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Directed Research

An Approach on Disrupting Sexism in the Work Place:
Mechanisms to break the Glass Ceiling

Masters in Management | Work Project

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A project carried out for the Masters in Management program under the supervision of Professor Joana Story, PhD

Acknowledgments

I want to dedicate this work project to my Mum, whom I hope would make very proud for achieving this.

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Abstract

Women are a major part of today's working force but still are not a representative part of leadership roles. Executive boards worldwide and top management positions are predominantly male and despite advances in terms of government policies, education and corporate measures to include women in senior positions, there is still a small percentage of women in leadership roles. This paper analyzes the perceived challenges women face.

Keywords: gender discrimination; women in leadership; women in workplace; sexism

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Introduction

Workplace discrimination is still a reality to many women who aim to achieve leadership roles in their companies. Only 14.2% of the top five leadership positions at the companies in the S&P 500 are held by women and women hold 16.5% of these four positions just below CEO in the S&P 500. In Portugal, only five companies out of the 17 in PSI-20 have women on their executive boards; from a total of 82 managers, merely 8 are women (OECD, 2009; Eurostat, 2016; Pordata, 2016). In order to assess the reasons behind the gap in leadership between men and women, one must first understand how gender and gender roles play a part in our culture and how it then translates into a work environment. Culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Tyler, 1871). Sexism refers to beliefs that value one sex (gender) over another, usually "that the members of one sex are less intelligent, able, skilful, etc. than the members of the other sex, especially that women are less able than men" (Cambridge Press, 2016). A sexist culture is a reflection of how engrained sexist beliefs become normalized and are perceived as "the way things are" without any critical or logical explanation. Gender and culture are related since the expectations for both genders differ when considering their roles in society, their households and within the workforce. These expectations reflect in the way we perceive what is appropriate behaviour for each gender and it is shaped and defined by culture. The OECD uses the percentage of women in management positions as an indicator for a country's progress (OECD, 2009) and its comparison to men's positions in management and leadership roles is a key social indicator of parity between genders in the workforce. According to OECD's report *Gender and Sustainable Development* (2009), women in management and leadership roles can "bring a wider range of perspectives to bear in corporate decisionmaking, contribute team-building and communication skills, and help

organisations to adapt to changing circumstances (OECD, 2009a: 31).” In *Achieving stronger growth by promoting a more gender-balanced economy* (OECD, 2014) it is stated that “the factors underlying the persistency of the female labour market disadvantage, include gender stereotyping that tracks women into lower paid occupations, gender difference in choice of fields of study, gender differences in access to financial markets and productive resources, gender differences in the use of leave arrangements for fathers and mothers, constraints to public childcare supports, unequal treatment of men and women in legal frameworks, including labour laws, and pervasive views about differential gender roles”. The European Commission is also aware of these facts and has deployed a new *Strategy for Equality between Women and Men* (2010-2015) in September 2010 and later that year, launched the “Women on the Board Pledge for Europe”, a “call on publicly listed companies in Europe to sign a voluntary commitment to increase women’s presence on their corporate boards to 30 % by 2015 and 40 % by 2020 by means of actively recruiting qualified women to replace outgoing male members” (EU, 2012). Research has proven that more women in the labour market and particularly in leadership and management roles, is beneficial for companies, economics and society as a whole. McKinsey & Company (2007) found that companies with a greater percentage of women in managerial roles obtained better positive outcomes on organizational excellence and financial performance. Nevertheless, the gap between men and women is not getting any slimmer despite the fact that there are presently more women enrolled in universities (190.282 women vs 166.117 men, according to DGEEC/MEd - MCTES, PORDATA, 2016) and entering the work force - Given that a greater parity in jobs and leadership positions can bring financial advantages to companies, as well as promote a fairer society based on qualifications and merit, what is stopping women to achieve senior roles? This paper aims to understand

what is preventing women from climbing the corporate ladder and what can be done to reverse it. The purpose is to analyse and provide recommendations that can be implemented in order to break the glass ceiling that is stopping women from reaching their full potential.

Workforce and labour

Women in Portugal: historical context

It was during the 1960s, during a strong period of emigration and during the colonial Portuguese war, that women truly entered the workforce in Portugal. With men abroad, women saw themselves as the main household income and had to provide for themselves and their children. When at the end of the following decade, the democratic revolution took place, ideals and morals of equality and emancipation were already on the rise. Nevertheless, Portuguese women were only given full legal equality in 1976. It was that year that women were granted the right to vote and full equality in marriage was finally established. In terms of jobs, they were finally permitted to work in positions that had been denied access to, such as public administration, law and diplomatic functions. (Silva, 1983; Ferreira, 1999). With this disruption in terms of social norms and women economic empowerment, state mechanisms were created to enforce women's rights and legal equality – in 1977 the Commission on the Status of Women was created as an attachment to the Prime Minister's Office in order to oversee the protection of women's rights and in 1991 it was renamed as renamed the Commission for Equality and Women's Rights (Comissão para a Igualdade e Direitos das Mulheres) (U.S. Library of Congress). In spite of these significant improvements and advances in terms of legal status, Portuguese women remain underrepresented in most upper-level positions, whether public or private, and the pay gap against their male

counterparts is still a current issue data (The Current Situation of Gender Equality in Portugal, EC, 2013).

