

THE LABYRINTH METAPHOR

OBSTACLES FOR WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT TO HIGH-
MANAGERIAL AND EXECUTIVE POSITIONS

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Academic year: 2019-2020

Date: 05/11/2020

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ABSTRACT

This project explores why women remain underrepresented in high-ranking leadership roles as well as what can be done in an attempt to facilitate their indirect paths in attaining influential and powerful positions. Men have fewer challenges in obtaining leadership roles because they match agentic stereotypes normally associated with those roles. In contrast, women find themselves navigating through indirect and obstructed pathways or even dead ends when attaining executive managerial roles. Using “*the Labyrinth Metaphor*” has been the basis to give a complete explanation and analyse what makes more challenging their advancement. This metaphor relates to how issues of discrimination, gendered mental associations and organizational obstacles are connected to women’s hurdling advancement in management. Hence, the solutions given in the project are directly related to the reasons and issues explored.

Keywords: women leaders, gender, leadership, organizational obstacles, discrimination

I hope this project inspires and that will inspire women, as it inspires me, that aspire to attain an executive leadership role someday. This is the main reason why I had chosen to study, as profoundly as possible, this issue and therefore to recognise what are the challenges women may face navigating the different paths of their careers. I believe that by acknowledging contextual and more-specific factors that have an effect on leadership, women can be stronger, fierce and more persistent to keep climbing and feeling empowered.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the second part of the 20th century, women have been fighting against the gender segregation of the labour market, that expected from them not more than being caring and nice at home. Nevertheless, because of the evolution of societies and the different labour markets, women have been able to introduce themselves as managers and leaders with more responsibility roles throughout the years. Over the last five years¹, the proportion of global businesses that employed one woman in high-ranking management has increased. Moreover, 87% of companies were accounted in 2019 to have at least one female in a senior leadership role. Yet, women represented that year, only 29% of senior executive positions in the globe. Also, only the 2,8% of the companies from the *Fortune Global 500*², had a female CEO in 2019 (Fortune 2019). Globally, the average of women in senior roles continues to increase but, although representing the highest numbers ever on record, it might not be enough. Moreover, the leadership roles may be gendered-segregated as women found themselves more often being chief of the human resources department (43%) than in others, which could relate to more feminine qualities such as being compassionate or empathetic. Then, women would still be discriminated because of their gender and this could cause an effect on every field, including management. This project surges from the necessity and curiosity to understand what leads to women's lesser advancement. Therefore, the aim of this study is to comprehend why women are still underrepresented in influential positions in business and why women are still being accounted as the "first female" to become a CEO or high-level managers. Hence, it relates directly to this issue and limits the study in the upper levels of hierarchical structures.

This project has its basis on different studies and explanations that, over the years, the American scholars Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli³ gave as a response to this

¹ All the statistical data from the *Introduction* has its source on (Grant Thornton 2019). If, in some cases, it has not been taken from this report, the source will be explicitly cited.

² *The Fortune Global 500* is an annual ranking of the largest 500 corporations worldwide as measured by total revenue. The percentage has taken from filtering the ranking with *female CEO*.

³ Alice H. Eagly is a noted social psychologist and professor of both disciplines psychology and management. Her research interests are gender (especially sex differences in similarities in leadership, prosocial behaviour, aggression, partner preferences, and socio-political attitudes) and others such as the content of stereotypes. Linda H. Carli is a Senior Lecturer Emerita in Psychology and her interests include the study of women leaders, social influence, gender differences in interaction and influence, and reactions to victimization.

issue. Eagly and Carli quoted the metaphor of *The Labyrinth* as to give a detailed, rigorous, and overall definitive explanation of those obstacles women face that men do not (Harquail 2008). Besides, other scholars' academic papers and research has been used to support their statements.

