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POSTGRADUATE DEGREE IN MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

FEMALE LEADERSHIP

END-OF-COURSE TOPIC FOR THE ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR CLASS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the impact that female leadership has been having in this 21st Century, in this way we give door to the following question: How has female leadership been consolidated in organizations and what are its main contributions and limitations in the development of human capital?, starting from this question, the paper aims to analyze the strategic role of female leadership in cohesion, innovation, commitment and sustainability within organizations.

This is a documentary and analytical study, based on theoretical references, previous research and international statistics on female participation from different spaces. Within these studies we find that female leadership is distinguished by a more consensual, mediating and humanistic style, although its security and independence are very questionable.

It is recognized that their strategic contribution to innovation, cohesion, development and decision-making in complex environments, we have also seen a growth in political participation in different countries and that by 2026 around 28 countries have women in the highest positions of power. There is a structural and cultural gap that has persisted that is reflected in low labor participation and concentration in social ministries, while strategic sectors such as the economy or defense continue to be dominated by men. While artificial intelligence and digitalization offer opportunities, there is also a risk if the gender perspective is not applied.

In conclusion, female leadership has made significant progress in visibility, recognition, although it faces barriers that limit full equality, many of them are born from a hierarchical, cultural or social profile, so its consolidation requires strengthening training, mentoring and exclusive public policies, ensuring that diversity translates into real decision-making power.

Keywords: Female leadership, Human Capital, Gender Equality, Organizational Innovation, Women's Participation

Introduction

Women's leadership is today one of the most relevant topics in the academic, political, and organizational spheres. In a global context characterized by interdependence, technological innovation, and the need to build more equitable societies, women's participation in positions of power and decision-making has become a strategic indicator of development. The discussion on female leadership is not limited only to the presence of women in management positions, but encompasses the transformation of management styles, the redefinition of power relations, and the construction of inclusive and sustainable organizational cultures. In this sense, the study of female leadership acquires scientific and social importance by offering keys to understanding how the values associated with empathy, collaboration, and justice can enrich the dynamics of institutions and contribute to the strengthening of human capital.

The central problem that guides this research can be formulated as follows: how is female leadership configured in contemporary organizations and what are its specific contributions to the development of human capital and the construction of inclusive and sustainable environments? This question arises from the observation that, despite advances in gender equality, significant gaps persist in women's participation in spaces of power, as well as cultural stereotypes that relativize or devalue their contributions. The research seeks, therefore, to analyze the strategic role of female leadership beyond comparisons with hegemonic male models, exploring its symbolic, ethical and organizational foundations.

The general objective of this paper is to analyze the strategic role of female leadership in the development of human capital within organizations, identifying its contributions in terms of cohesion, innovation, commitment, and sustainability. This study is based on several aspects. First, it responds to a social need: gender equality in leadership is not only a matter of justice, but a factor that directly impacts the quality of decisions, team cohesion, and the sustainability of organizations. Second, it contributes to the scientific discussion by integrating symbolic and feminist perspectives that allow overcoming the reductionist vision of comparing male and female styles. Third, it offers a practical framework for organizations that seek to strengthen their human capital through inclusive and participatory policies. Finally, this work contributes to making visible the experiences and contributions of women in Latin American contexts, where cultural and structural barriers are still significant.

In short, female leadership is presented as a transformative alternative that not only expands the participation of women in spaces of power, but its current relevance also lies in the fact that it offers answers to the challenges of contemporary organizations: the need for cohesion in complex environments, innovation in scenarios of constant change and sustainability as an ethical and strategic principle.

The structure of the document is organized as follows:

section 1 describes the theoretical and conceptual framework of women's leadership; section 2 explains the methodology used in the study; section 3 presents the results obtained; section 4 discusses the findings in relation to the state of the art; and section 5 offers the conclusions and practical implications of the work.

Theoretical framework or Literature review

Female leadership has been the subject of increasing interest in organizational, educational, and political research during the last decades. Her study is not limited to the presence of women in positions of power, but seeks to understand how leadership styles associated with the feminine are linked to empathy, collaboration, communication, and purpose orientation, and this can transform institutional dynamics and contribute to the development of human capital.