Working women in Portugal: current facts and data

According to European Comission data (EC, 2013), "the underrepresentation of women on hierarchical levels is significant – the proportion of women on supervisory boards (7%) is clearly lower than the EU-27 average (16%)". Thus, it is significantly pronounced how underrepresented women are in decision-making positions when we compare Portugal to the remaining members of EU and in terms of management positions on large and SMEs companies, Portugal is still below EU-27's average - 30% against 33% (see Exhibit 1). The qualification levels of women in Portugal has increased significantly and currently, there are more women enrolled and graduating from universities than men (see Exhibit 2). In terms of gender pay gap, the average female employee in Portugal earns 12.5% less than the average male employee. By comparison to EU-27 (16.2%), this is low, however, between 2006 and 2010, the gender pay gap in Portugal increased by 4.4 pp, dropping in 2011 by 0.3 pp (see exhibit 3).

Women are not only overtaking universities but also the job market; in 2016, women represented 48.9% of the total labor force (International Labour Organization, using World Bank population estimates) in Portugal and 46.4% in Science, maths and computing fields of education (EU, Gender Equality). This symbolizes a quick progress by comparison to past data and given Portugal's fairly recent legislative measures on gender equality. In the following graph, it is possible to analyze the evolution in terms of access to the job market – coincinding with cultural and social progress – since 1974 (the year Portugal became a democratic republic).

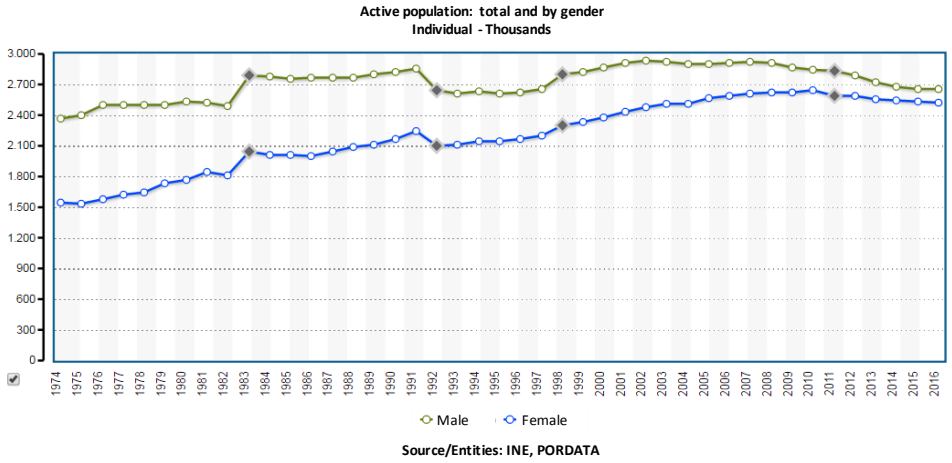

Figure 1 – Active Population in Portugal

With growing expectations and access to education, women started to enter careers thus becoming more prominent in terms of labor force.

Literature Review - Barriers and Challenges

Glass ceiling and Second-Generation Gender Bias

Glass ceiling is "the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements." (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Despite the rise in terms of female education, the access to senior level jobs in public and private sectors still remains unnatainable to the same degree as men which translates into the fact that there is not a correlation or proportional increase of women in management positions (Aparna, 2014; Grant Thornton - IBR, 2013; World Bank Report, 2012) which proves that organizational norms and cultural practices are barriers to women's access to senior leadership and management positions in most countries (Global Gender Gap Report, 2016; Piterman, 2008). Women account for 45% of people employed in the European Union and 56% of people in tertiary education (Eurostat, 2011) which translates into being better formally educated than men and in greater number but nevertheless, at

senior positions, this representation declines drastically. Whilst some authors emphasize the lack of substantial women at the top, others perceive women in corporate positions as token workers who aren't fully integrated, an outsider inside (Kanter, 1977). According to Ibarra et al (2013), research has been moving from the glass ceiling perspective into a second-generation gender bias approach. This bias is identified as the primary cause of women's underrepresentation in leadership roles that "reinforces entrenched beliefs, prompts and supports men's bids for leadership, and thus maintains the *status quo*". The main identified barriers are in terms of organizational culture, gender stereotypes, lack of mentoring, male-oriented career paths, male-dominated networks and inadequate strategies for motherhood/work-life balance. We are hereby dividing these factors into two groups: structural factors (policies and work practices) and cultural factors (beliefs, stereotypes, values).

Structural factors

Professional women face constant difficulties in organizations in terms of being able to succeed naturally due to organizational work culture that institutionalize a set of procedures, informal rules of behaviour, incentives and prioritities that are unfit to accomodate their needs as organizations seek to select and retain employees that are adjusted to their culture (Carrillo and Gromb, 2006). These structural factors are displayed in terms of gendered career paths where work is "categorized" into primary and secondary, being the primary or core functions mostly attributed to men with higher pay and more prestige (Peitchnis, 1989; Igbaria and Baroudi, 1995). Gendered career paths favour mobility, travel and formal rotations in work as a key step on path to leadership roles and have been put in place at a time where household dynamics were different and mostly men provided for the family whereas women tyically assumed a more domestic role (Ibarra et al, 2013). Women are often placed the question whether

they want to pursue a career or being mothers thus being overshadowed by their male peers and neglected when considering promotions as "Men in senior roles are more likely to appoint or promote someone with a style similar to their own as the top factor" (Sanders, 2011). Although this is intrinsecally related with cultural factors, many organizations still have not deployed effective mechanisms for shared parenthood, adding pressure on women to continue to assume that primary role. (Prowess, 2008). Limited mentoring, including female leaders to look up to, is one of the issues that seem to be referred to as without appropriate female leaders to be inspired by, or to experiment and evaluate leadership styles and behaviours, may discourage women to aspire to achieve said roles and to ending up feeling the necessity to adopt a more masculine style. (Ibarra et al, 2013). Networks are also male-oriented, an "old boys' club" that do not support or encourage women to participate and tend to mentor and foster male employees' development as they perceive them as more fit for the job and block women from accessing influential colleagues on a more informal level (Ibarra et al, 2013).