The study of the labyrinth will take the reader through different sections. The first block relates to the *pathways* that lead to the labyrinth and that challenge women's competence and responsibilities along with an understanding on how common cultural beliefs and organizational practices can lesser that recognition of women as leaders. As a matter of response, the second block relates to what all women, men and organizational structures could do in order to facilitate those obstructed paths.

Hence, this issue is studied from a managerial and psychological perspective as both researchers are experts in these fields. Although analysing this amount of work, the project has its limitations. First, the limited length of the project has affected in the sense of not being capable to give more explanation on some themes. Consequently, in the attempt to clarify these issues some footnotes have been added. Nonetheless, all information has been so helpful to address the issue in a clearer way. Second, the *labyrinth metaphor* is studied in a non-geographically perspective, which means that everything exposed in the project is in a generalist manner, which does not help in addressing specific issues of specific social collectives or diverse societies. Hence, it needs to be taken into account that this puzzle that women have to solve in leadership has its added challenges depending on where women are leading and in context-specific issues. Because of that, an important consideration has to be expressed: this project explains the *labyrinth* from the perspective of white privileged women that try to access to leadership and executive roles. Therefore, this are the obstacles that non-racialized and stigmatized women face. Then, it is open to the reader to think and be more informed about how racial, transgendered and xenophobic biases affect those women that suffer from them and that also try to reach to the high-managerial positions.

II. ANTECEDENTS

Over the years, the explanation of why women are not able to establish themselves in high-level managerial positions has taken different paths and perspectives. Therefore, it is crucial to understand where the issue has its beginnings and the idea behind the obstacles women face in reaching those leadership positions. Hence, this part of the project will address these antecedents, starting from the “concrete wall” and then, moving to the “glass ceiling” and what is going to be the real issue of the project: “The Labyrinth Metaphor”.

From an era of the history with the non-recognition of women as part of the labour force and either their rights to vote⁴, in the 1970s, women’s exclusion from the business world, politics and labour, in general, was still a reality. Although they gained the right to vote, society was not prepared to change. As part of that era’s natural order, the division of labour implied women to accept that an absolute barrier was in front of them, not letting them work as part of a cultural mindset. In consequence, the “concrete wall metaphor” had its sense. Hence, the division of labour rested in the idea of women being homemakers and men the breadwinners (Carli and Eagly 2018) along with continuing with disqualifying their not-paid labour (Eagly and Carli 2007a). As a result, they faced literally a wall, with written and explicit rules and norms against their advancement in leadership (Eagly and Carli 2007a). But barriers shifted as more women were hired and, consequently, they were not facing an isolation barrier anymore. Hence, the wall moved gradually from being visible to the invisibility. In 1986, two journalists from the Wall Street Journal introduced the label of “glass ceiling”, an invisible barrier that prevented women from gaining access to top leadership positions (Ryan and Haslam 2007). In other words, it was defined as a fixed limit that kept minorities and women out of the race for high-level managerial jobs regardless of their achievements or qualifications (Cotter et al. 2001). Henceforth, women were denied solely for their sex and gender condition (Eagly and Carli 2007a). At the same time that women were held in organizational lower levels, men were escalating rapidly. This

⁴ The history of women’s recognition in this project as an active part of the society has its roots in the late 19th century and beginning of the 20th, coinciding with the implementation of the Women’s Suffrage (Paxton, Hughes, and Green 2006).