1. Conceptualization of female leadership

Female leadership is defined as a management style that incorporates values and practices traditionally associated with the feminine, such as cooperation, sensitivity to the needs of the group, and consensus-building. It is not only about women leading, but also a model that privileges inclusion and sustainability. According to Hurtado and Girón (2025), talking about leadership "in feminine" implies transcending the dichotomy of man or woman and recognizing the symbolic and cultural dimension of the values that enrich organizational management.

In this sense, authors such as Eagly and Carli (2007) have identified that women tend to exercise transformational leadership, characterized by motivation, individual accompaniment, and trust-building. This style contrasts with transactional leadership, which is more focused on rewards and sanctions, and has been shown to be more effective in complex and changing environments.

2. Main theories and approaches

The literature on female leadership has been nourished by various theoretical currents:

- Transformational leadership theory: Eagly and Carli argue that women show a greater tendency to inspire and motivate their teams, generating cohesion and commitment. This approach is linked to emotional intelligence and the ability to listen actively.
- Feminist perspective of leadership: Lagarde (1992) and Varela (2005) argue that female leadership should be understood as an ethical and political practice, oriented towards justice and equity. It is not only about occupying positions, but about transforming power structures.
- Symbolic and archetypal models: Hurtado and Girón (2025) propose that female leadership can be analyzed from symbolic anthropology, integrating values associated with Venus (harmony), Mars (action) and Mercury (mediation). This vision allows leadership to be understood as a cultural construction rather than a biological one.
- Organizational studies: Coronel, Moreno and Padilla (1999) highlight that women tend to create climates of collegiality, informal networks and less hierarchical structures, favoring cooperation and innovation.

In short, female leadership is conceived as an alternative model that combines emotional, ethical and relational dimensions, offering answers to the challenges of modern organizations.

3. Empirical evidence and relevant findings

Various studies have documented the differential characteristics of female leadership:

- Management styles: Research in the educational field (Díez et al., 2001) shows that women directors tend to exercise a more democratic, dialoguing and participatory leadership. The creation of support networks and collaborative management are emphasized.
- Key competencies: Zenger and Folkman (2019) identify that women excel higher than men in competencies such as empathy, effective communication, orientation to team well-being, and emotional intelligence.
- Organizational impact: Studies by McKinsey (2018) and Harvard Business Review (2020) show that organizations with a greater presence of women in management positions show better indicators of innovation, talent retention, and corporate reputation.
- Persistent limitations: Despite these findings, significant gaps persist in female participation in strategic sectors such as the economy, defense, or technology. Cultural stereotypes continue to question the security and independence of women leaders, relativizing their contributions.

These results suggest that female leadership not only brings tangible benefits to organizations, but also faces cultural and structural resistances that limit their full development.

4. Relationships between variables and dimensions

The analysis of female leadership involves considering several interrelated dimensions:

- Individual dimension: Includes competencies such as emotional intelligence, communication skills, and purpose orientation.
- Collective dimension: Refers to the construction of support networks, mentoring, and participation in organizational communities.
- Symbolic dimension: Includes the cultural and archetypal values associated with the feminine, which influence the social perception of leadership.
- Structural dimension: It encompasses public policies, equality regulations and organizational practices that facilitate or hinder women's access to positions of power.

The interaction between these dimensions determines the effectiveness of female leadership and its impact on the development of human capital. For example, a woman with high individual competencies may be limited in her participation if there are no collective support structures or inclusive policies.

5. Critical synthesis

The literature review allows us to conclude that female leadership has been consolidated as an interdisciplinary field of study, which combines contributions from psychology, sociology, education, and organizational theory. Its main characteristics are: empathy, collaboration, communication, and purpose orientation, they have proven to be effective in team management and in the construction of inclusive cultures and beliefs. However, the persistence of cultural stereotypes and the lack of empirical evidence in certain contexts limit its full recognition. Therefore, this work seeks to contribute to academic and practical discussion, offering an interpretative framework that links female leadership with the development of human capital and organizational sustainability.