Cultural Factors

The main barriers in terms of cultural factors are gender stereotypes and sexual tensions for women on career paths to top leadership management positions (Piterman, 2008). Biased perceptions on what it takes to be a leader and what attributes a leader must have, are closely linked to our understanding of what are "masculine traits". However, research show us that women are just as qualified as men in contributing to achieving organizations' stated financial and strategic objectives (McKinsey and Company, 2012) but that their leadership styles differ from those of men, which holds them back to achieve said roles. Barriers to progression "are in large part due to perceptions of a woman's ability to lead" (Sanders, 2011) and the same traits that are successful on men

are not perceived in the same manner when it comes to women, which can even hurt their chances at corporate achievement as women who become leaders are "viewed sas competent but less likeably than their male counterparts" but if they enact a feminine style they "may be liked but are not respected". (Ibarra et al, 2013).

Gender stereotypes also reinforce a preconceived idea that women are more emotional and thus less capable of taking strong decisions and the gendered bias reflects in terms of appreciating their work in the same manner as men's (Ridgeway and England 2007).

Methodology

This work project has been conducted as a qualitative research as conclusions have been obtained by analysing personal experiences and point of views of women in the workforce. The chosen method for assessing this research was the methodological triangulation as it provides different points for the same phenomenon and credibilizes qualitative analysis (Denzin, 2006). By combining literature review, women in leadership positions and women in non-leadership positions, it is possible to cross all retrieved data and reach conclusions from a non-biased standpoint. A total sample of 12 women were interviewed, with half being in leadership roles and the other half in non-leadership roles. In order to assess how women overcome the glass ceiling, I have interviewed 6 women who are in leadership positions in different sectors – IT, higher education, politics and professional services. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and most of them took place in the participants' offices. I used open questions that tried to assess how they perceived discrimination and obstacles to leadership and what did they do in order to overcome said barriers. They were also asked what they think can be done to reverse the system and to contextualize their own educational and professional background, as well as to identify what made them achieve individual success, if they felt any bias against male peers, their main perceived obstacles and what

they thought set them apart. The objective was to obtain their experiences and point of views regarding the subject under analysis. The median age was 35 years old and all had, at least, a master's degree and two of them had PhDs. Of the 6 women, 5 were married and 5 had children. To assess how women in non-leadership roles deal with everyday sexism or possible constraints to career mobility, I have interviewed 6 women in different sectors – hospitality, professional services and IT. The median age was 35 years old and all had some sort of formal education – 4 women held bachelor's degree, 1 had completed secondary education and another was currently pursuing her studies on an after-work attendance regime. Of these 6 women, 2 were married and 1 had children. They were asked about their academic and professional background, how it was like to be a woman in their industry, their main perceived obstacles, an experience where they felt some sort of bias and if they wished to become leaders. Some quotations will be used in order to illustrate or support some findings.

Main Results

From hereon, I will refer to both groups as "leaders" and "non-leaders". All women, from both groups, referred motherhood as something that they are questioned about or that they felt some pressure about. However, their main source of pressure came from social expectations and not from their workplace:

"Is there some sort of differentiating treatment for men and women? In the company? None. In society, definitely. You feel like there's this cultural obligation for women, as in, men are the breadwinners and women are expected to manage their households, family life and, by chance, they also have a job." Senior Manager, Professional Services

"I'm 30 years old, I don't have children and I'm always going through a constant pressure; when are you having kids? You're getting older, it might be too late... When actually, I feel that if I have children it might stop me from going further in my career." Head of Department, Higher Education

The first main conclusion from the interviews within Leaders, is that they all had some sort of support network that made motherhood and domestic chores a non-issue for them.

"There's a lot of logistics involved (...) and I spend a lot more money than normal. You can't worry about futile things and you have to have a support network or some system that takes care of things for you, be it the kids or food shopping..." Senior Manager, Professional Services

"I was very fortunate because I could afford to have a housekeeper, I lived in the city centre and my parents were able to take care of the kids while we (me and my husband) were at work" Vice-Dean, Higher Education

Considering that motherhood and domestic chores are still typically perceived as a female duty and that housework is still unequally divided with women spending on average 21 hours per week in house chores as opposed to men's 8 weekly hours (Wall et al, 2015), the fact that these women did not have that added pressure and time-consuming activities, allowed them to actively pursue their careers.

"Women do work a whole lot more hours at home, it's true. I pay someone to do my share – which is a massive amount of daily tasks that ought to be done." Senior Manager, Professional Services

Another relevant factor and that was mentioned by 4 of the leaders, was the equal relationship with their respective partners. This comes in line with the previous mentioned "support network" and also in terms of feeling motivated and that their careers were equally important.