phenomenon, named the “glass escalator”, describes the advantages that helped men rapidly succeed above women in even female-dominated occupations (Carli and Eagly 2015; Maume 1999). Consequently, men found advantages in escalating to the top-management positions in both gender-dominated professions (Williams 2013). However, the beliefs around the idea of that division of labour continued, provoking managers not invest in women’s advancement as they might be more interested in being home caregivers. In fact, the assumptions of the women’s role in society did not change (Eagly and Carli 2007a). But something happened. Entering the 2000s, women start to become CEOs of high-reputational companies such as Carly Fiorina in Hewlett-Packard in 1999 (Sellers 2009) or Meg Whiteman in eBay in 1998 (Bort and Leskin 2020). So, the concept of the unseen and unsanctioned barrier (Maume 1999) could no longer be sustained, as women were breaking the glass ceiling. Hence, the explanation against women's progression in business no longer fitted, as more women were advancing in attaining power and authority. Eagly and Carli (2007) appointed that the “glass ceiling metaphor” was indeed misleading. It erroneously implied equal condition for all women to access such positions and assumed an absolute and homogeneous barrier at a specific level of the hierarchy ignoring possible complexities. Moreover, it did not recognize possible strategies that women used to become leaders. Besides, it precluded the possibility for them to overcome those barriers and failed to study those paths to facilitate women’s rise (Bruckmüller et al. 2013).

Having said that, it is undoubted that paths for women to the top exist. Nevertheless, it is clear that the obstacles that they may face are in continuous evolution. It might seem that all past metaphors result discredited, but some features, such as discrimination and prejudices, can be related to the issue of this project. Besides, the facts were in need of another image to describe them and that is what Eagly and Carli (2007) did in putting forth the image of a labyrinth, as the metaphor to describe the “*journey riddled with challenges all along the way*” (Hoyt 2010:485). The next sections of the project, occupying the core of it, will be giving a concrete and extensive explanation of the *Labyrinth Metaphor* to illustrate, as profoundly as possible, the challenges and the complexity of women securing top leadership positions.

III. NAVIGATING THE LABYRINTH

Despite the notable advances that women have made in escalating to the top of managerial positions over the last decades, women still need to navigate through more demanding pathways to leadership than their male counterparts with equal capabilities (Harquail 2008). Therefore, these next sections will address questions around why women remain underrepresented as leaders and which forms can this *labyrinth* take. Then, the core of the project will study which paths confront women when advancing to that labyrinthine condition and how to solve them. Giving an analysis of the challenges and obstacles they face will help to understand the issue. Also, evidence on how to try and achieve the pathways out of it will be analysed.

I. PATHS THROUGH THE LABYRINTH

The routes through the labyrinth are considered those that affect women enough to make them not succeed in upper hierarchical levels, which challenges their capabilities and competences. These pathways are a mix of cultural beliefs, patriarchal behaviours, prejudices around particular leadership styles and identities, and organizational structures. This section is dedicated to studying all these themes and therefore, spread light in which could be the motives that keep women out of that high spheres.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is defined, in psychology, as the usually negative behaviours against an individual or group of people (McLeod 2008). Additionally, gender discrimination, or gender bias, is, in fact, *the act of treating a person, usually a woman, unfairly because of their sex* (Cambridge University Press 2020). In what relates to this project, then, discrimination happens when, and if, women receive fewer leadership opportunities than their male counterparts even when having the same competences (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Therefore, when this occurs, it contributes to women's lesser advancement through the labyrinth. Although there

exists an extended amount of research done in this field, it is of high urgency the continued acknowledgement of why this happens, as companies from all over the world, such as Wall-Mart and Nike, and the Mobile World Congress, have been facing, among others over the years, gender-discriminatory lawsuits (Fernández Campbell 2018; Martinez, Castro, and Amiel 2019; Sainato 2019). Furthermore, discrimination gets increasingly difficult to avoid when women try to navigate the different pathways to authority positions (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Hence, prejudices, stereotypes and perceptions affect the ways discrimination influence women in their ascent. Moreover, the incongruity that is created when these factors are not align with the image that people have of an effective leader, which normally relates to a masculine identity, influences the image of women as leaders in a disqualifying manner (Koenig et al. 2011). In other words, the prejudice that women suffer derives from gender roles, expectations that the society has about what women and men should be (Eagly and Karau 2002). The identity that has been associated with the leading role is masculine and therefore, people ascribe most of the features of a leader as masculine (Carli and Eagly 2011). As a result, when women do not match with this illusion of the masculine leader, the misfit provokes a negative effect on their promotions (Eagly and Karau 2002). These mismatches are created as part of brain associations. Moreover, everyday psychological processes are associated with a level of prejudice creation (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Furthermore, some of those mental associations underlie prejudice toward women leaders. In fact, the principal bias of classifying people is categorizing them directly by gender or sex⁵ (Stangor et al. 1992). This immediately evokes associations and expectations of what society understands in terms of masculinity and femininity (Eagly and Carli 2007a). In a study done by Koenig et al. (2011) it was concluded that there was a “*strong and robust tendency for leadership to be viewed as culturally masculine*” (Koenig et al. 2011:637). Additionally, the amount of unpaid labour carrying family responsibilities has a greater impact on this statement as it is viewed as one of the elements of what conforms the gender gap in organizations (Carli and Eagly 2011) Indeed, “*on average, women spend more time than men on childcare and*