Methodology

This study on female leadership is based on a methodological approach that seeks to integrate academic rigor with social relevance. The choice of methodology responds to the nature of the research problem: to understand how female leadership is configured in contemporary organizations and what are its specific contributions to the development of human capital. To this end, a design that combines documentary analysis and qualitative exploration was chosen, in order to articulate theory and empirical evidence in a solid interpretative framework.

1. Research Approach

The approach adopted is qualitative and documentary. Critical interpretation of academic texts, institutional reports, and specialized literature on leadership and gender is privileged. This approach allows us to capture the complexity of the phenomenon, considering not only statistical data, but also discourses, narratives, and symbolic frameworks that shape the perception of female leadership. The choice of the qualitative approach responds to the need to explore meanings, values, and practices that cannot be reduced to figures, while the documentary component ensures the systematization of reliable and up-to-date sources.

2. Study design

The design is descriptive and exploratory. It seeks to describe the characteristics of female leadership in different organizational contexts and explore its contributions to the development of human capital. The aim is not to establish strict causal relationships, but to identify patterns, trends and relevant dimensions that allow the construction of an interpretative theoretical framework. The exploratory nature is justified by the existence of gaps in the literature, especially in the Latin American context, where studies on female leadership are still incipient.

3. Population and sample / Data sources

Given the documentary nature of the study, the "population" is understood as the set of academic texts, reports and empirical studies on female leadership published in the last three decades. The selection of sources was made under criteria of thematic relevance, topicality and diversity of approaches. The following were included:

- Scientific articles in indexed journals on leadership, gender and organizational culture.
- Reference books and works by key authors such as Sheryl Sandberg, Frances Hesselbein, Alice Eagly and Marcela Lagarde.
- Institutional reports from international organizations (UN Women, World Bank, McKinsey) that provide statistical data on women's participation in leadership.
- Regional studies in Latin America and the Caribbean, with an emphasis on education, politics and business.

A selection of documents was made, due to their relevance and ability to provide complementary perspectives. This diversity ensures a broad and critical vision of the phenomenon.

4. Data collection instruments and techniques

The main technique was systematic literature review. An analysis matrix was developed in which the following variables were recorded:

- Key concepts of female leadership.
- Associated styles and competencies.
- Structural and cultural barriers identified.
- Impacts on human capital, innovation and sustainability.
- Theoretical and empirical gaps pointed out by the authors.

The matrix allowed the information to be organized in a comparative way and to facilitate the identification of convergences and divergences between the studies. In addition, a hermeneutic analysis was applied to capture the underlying meanings in the discourses, especially in feminist and symbolic texts.

5. Analysis procedures

The analysis was carried out in three phases:

1. Thematic coding: The texts were classified according to previously defined categories (leadership styles, barriers, contributions, gaps).
2. Interpretive analysis: We examined how the different authors conceptualize female leadership, identifying coincidences and tensions. For example, while some studies highlight empathy and collaboration as strengths, others interpret them as signs of insecurity.
3. Comparative synthesis: The findings were integrated into an interpretive framework that links female leadership with the development of human capital, innovation, and organizational sustainability.

The procedure was based on qualitative analysis techniques such as source triangulation and category contrast. No statistical tests were applied, since the objective is not to measure numerical correlations, but to understand meanings and conceptual relationships.

6. Methodological limitations

The study has some limitations that must be recognized:

- Documentary nature: As it is based on secondary sources, it does not include its own empirical data or direct surveys of women leaders. This limits the possibility of generalizing the findings to specific contexts.
- Geographical bias: Most of the studies reviewed come from Anglo-Saxon contexts, which may make it difficult to apply their conclusions to Latin America. Although regional sources were incorporated, they are less numerous. It was also identified that in Arab countries, it has not been a subject of studies and analysis throughout history.

- Comparison with male models: Some of the literature continues to evaluate female leadership in contrast to male styles, which can reproduce biases and limit the identification of one's own contributions.
- Lack of tangible indicators: Although the benefits of female leadership in innovation and cohesion are recognized, there is still a lack of studies that measure these impacts with concrete indicators in diverse organizations.

These limitations do not invalidate the study, but they point to the need for future empirical research that complements the documentary analysis and allows validating the findings in specific contexts.