"There's a family issue in which I reckon that I might be luckier than other people because my husband has a job that he can perform anywhere in the country so when I was invited to assume a Board Administration role in Oporto, I talked to him and the whole family moved." Senior Manager, Professional Services

"I'm married with two children. My husband's choice was my own and I chose someone that teams up with me (...) and this is crucial. I never had to assume any more parental responsibility than he has. That's given me a lot of flexibility. I never felt one is more important than the other."Operations Director, IT Company

"It does imply some good willingness from the other side (other partner)… J. has a lot more responsibility in hands than his (male) friends. If I'm not home, someone has to pick the kids up, bathe them, put them to bed…" Deputy, Public Government / Politics

Given this, motherhood did not impact their careers and unlike other of their colleagues, as mentioned, they never felt that they had to "make a choice". They did mention that they witnessed several female co-workers that upon child birth, felt that they had to step down due to struggling with work-life balance:

"I remember that at [Professional Services company] we had a hierarchical pyramid that was very balanced in terms of junior and entry level roles and by the time people reached their 30s, they (the women) started leaving and changing jobs as they felt they had to choose and couldn't juggle all that" Manager, Professional Services

"(My colleagues) struggled between having a family, children and having to juggle all that with the sort of dedication a management job requires, is not reconcilable" Human Resources Director, Services Company

"When a woman has children (...) if we think about it, they become housewives, mothers, leaders and to concile all these roles... She ends up choosing (one) or doing everything" Head of Department, Higher Education

"Parity is absolutely necessary and an equal to equal mentality is indispensable. I've had several colleagues that left consultancy because they did not have that (with their partners) and they ended up giving in to a certain pressure" Senior Manager, Professional Services

Non-Leaders seemed to agree with this choice between motherhood and professional career, mentioning a struggle between work-life balance:

"When I had my daughter, and after getting back to work, I never stayed until late again. I mean, of course sometimes it's absolutely necessary... But for the most part, I did start leaving earlier. I have to. And I know that's impacted my career." Administrative Assistant, Professional Services

There also seems to be a general consensus from Leaders in terms of feelings of guilt that prevent women from accepting certain leadership roles:

"I feel guilty, I do feel bad about it, it's like I'm failing. But I also know that in 10 years time, I'll still be working and they'll be teenagers and won't need me anymore." Deputy, Public Government / Politics

"They (women) feel guilty if they don't take that responsibility. We constantly blame ourselves for things that men don't feel. We're more punishing to ourselves and that also prevents us from being game." Operations Director, IT Company

"What I feel differently about, as opposed to my male colleagues, is that I feel bad. I feel bad about not being more present (to my family). They (men) don't feel bad. It's normal. And I think that it's this guilt that stops a lot of women from going to higher positions." Senior Manager, Professional Services

Both groups seemed to believe that women, in order to reach higher-level roles, had to work harder than men or, at the very least, be highly complete professionals:

"I think that women have to be much more complete (professionally) than men in order to reach leadership roles. I feel like men are excused a lot more than women. (...) If he doesn't have social skills, fine, we'll teach him, he'll get there... If she doesn't have social skills, she doesn't have social skills. If maybe a woman has a bad temper, she has some problem, if it's a man, it's normal." Human Resources Director, Services Company

"It's like... a woman has to prove a lot more, way more than men. Women have to work much harder to get the same job. There's a lot to be proven before she gets there." Marketing Director, IT Company

Leaders perceived female leadership as being different to male leadership, acknowledging differences in terms of style and referring to a more cohesive and understanding pattern.

"Usually a male leadership, in terms of employee relationship, affectiveness (...) emotions are highly covered. Fragilities are disguised. (As leaders) we're not always sure and a woman is more honest with that, ok fine, this might not work. A man doesn't do that."Head of Department, Higher Education

"Female leadership is worth it on its own, it's different from a male leadership. We have a more emotional side, we have a different approach to things... Which is why mixed teams are great." Operations Director, IT Company

Leaders seem to believe that women are more agreeable than men and their leadership styles can in fact be more supportive towards workers. Most of the leaders and non-leaders agreed that their main barriers were not work-related and that the companies in

which they worked, have mostly never treated them any differently to their male peers. Nevertheless, there have been situations where they have felt gender bias or some sort of discrimination:

"When I first told my boss I was pregnant, his reply was that «when a plane is about to take off, you don't load it more». His first reaction was terrible and they did not make my life easy for several months." Senior Manager, Professional Services

"One thing I'll never forget is that being "too nice" made people respect me less. I was told that. People nowadays might think I'm not nice or even unfriendly but that's something I had to learn to do so that a certain barrier wasn't broken, in order to get things done." Administrative Assistant, Professional Services

"I've always felt that due to most people in middle management being men, I wasn't given the same opportunities. I had to, almost unwillingly, to accept and international project to be given those opportunities. When I came back, after 3 years, they couldn't fit me anywhere in the company. Neither in my old job or in a new one. I always thought that if I were a man, that wouldn't have happened." Logistics Coordinator, Construction Industry

Both groups agreed and mentioned pay gap for the same jobs and seemed to attribute that to women's lack of self confidence:

"Women are very afraid to «sell themselves». It's not usual for a woman to be able to sell her skills. When a man is interviewed, he sells himself really well, I can programme, I can speak in public, I can do this,... Women struggle a lot more doing that, it's like we're doing something that we shouldn't be doing." Marketing Director, IT Company

"I feel that men can naturally put through their worth a lot better than women, and I think that's what's lacking us, the confidence to be able to sell ourselves. We don't know how to do that. It's like we're embarrassed to assume our own worth." Sales Executive, Hospitality Management

Non-leaders seemed to feel that there is in fact a glass ceiling, as opposed to leaders that said they didn't experience that. Non-leaders stated that they find it harder to be promoted and that they find that it's due to the fact that top management roles are largely occuppied by men.

