, even in similar roles. In addition, the interviewees reported a feeling of overload when trying to balance formal work

with domestic responsibilities, still seen as a mostly female task. This scenario reflects the persistence of gender stereotypes that hinder women's full professional development.

Another important point was the perception of progress in women's achievements. All the interviewees recognized that women have conquered more space in leadership positions, although cultural and institutional barriers still persist that prevent full equality in the labor market.

The author makes it clear that, despite these achievements, inequality still persists, manifesting itself both in the wage disparity and in the prejudices that continue to hinder women's ascension to leadership positions (Feitosa, 2019).

Another study presented by Querino, Domingues and Luz (2013), on "The Evolution of Women in the Labor Market", presents a comprehensive analysis of female insertion in the Brazilian labor market. The authors highlight the significant increase in women's participation, especially after World War I, when many had to take on roles that traditionally belonged to men. The text addresses the difficulties faced by women over the years, such as wage devaluation and occupational segregation, where they occupied positions with lower pay and social prestige.

A significant fact presented in the article is the growth of the economically active female population. In 1970, only 18.2% of Brazilian women over 10 years of age were economically active. Twenty years later, this percentage doubled, reaching 39.2%, with more than 22 million women in the labor market. This growth is attributed to factors such as industrialization, urbanization and the need to supplement family income. Economic crises, especially in the 1980s, also impacted the labor market, shifting the female workforce to the tertiary sector, such as commerce and services, areas in which women traditionally had an easier time inserting.

In terms of education, the author also points out that, over the decades, women have become more qualified, which allows them to access occupations that require a higher level of knowledge. However, even with these advances, the wage gap between men and women persists. IBGE data from 2011 showed that the average income of women was R$ 1,343.81, while men earned an average of R$ 1,857.63, a difference of 72.3%.

The study by Glasenapp et al. (2024) in Women in the Labor Market" offers an updated analysis on female participation, specifically in the retail sector of construction materials. Considering that the data from Querino et al. (2013) are older, it is relevant to update it with the information from 2024.

While the study by Querino (2013) already indicated challenges such as wage inequality and occupational segregation, Glasenapp's new data reinforce that these issues

remain, but with more complex nuances. For example, in the study carried out in Santa Maria (RS), it was revealed that 39.29% of the women surveyed stated that construction materials companies do not have specific positions aimed at women, and only 16% of women hold leadership positions, despite representing 50% of the sector.

In addition, the study highlights the absence of career policies aimed at promoting women to leadership positions. This shows that, despite the increase in female participation in the market, there are still significant barriers, such as the concentration of women in administrative functions and the continuity of inequality in sectors that are mostly male.

The following graph illustrates the evolution of female participation in the labor market over several decades, from 1970 to 2024. Based on data presented by Querino et al. (2013) and Glasenapp et al. (2024), it is possible to observe a trend of continuous growth in the presence of women in the professional environment. This increase reflects significant changes in social dynamics, such as greater access to education and the expansion of opportunities in the labor market.

However, despite this numerical advance, as pointed out by the studies, challenges related to equal pay and the occupation of leadership positions still persist. The graph helps to contextualize this progression, highlighting the increase in female participation, but highlighting the need for more inclusive and equitable actions in organizations.

Graph 1 Evolution of Women's Participation in the Labor Market (1970-2024).



Source: the author (2024)