⁵ Gender is not the same as sex. “Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for girls and boys, and women and men. Gender interacts with, but is different from, the binary categories of biological sex” (WHO 2020b). Otherwise, sex “refers to the biological characteristics that define humans as female or male” (WHO 2020a).

housework in all nations” (Carli and Eagly 2011:249). Again, mental associations can result pervasive and influential even when people are not aware of them. If people are not able to recognize this cultural constructions, the beliefs and behaviours that emerge from those pre-judgements could help to maintain the idea of men as natural leaders (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Moreover, the perceptions that constitute the relationships between management and more masculine leader roles relate to implicit theories that result from stereotypes (Ryan and Haslam 2007). The negative outcome of mental associations, therefore, can be rapidly linked with stereotypes attributed to the feminine and masculine role.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are social constructions that people adopt in their minds and that are highly resistant to be changed (Harquail 2008; Heilman and Eagly 2008). Thus, stereotypes can be classified into *descriptive* and *prescriptive* beliefs⁶ (Cialdini and Trost 1998). Then, descriptive stereotypes describe women as warm and communal (Heilman 2001), whereas prescriptive stereotypes dictate that women should be communal (Eagly and Karau 2002). Consequently, social psychologists had examined to what extent it is crucial to limit their influence by recognizing that those stereotypes have been activated simply as a cultural construction (Blair and Banaji 1996; Kunda and Spencer 2003). The damaging effects of stereotypes seem to be a paradox (Eagly and Mladinic 1994; Koenig et al. 2011; Langford and Mackinnon 2000). Women, which are perceived related with more positive cultural stereotypes such as kindness, experience workplace discrimination as a result of a *role congruity theory* mismatch (Eagly and Karau 2002). This theory explains how biased evaluations exist as a consequence of framing women as communal and men and leaders as agentic⁷. As a result, often, women are expected to *take care* and men to *take charge*. Hence, these associations comprise the basis for gender stereotypes (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Indeed, the internalization of these negative

⁶ *Descriptive beliefs*: consensual expectation about how a social group *actually* does; and *prescriptive beliefs*: consensual expectations of what group members *should* do.

⁷ Communal qualities are referred as those such as concern for others, sensitivity, warmth, helpfulness and nurturance (Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 2001); agentic qualities are referred as those such as confidence, assertiveness, independence, rationality, and decisiveness (Eagly and Carli 2007a).

perceptions of mismatch occurs and is known as the *stereotype threat*. Then, it may affect negatively to women's aspirations and efficiency as leaders (Hoyt and Murphy 2016).