"Leadership and management roles are occupied by men. Middle management... yes, we have a couple of women... But administration roles... those are taken by men. So yes,

I do feel some sexism, so to speak... I feel that. Women don't get that opportunity, to access administration roles. Middle management, sure. No more than that." Head of Department, Higher Education

"In my last company, it was a very male company with very few women. I believe that what can determine a woman accessing certain roles has to do with the company's culture and with greater parity between men and women. I felt at times that being a woman made my peers treat me differently. At this new company, there's a lot more women and I feel like I might get better chances to grow (professionally)." Logistics Coordinator, Construction Industry

One Leader and 2 non-leaders referred the absence of role-models to look up to:

"For a long while, I never had a woman in leadership to which I could look up to and find that she had the same challenges as me. The ones that became leaders were either single, divorced and chidless, or became so masculinized in their role... as in, more aggressive than me, neutral clothes... like, they stopped being women. As if being a woman is a bad thing." Operations Director, IT Company

"Without women bosses, it's hard for me to project myself or get inspiration from... I think if I had a proper role-model, or some mentoring of some sort, it might be easier to see the light at the end of the tunnel." Policy Administrator, Insurance Company

"I feel like when I look up, I don't see any women there. It's uninspiring and makes me doubt myself or better yet, makes me question if I'll be able to get there. And what happens when I do?" Consultant, Professional Services

Some women of both groups also mentioned the "old boys' club" that happens through informal networking and that they perceive it as a barrier to create important bonds that might help them succeed.

"A lot of the networking takes place when they (men) go out for drinks... And when this happens, even though it might seem like a boys' night out, they discuss important things. They do business. And women, well, we're simply not invited to join them." Operations Director, IT Company

"My major problem when I was leading a team of mostly men, was that they all went out together, to talk about women, sports, you name it. And the other team leaders would go along, mix with the bosses, create some sort of manly bonds... and then get promoted. It wasn't just about their performance inside the company. It was about mingling outside of it." Logistics Coordinator, Construction Industry

Both groups agreed that most of the pressure comes from outsiders, i.e. society norms and expectations and are mostly related to the lack of women in leadership roles, motherhood and gender bias.

Findings and Conclusions

The findings were analysed on a scale from 1 to 10, being 10 the most important and 1 the least important. The main findings (see figure 2) show us that Motherhood is the main source of concern and the key barrier to achieve and maintain leadership roles, with Work/Life Balance as a close second, forming the 1st level of importance in terms of findings. The 2nd level of importance were formed by Business Acumen Stigma (the lack of confidence identified by the women), Over Compensated Workload and Social Expectations. And finally, Pay Gap, Old Boys' Club, Men at Top Management Roles and Inexisting Role-Models seemed to be the least impacting identified barriers from all the mentioned above.

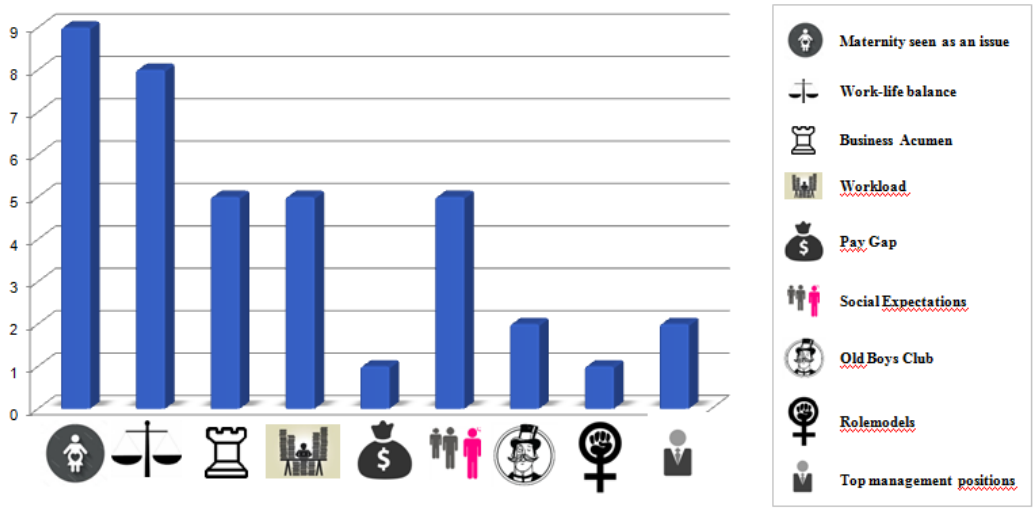

Figure 2 – Main Findings

The main conclusions from this research find that in a workplace environment there is no significant discrimination against women in force despite some observations of gender bias towards women. Moreover, the perceived barriers are in terms of culture

and different expectations for women outside the workplace. Motherhood is, as stated abovehead, the main hardship women encounter when experiencing their professional lives. Due to cultural and social expectations, motherhood is still perceived as something they must comply to and that should not be neglected, causing in turn a strong personal demand in terms of Work/Life Balance. Women tend to overcompensate in terms of workload in order to progress in their careers, mostly because of a perceived gender bias towards their performance. Despite this, it is important to mention that non-leaders felt a more significant difference in treatment against their male peers, in terms of pay and career path. Non-leaders also mentioned postponing motherhood or believing that becoming mothers would prevent them from growing within their companies. These conclusions can allow us to say that at higher-level roles, once the glass ceiling is shattered, equality is reached, but that on external levels (i.e., society), there is a major influence by cultural factors that prevent women from reaching top management roles; it is therefore culture the main barrier to women's career paths. It is possible to consider all of the findings in three categories: *First order concepts*, the individual basic results originated by the problem itself. These can then be aggregated in *Second Order Concepts* which represent, in their nature, the same as the first order, but as a whole group. The results of this exercise then converge into three different Aggregated Dimensions: "Gender Roles", "Cultural Upbringing Influence" and "Institutionalized Sexism" (see figure 3).