Results

1. Female leadership styles

The studies reviewed show that female leadership is characterized by transformational and participatory practices. Common patterns are identified in different organizational contexts:

Dimension	Observed characteristics
Leadership style	Predominance of transformational leadership, focused on motivation and cohesion.
Team management	Preference for cooperation, active listening and consensus building.
Use of power	Tendency to distribute power instead of accumulating it.
Communication	Greater openness, empathy and orientation to interpersonal relationships.

These findings are repeated in educational, business and political spheres, confirming the presence of a differentiated pattern with respect to traditional hierarchical styles.

2. Structural and cultural barriers

The literature shows that women face obstacles that limit their access to and full exercise of leadership. The main findings are summarized in the following table:

Barrier Type	Objective Description
Domestic and family burden	Limitations derived from the lack of support in childcare and household chores.
Cultural stereotypes	Perceptions that question the safety and independence of women leaders.
Organizational resistance	Low representation in strategic sectors such as economy, defense and technology.
Non-constructive competition	Less socialization in direct confrontation, which generates disadvantages in competitive environments.

These results show that the barriers are not only individual, but structural and cultural.

3. Contributions to human capital and organizational sustainability

The findings indicate that female leadership brings tangible benefits to organizations. Four main areas are identified:

Contribution area	Observed results
Internal cohesion	Creation of climates of trust and collaboration.
Innovation	Greater diversity in decision-making, associated with better creativity indicators.
Commitment and well-being	Higher competencies in empathy, effective communication, and emotional intelligence.
Organizational sustainability	Integration of values of justice, equity and resilience into the institutional culture.

These contributions are documented in corporate, educational, and political studies, confirming their relevance in different contexts.

4. Persistent breaches

Despite the progress, the results show that significant gaps in participation and representation persist:

Indicator	Observed Value (2026)	Comparison with previous values
Global female labor force participation	53,7%	Down from 54% in 2016.
Presence in ministerial cabinets	22,4%	Only 9 countries achieve parity in key ministries.
Global average of women parliamentarians	27,5%	Notable cases: Rwanda (64%), Cuba (57%), Mexico (50%).
Strategic sectors	Underrepresentation in economy and defense	No significant changes compared to the previous decade.

These data show that although visibility has increased, full equality has not yet been achieved.

5. Objective synthesis

The results show that:

- Female leadership is characterized by transformational, participatory, and person-centered styles.
- Structural and cultural barriers persist that limit its full exercise.
- The contributions to human capital and organizational sustainability are consistent and documented.
- Gaps in labor participation and political representation remain significant, with values similar to or lower than expected compared to previous decades.

Discussion

The results obtained allow us to critically interpret the role of female leadership in contemporary organizations. Evidence shows that this leadership style is characterized by transformational, participatory, and person-centered practices, but it also faces structural and cultural barriers that limit its full development. The main interpretations and comparisons with the literature are presented below, as well as the implications, limitations, and recommendations derived from the study.

1. Critical interpretation of the results

The finding that women tend to exercise transformational leadership confirms the hypothesis that styles based on empathy, collaboration, and effective communication are more prevalent in female contexts.

However, the persistence of stereotypes that relativize these characteristics reveals a tension between the positive valuation of these styles and their cultural delegitimization. In other words, although it is recognized that empathy and cooperation generate cohesion and well-being, their validity as attributes of "strong" leadership continues to be questioned.

Likewise, the identification of barriers such as domestic burden and low representation in strategic sectors shows that female leadership does not depend only on individual competencies, but on structural conditions that restrict their exercise. This suggests that the problem is not the lack of capacity, but the persistence of a system that unevenly distributes responsibilities and opportunities.

2. Comparison with other studies and theories

The results coincide with the transformational leadership theory proposed by Eagly and Carli (2007), who argue that women tend to inspire and motivate their teams through shared values. They are also aligned with the contributions of Frances Hesselbein, who emphasizes that leadership should be understood as a matter of integrity and purpose rather than hierarchy. In this sense, the findings reinforce the idea that female leadership provides an alternative model to traditional styles based on vertical authority.