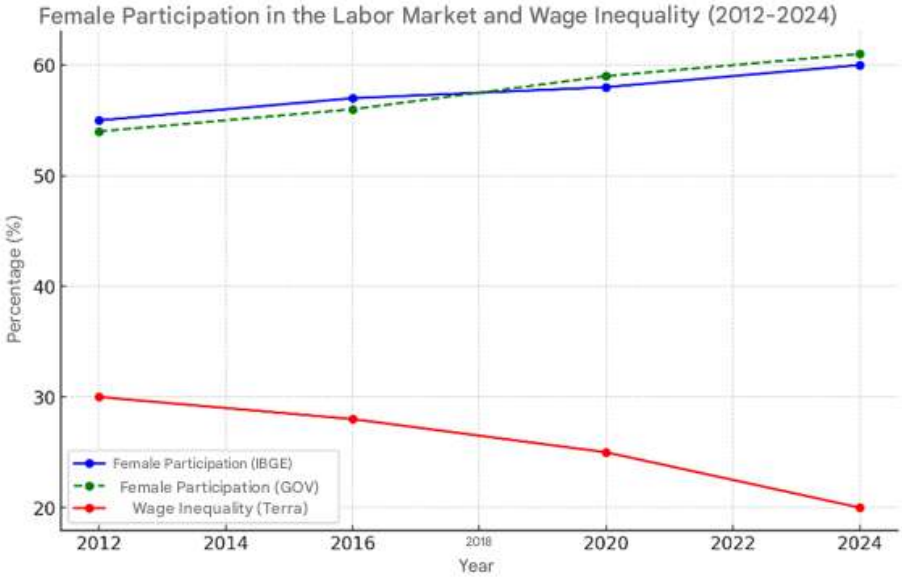
There has been a significant increase over the decades, from just 18.2% in 1970 to 50% in 2024. This growth reflects the advancement of women in different sectors of the economy, as a result of greater schooling, increased professional opportunities and cultural changes. However, despite this increase in participation, the most recent studies indicate

that women still face barriers in leadership positions and equal pay, showing that the mere presence of numbers does not guarantee the overcoming of structural inequalities.

Nevertheless, IBGE data indicate that, in 2024, women's participation in the labor market is about 20% lower than that of men, revealing persistent inequality. Meanwhile, the GOV (Ministry of Labor) shows constant progress in female inclusion in the market, showing that equality policies have been advancing, but there is still room for improvement. The Terra source highlights a wage inequality of approximately 20%, which shows that, despite the increase in female participation, women still receive, on average, 80% of the salary of men in equivalent positions.

Thus, the graph presented below illustrates the evolution of female participation in the labor market between 2012 and 2024, based on data from the IBGE, GOV and a survey mentioned on the Terra website. He compares the inclusion of women in the labor market over the years and the wage inequality faced by them.

Graph 2 Women's Participation in the Labor Market and Wage Inequality (2012-2024).



Source: the author (2024).

It is observed that both IBGE and GOV data indicate a gradual increase in female participation, demonstrating progress in gender inclusion and equity policies. However, the line that represents wage inequality shows that, despite the greater inclusion of women, there is still a significant difference in earnings when compared to men.

These data show that, despite the advance in the presence of women in the labor market and in the occupation of strategic positions, there are still structural barriers, especially with regard to equal pay and equal opportunities. The future trajectory depends

on more robust public policies, as well as changes in corporate and cultural practices to promote true gender equity.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of this paper was to investigate how prejudice and patriarchy affect women's professional progress, particularly in a historically male-dominated corporate environment. During the study, not only the direct challenges, such as gender bias, but also the indirect impacts, such as the double shift and the pressure to reconcile family and professional responsibilities, were analyzed.

The methodology used was predominantly bibliographic, with the analysis of articles and studies on female leadership. There was no collection of quantitative data directly by us; However, we use existing data to illustrate the evolution of women's participation in the labour market. In this way, it was possible to build a solid theoretical basis and present empirical evidence that reflects both the advances and the gaps still present in relation to gender equality.

The survey reveals that the insertion of women in leadership positions is not only a matter of equity, but also of competitiveness for companies. The presence of women in decision-making positions offers new perspectives, promotes diversity of ideas and strengthens a more collaborative and innovative organizational culture. However, institutionalized sexism still represents a major obstacle, leading women to adjust their behavior and decisions to male expectations, often compromising their authenticity and creativity.

The topic addressed in this work is extremely relevant today, when both the importance of diversity and the need for more equality in the corporate environment are discussed. It is clear that inclusion policies are essential to create an environment in which women can grow and thrive, without the limitations imposed by gender bias. In addition, companies that do not invest in diversity miss an opportunity for growth and innovation, since women, by bringing their experiences and visions, contribute to a stronger organization adapted to contemporary challenges.

In this way, this work not only fulfills its objective of investigating the challenges faced by women in the labor market, but also proposes a reflection on the role of all the actors involved – from women who face these barriers to organizations that have the power to transform their structures. For these changes to be real, a collective commitment to promoting gender equality is needed, adopting practices that make the work environment more inclusive and fair for all.

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