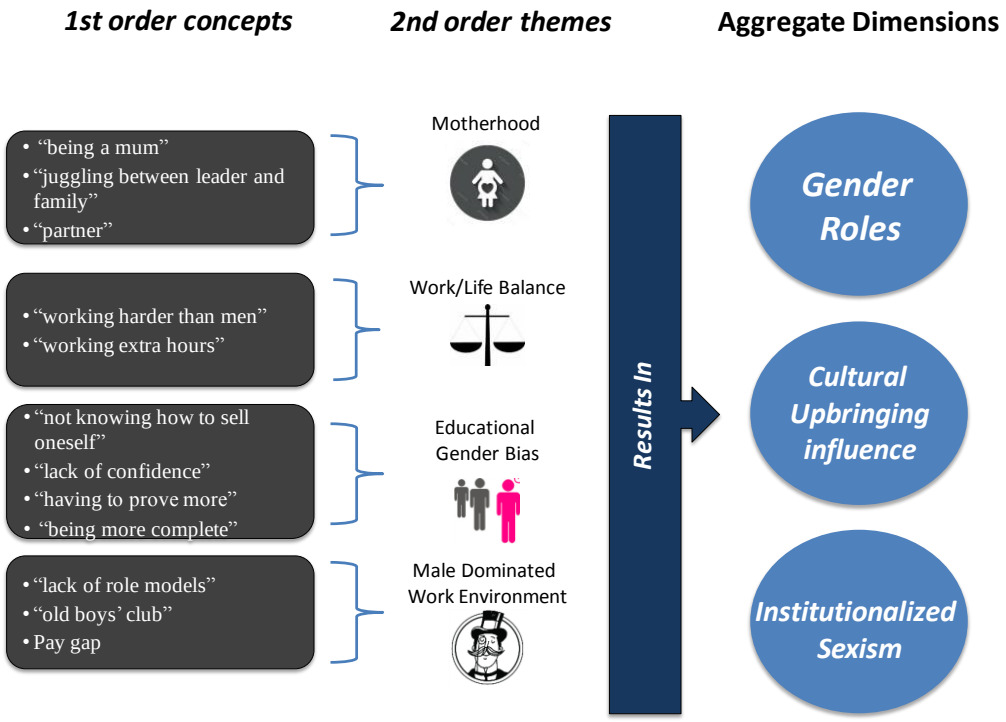

Figure 3 – Data Structure

Based on the model by Corley and Gioia (2004)

In order to simplify and aggregate the various steps, we used a model built by Corley and Gioia (2004). In this model, it is possible to observe the various inputs to the problem, identify the problem itself and the recommendations that are most suitable to address the presented problem. As it is exposed in the model (see figure 4), the main inputs that fed the identified problem were "Gender Roles", "Cultural Upbringing" and "Institutionalized Sexism", as explained throughout the paper. These triggered the gender bias that created by itself a glass ceiling, causing an invisible barrier to women's ascension to leadership roles. It is in this chain of ideas that it is possible to conclude, therefore, that regulation is required in order to disrupt the status quo and cultural barriers that are the root cause of the problem under analysis.