On the other hand, the results contrast with the criticisms of Helgesen (1995), who interpreted affective orientation and resistance to hierarchical structures as weaknesses. Current evidence shows that these characteristics, far from being limitations, can constitute advantages in complex and collaborative environments. This comparison shows a change in the valuation of female leadership, although cultural biases that delegitimize it still persist.

Finally, the findings on persistent gaps in labor participation and political representation are related to studies by international organizations (UN Women, 2025), which point out that formal equality does not translate into real equality. The coincidence between the data reviewed and the global reports confirms that the problem is structural and requires more effective public policies.

3. Significance and implications of the findings

The results have several relevant implications:

- **For organizations:** Women's leadership brings cohesion, innovation, and sustainability, which suggests that promoting the participation of women in management positions not only responds to equity criteria, but also to an organizational improvement strategy.
- **For public policy:** The low representation in strategic sectors indicates the need for specific measures to guarantee parity in areas such as the economy and defense, where decisions have a high social impact.
- **For academic research:** The persistence of cultural stereotypes shows that female leadership should be studied not only from the organizational perspective, but also from the symbolic and cultural dimension.

In summary, the findings show that female leadership is not only a matter of social justice, but a strategic factor for the development of human capital and institutional sustainability.

4. Recommendations and future lines of research

Based on the results and their limitations, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Empirical research in Latin America:** Develop case studies in organizations in the region to understand how female leadership manifests itself in specific cultural contexts.
- **Impact indicators:** Design metrics that allow for an objective evaluation of the contributions of female leadership in innovation, cohesion and sustainability.
- **Symbolic and cultural analysis:** To delve into the symbolic dimension of leadership, exploring how the values associated with the feminine influence social and organizational perception.
- **Inclusive policies:** Promote mentoring, training and parity programs in strategic sectors, ensuring that diversity translates into real decision-making power.
- **Comparative studies:** Contrast female leadership with other alternative styles (e.g., collaborative or distributed leadership) to identify convergences and differences.

These future lines will allow us to move towards a more complete understanding of female leadership and its impact on contemporary organizations and societies.

Conclusions

The study allows us to clearly synthesize the main findings on female leadership in contemporary organizations. It was found that this leadership style is distinguished by transformational, participatory, and people-centered practices, providing cohesion, innovation, and sustainability. At the same time, structural and cultural barriers were identified, such as domestic burden, stereotypes, and low representation in strategic sectors that limit its full exercise. Finally, it was evident that, despite advances in visibility and support programs, significant gaps persist in labor and political participation.

The research question posed was: how is female leadership configured in contemporary organizations and what are its specific contributions to the development of human capital and the construction of inclusive and sustainable environments? The answer, derived from the findings, is that female leadership is configured as an alternative model that integrates values of empathy, collaboration and justice, generating positive impacts on internal cohesion, innovation and organizational well-being. However, its full consolidation requires overcoming structural and cultural barriers that still restrict real equality in spaces of power.

In terms of contribution, the study offers three main contributions:

- **Theoretical:** broadens the understanding of female leadership beyond comparison with male models, integrating symbolic and cultural dimensions that enrich the analysis.
- **Methodological:** demonstrates the usefulness of the qualitative and documentary approach to systematize discourses and evidence on leadership and gender, offering a solid interpretative framework.
- **Practical:** it provides elements for the design of organizational and public policies that promote women's participation in strategic sectors, strengthening human capital and institutional sustainability.

The final recommendations point to the need to:

- To promote empirical research in Latin American contexts that allow validating the findings in specific cultural realities.
- Design concrete indicators that measure the impact of female leadership on innovation, cohesion and sustainability.
- Promote mentoring and training programs that strengthen the competencies of women leaders and reduce gaps in strategic sectors.

Final Course Projects-Organizational Behavior

- Integrate the symbolic and cultural perspective into equality policies, recognising that the transformation of leadership also implies a change in social values and perceptions.

In short, female leadership is an organizational and social strategy of great relevance. Its consolidation will not only contribute to gender equality but will also enhance the capacity of organizations to face the challenges of a complex, diverse and constantly changing world.

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