When people associate men with effective leaders, the paradigm of *think manager-think male* (Scheil 1973) is observed. This paradigm focuses on traits shared by managers with men and women independently. Then, it concluded that men shared more managerial attributes than women did as agentic roles were more linked to leadership. Additionally, the *think manager-think male* association supports many of the gender inequalities in the organization (Ryan et al. 2011). Yet, this paradigm has weakened somewhat throughout the years as contemporary descriptors of leadership contemplate more feminine stereotypical qualities (Epitropaki and Martin 2004). Despite this, recent studies still view management as possessing more agentic, and therefore masculine, characteristics (Sczesny 2003). Then, these cultural stereotypes provide men with a palpable advantage as they will be immediately recognized as male, and consequently, masculine associations will be activated. Hence, men will be seen as a possible effective leader (Eagly and Carli 2007a). So, while gender stereotypes assist men on their way to elite leadership roles, they complicate the navigation for women through the labyrinth (Wigboldus, Dijksterhuis, and Van Knippenberg 2003). Precisely, women carrying leadership positions stereotypically masculine feel devaluated as they are compared to their male counterparts (Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky 1992).

Double Bind

As previously discussed, the mismatch of women performing communal behaviours and the demand of agentic roles in leadership contributes to discrimination in the workplace. The dilemma that arises from this is known as the *double bind*. Furthermore, the *double bind* leads to a *double standard* when women receive lower evaluations than male leaders equally competent (Eagly et al. 1992). Understanding this dilemma might help in learning how to balance both roles, and therefore, have the ability to navigate the labyrinth (Eagly and Carli 2007a). On the one hand, women in roles of power might be seen as not sufficient

warm or sensitive when displaying an agentic performance, because of female stereotypes associations to communal attributes. On the other hand, women might not be perceived as agentic enough in becoming effective leaders when fulfilling somehow the feminine gender role (Carli and Eagly 2011; Eagly and Carli 2007a; Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2019). Then, they might be disliked when showing too much agency (Bowles, Babcock, and Lai 2007) and perceived as ineffective leaders when displaying a more communal role (Hoyt 2010). More concretely, the *double bind* penalizes women in both ways. Women have traditionally been associated with the caring and nurturing attributes, so, pleasing behaviours are not a bonus in their performance. In other words, it denies them the power and benefits of being entirely communal (Eagly and Carli 2007a).

Given the *double bind*, it is not surprising to imagine that resistance against the influence⁸ of women leaders exists. This resistance causes more obstacles in the labyrinth for women seeking authoritarian and influential positions (Carli 2001). Hence, the *double bind* creates resistance in different domains (Eagly and Carli 2007a). However, the most important one is the men's resistance to more agentic women leaders. In this case, men especially oppose and resist women who try to influence in the same way men are supposed to lead. That is showing power by more authoritarian manners (Carli 2004). In some cases, resistance can sadly lead to sexual harassment in the workplace (Bond et al. 2004; Eagly and Carli 2007a). Also, the *double bind* carries concerns around women leadership competence when observing a lack of agency. Hence, to women that display exceptional performances, additional demands are asked. However, and because of the *double standard*, women might be impeded to obtain the desired job position and to attaining leadership (Carli and Eagly 2011). Additionally, this *double standard* is sometimes a hurdle and can be tough to eliminate or even reduce. When describing a man or woman as "competent", it does not need to evoke to the same idea for both genders (Biernat 2003). Therefore, even when evaluating the same abilities, group stereotypes may influence the meanings of competence. Nevertheless, women may take advantage of this *double standard* because people are aware of all the obstacles

⁸ Influence is one of the requirements of effective leadership and, therefore, is crucial in the display of a managerial role. Moreover, influence assists in achieving collective efficacy as well as reinforcing the self-concept of leader and enhancing team performance, among others (Hannah et al. 2008).

and challenges that she has faced to occupy that high managerial role. So, she could be seen, at some point, as more competent as their male peers (Rosette and Tost 2010). Moreover, women are aware of this reality (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Then, for women to become influential, the *double bind* requires a balancing act between those communal and agentic roles. Hence, women leaders need to consider how to equally display agentic characteristics regarded as essential for leadership without infringing the gender stereotypes associated to the feminine act (Gipson et al. 2017).