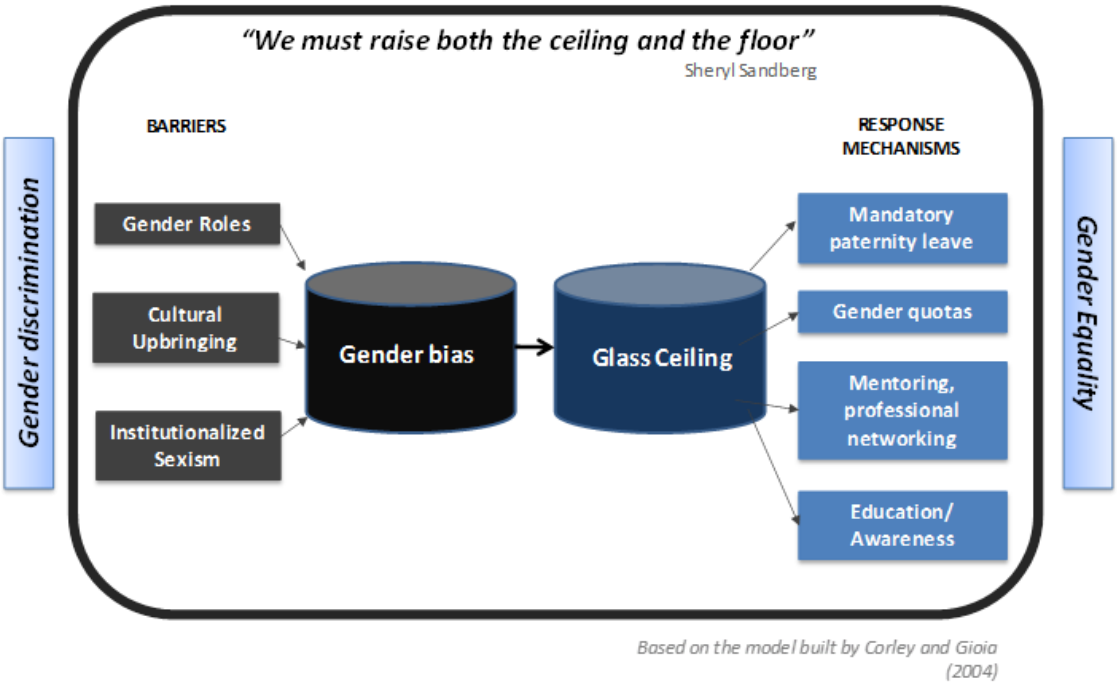

Figure 4 - Change Process Model

Limitations

The Limitations of this Work Project were in terms of finding women in top management positions that would agree to be interviewed. The research was conducted with a limited sample of 12 women who shared their personal stories and insights and as such, these conclusions can only be referenced from their points of views. Nevertheless, the literature review and adjacent research reinforce the idea that women still need mechanisms that help them break the glass ceiling. Although we are considering "women" as an homogenous group, the challenges hereby approached are focused on white women and how they perceive the slow career advancement and their barriers to top management positions. Women of ethnic minorities face an additional restraint in terms of racial discriminations and xenophobia. Sexual orientation was also not considered in this analysis and therefore, conclusions can only be taken by considering this specific group.

Recommendations

Considering the cases of different countries where gender diversity is on the path to parity, the following recommendations for Portugal seem the ones most in line with the difficulties perceived in this study. These recommendations come in no particular order of significance.

Mentoring and Professional Networks

Creating effective mentorship programs can be crucial in terms of developing women's leadership skils and especially in terms of orientation for their medium to long term goals. There is a lack of women mentors and mentorship programs are generally conducted by men in senior roles thus creating a cultural and social gap with the mentee. Associating with one's peers can not only inspire but facilitate solving similar hardships that one faces. Female mentors can address specific barriers that women face and guide them though their career paths in a more objective manner. Moreover, being mentored by a peer, can be more comfortable, assuring and even inspirational. Professional networks, such as existing ones as PWN (Professional Women's Network), can provide women with the tools to achieve senior positions. It also a great way to break the vicious "old boys' club" circle and allow women to share stories with one another, create their own personal networking devices whilst stimulating them to achieve more. These networks also go hand-in-hand with mentoring as through networking, it is possible to obtain informal advise on professional matters as well as provide women with leadership role-models. These networks often provide workshops, seminars, meetings and informal gatherings that enable the development of soft skills and increasing knowledge on industry/sector specific matters.

Gender Quotas

The implementation of quotas is the quickest method to solve the current inbalance in terms of gender distribution in executive roles. By imposing companies and the public sector gender parity, women can access roles that they would otherwise be denied or struggle achieving. Despite being argued as a threat to meritocracy by some companies, it does not necessarily mean as such; for certain roles, there are criteria that must be taken into account. The same criteria will be applied to women who are considered eligible for these roles and in that sense, it will only guarantee greater gender diversity and not threaten the quality of elected managers or board administrators. A main issue in women's access to leadership roles is the inherent sexist culture / society and through legislation, the cultural mindset can change quicker. By imposing top and middle management positions for women, the process that would naturally take many years, will become effective in less time and, progressively become institutionalized as normal.

Mandatory Paternity Leave

One of the main findings suggests that when men and women have equal relationships with equal division of housework and parental duties, women have the support network they need in order to focus and excel in their careers. All the leaders mentioned the support network that allowed them to progress professionally as domestic life, mainly in terms of child care, was not an issue for them. 3 of the non-leaders mentioned motherhood as a worry for their career progression and stated that they feel their career might stagnate if they choose to procede with being mothers. The recommendation of Mandatory Paternity Leave strongly advises to implement a model similar to Finland's; "9 weeks, of which up to 3 can be used while the mother is of maternity or parental leave. The remaining 6 weeks are to be used when the mother is not on parental leave"

(OECD, 2015). This way, on an initial stage, both parents will be present and share responsibilities and provide for a corporate mindset shift as women, on the long run, will not be seen as the sole child carers and, in situations where motherhood can be perceived as a problem, since both genders take said leaves, there will greater parity and companies will no longer feel that female employees are a risk in terms of senior level positions.

Sanctions

For companies that fail to implement Gender Quotas and Mandatory Paternity Leave, there will be sanctions/penalties in order to ensure that these measures will be respected. With this said, Gender Quotas and Mandatory Paternity Leave must be legislated under Portuguese Law in order for them to become effectively deployed and respected.

Education

In terms of education, there are three measures to point. The first, is in terms of educating boys and girls for gender diversity and equality. The second, is encouraging young girls to learn maths from a young age. Last, but the not least, promoting sports for young girls. Education for gender diversity and equality is of extreme importance to mitigate cultural factors that affect girls and women's perception of their own self worth and confidence (from a sociological standpoint) and by including boys and men in these discussions, they too can see how beneficial gender equality can be for both genders, in terms of opportunity and in terms of self expression. Education is also key to promote a more active role of fathers in child education. By educating and preparing boys and men for fatherhood in the same sense as girls are, parenthood will cease to be a "female obligation" thus increasing women's chance to pursue more demanding roles and careers. Schools must play an active role in change; the public school system must foster an inclusive environment where maths and sports (for both genders) are highly

promoted. On a medium to long term, by encouraging young girls to enjoy maths, there will be more women in non gender typical careers (i.e., education, health care, social sciences) thus increasing female percentage in other sectors (such as engineering, technology, finance, etc) which will guarantee more female representation in industries that are currently male-dominated. Finally, sports activities can help young girls and women to build up the natural confidence/business acumen that all the interviewees identified as a barrier to success and leadership roles. Sports foster competitiveness and build up greater levels of confidence and self-esteem that can easily be transposed to business settings, helping women to gain skills in terms of negotiating salaries and taking more risks in terms of their careers.