LEADERSHIP STYLES AND BEHAVIOURS

Concerning women's communal expectation, the assumption around how women should behave as leaders, and as a consequence their leadership styles⁹, also needs a comment. There exists a vast body of past research that concludes that there are no gender differences in leadership styles, however, some findings explained that this might not actually be true (Burke and Collins 2001; Eagly and Johnson 1990). Since individuals beliefs of leadership roles are more related to masculine attributes, women are seen as less effective in comparison to their male peers (Powell, Butterfield, and Bartol 2008). Hence, women leaders face the challenge of cultivating an effective leadership style, in response to the *double bind* and the balancing act of communal and agentic qualities (Eagly and Carli 2007b). Stereotypically, women are more engaged in participative and people-oriented managerial roles, by involving employees in the decision making (Eagly and Johnson 1990; Mast 2004). As gender norms tended to classify men in task-oriented styles, performing in an authoritarian way was more commonly effective than the participative one displayed by women (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Despite this gender-biased classification, some studies have concluded that women and men are equal in their task-oriented competence. Moreover, both genders performed equally in task-orientation when positions were aligned with the gender conventions. Even so, women slightly exceed in intrapersonal qualities (Eagly and Johnson 1990). Therefore, some could argue that this might suppose an advantage if leadership had no gender prejudices. There exists a growing tendency that displaying more

⁹ A leadership style is defined as the set of characteristics displayed by a manager (Eagly and Carli 2007a).

leadership behaviours considered communal, such as the individualized consideration component of transformational leadership (Bass 1985), helps in being an effective leader (Rosette and Tost 2010). Nonetheless, because some behaviours in this style are culturally feminine and consistent with the female role in society of caring and being supportive, it can eventually present a pitfall (Eagly and Carli 2007a). As mentioned above, if women leaders are expected to behave communally as part of their nature, it could result in a denial of promotions for them. Consequently, fewer women would be able to ascent to higher managerial positions.

ORGANIZATIONAL OBSTACLES

Mental associations lead to, not only discriminate because of cultural beliefs but also influence organizational policies and practices (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Organizations have their own structures and culture. Therefore, obstacles when navigating the labyrinth can also be found in gender inequality within primarily institutional processes and human resources (HR) related decision-making (Stamarski and Son Hing 2015). Also, the level of decision-makers' sexism can affect the likelihood to display gender-based discriminatory actions. Women have gained a lot of leadership territory in worldwide organizations. Even so, a considerable transformation needs to take place before women could enjoy equality in accessing leadership (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Inequal treatment among women can be observed in many forms, however, only a few of them will be explained in this section.

Institutional Barriers

The four-feature model of Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) will be used, along with additional research, in the attempt to explain how institutional barriers can provoke synergies that could be affecting women's advancement. The organization is governed by people, which means HR and institutional policies could directly affect a group of people regardless of skills, competences or abilities. Then, discrimination against women can appear in policies such as evaluations,

opportunities that foster performance reward and hiring, among others. Hence, when there exist gender differences in the application of these policies, it could be as a result of explicit written gendered HR practices. It is needed to take into account that such decisions around the HR department have “*significant effects on women’s career*” as they determine terms such as “*selection, performance evaluation, and promotions*” (Stamarski and Son Hing 2015:4). In addition, such decision can be lot more disadvantageous and amplified when women are not found in congruence with the feminine role. Besides when women act in a more agentic manner than they *should* behave (Eagly et al. 1992). Consequently, women performing more assertively might be rated inferiorly than their comparable male peers (Heilman and Okimoto 2007). Leadership can affect in the institutionalizing process of gender inequalities (Stamarski and Son Hing 2015). Likewise, leaders communicate and incorporate business policies. Hence, they are responsible for aligning the values and culture of the organization through employees' functions. Underrepresentation of women leaders can, indeed, be perpetuated as the gender of management leaders “*affects the degree to which there is gender discrimination, gender supportive policies, and a gender diversity supportive climate within an organization*” (Ostroff, Kinicki, and Muhammad 2012; Stamarski and Son Hing 2015:6). In addition to these facts, organizations ask for more involvement of employees in terms of demanding long shifts and more devotion (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Therefore, as higher the managerial position, the more time is required. As a consequence, for women, who are subject to more family responsibilities (Carli and Eagly 2011), it complicates the reconciliation between personal and managerial tasks.