Corporate awareness on gender diversity

One of the findings of this research says that women often find that some industries do not cater to their needs or are not adjusted to their current life obligations (e.g., motherhood). It is crucial for companies to try to attract and retain top talent and by deploying gender-specific recruitment policies, it is possible to become, as companies, more attractive to female workers encouraging them to apply and remain with the company for longer. In order to counter the hardships found in terms of parental duties, the implementation of day care centres, kindergardens and breastfeeding rooms on site at companies can also help providing the structure to support women's career pursual. As most working parents struggle with finding solutions for taking care of children, and as the research suggests, this responsibility often falls on the mother's side, by eliminating that worry from their personal lives, women will be able to dedicate themselves more to their career "guilt-free".

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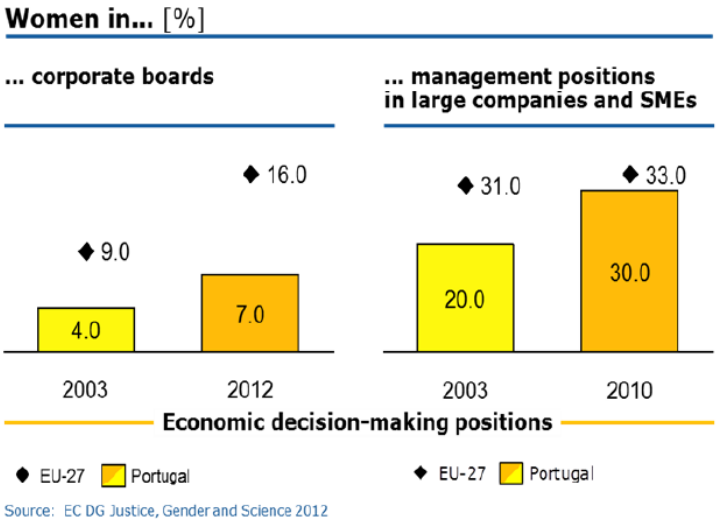
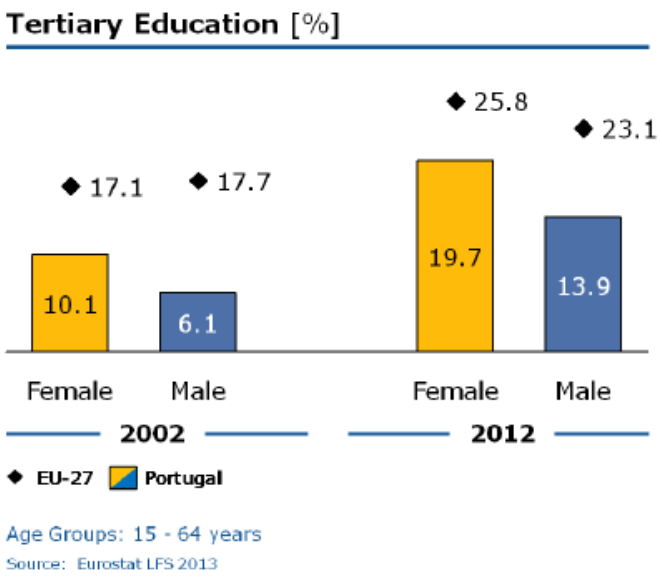
Annexes

I. Exhibit 1



Retrieved from European Commission. 2013. *The Current Situation of Gender Equality in Portugal.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

II. Exhibit 2



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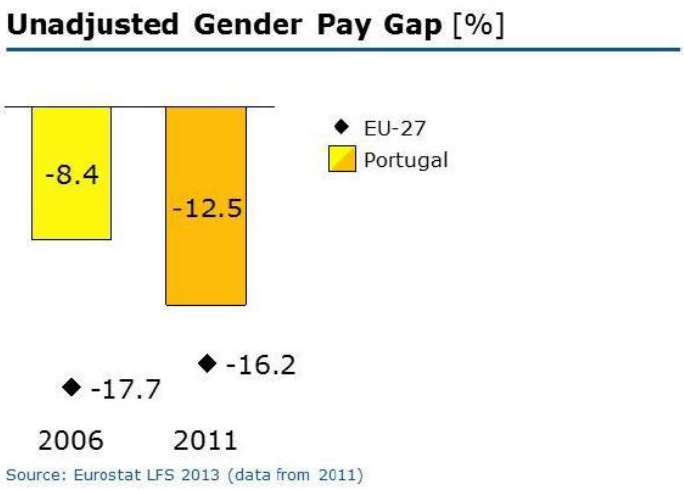
III. Exhibit 3



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IV. Interview Guide for Leaders

1 – Can you give me a brief academic and work history?

2 – How is it like to be a woman in a leadership position?

3– How do you believe women are regarded in your company?

4 - What traits and behaviours do women must possess in order to succeed?

5– What were your main perceived difficulties advancing your career?

6 – What, in your opinion, are the mechanisms that can help placing more women in leadership positions?

V. Interview Guide for Non-Leaders

1 - Can you give me a brief academic and work history?

2 - How is it like to be a woman in your organisation?

3 - Do you believe women in this organisation have the same career paths as men?

Why or why not?

4– Tell me an experience where you've felt some differentiating treament

5– What are your main perceived difficulties advancing your career?

6 – What are your career aspirations? Would you like becoming a leader?