The Effect of Hostile and Benevolent Sexism

In an attempt to deeply evaluate how the structure of an organization may affect women’s performance through the labyrinth, this project also comments sexism within the organization. This theme is the result of those mental associations and expectations on women’s as carers in accordance to the feminine role. The *ambivalent sexism theory* classifies sexism into two different types: hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske 1996). Hostile sexism relates to negative female stereotypes –such as incompetency, emotional instability or even sexually

manipulative– whereas benevolent sexism is defined as that desire to “protect” them and therefore, keep them from positions of power. Besides, hostile sexism involves the supremacy of men amongst women. In contrast, benevolent sexism signals positivity in women workers, as long as they occupy traditionally feminine roles and therefore, they *actually* are weak and in need of male’s protection (Stamarski and Son Hing 2015). Then, if decision-makers are, in effect, sexists, discriminatory institutional decisions will continue to be made in both directly (hostile sexism involves negative consequences for women’s access to high authoritarian managerial positions) and indirectly (in e.g. preventing their access to more complicated tasks) ways (King et al. 2012; Masser and Abrams 2004). Thus, levels of these sexist attitudes add more obstacles to women’s pathways to the excellence as top-rated managers.

Social Capital

Managers spend significant time in informal interactions, and these are sometimes even more important when escalating to positions of power in hierarchical companies than having an extensive skill set (Eagly and Carli 2007a; Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden 2001). These specific informal interactions are referred as social capital. Then, “*social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital*” (Bourdieu 1986:21). Women are aware of the importance of building a network of relationships even though these may lack bureaucratic rationality. Nonetheless, they might face difficulties. Not by lacking understanding of how these interactions work, but because of family responsibility needs implying gender segregation (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Moreover, even if women do not have these types of responsibilities, they might be a minority in the organization, which also would obstacle their pathways and social capital building. If, therefore, women are in male-dominated fields or companies, women would usually have less legitimacy and a decent power position in those networks. Nevertheless, it is in those fields that mentoring, by normally men, could help in gaining more recognition and support

(Moore 1988, 1990). In addition, because men are those that control these interactions, they base their networks in *masculine* activities (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Although networks are typically segregated, in more gender-integrated organisations, women might be more successful in establishing supportive relationships with their male counterparts. Furthermore, it is not to say that women can also benefit from their relationships with other women. Then, in this gender-based interactions women would be closely to having role models, gaining social support and information about how to deal with discriminatory issues.

A REPRISE

This first part of the project has highlighted the pathways that lead to the labyrinthic obstacles women have faced throughout the years, and continue to face, in managerial and leadership positions. These obstacles, although categorized in three different subsections, are mainly described as being part of an intrinsic paternalistic, sexist and discriminatory view of how women are supposed to behave. These gendered bias and prejudices expand and create other added challenges to women's advancement in executive positions. However, women are continuously escalating to top-managerial echelons so, it might seem, that they can gain prestige and authority regardless of these hard-to-beat impediments.

II. PATHWAYS OUT OF THE LABYRINTH

This labyrinth is not possible to be solved only for women but also with the help of behavioural and organizational-oriented practices (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Notwithstanding and despite the slowness, women are advancing into more visible executive roles. Moreover, the presence of women into elite leadership jobs has recently boosted. Indeed, having women leaders is seen as a symbol of modernity and future-oriented stewardship among companies (Carli and Eagly 2011). This section gives a general answer on how to overcome the obstacles and dead ends previously explained in the project. Therefore, the challenges are linked to what seems to be effective solutions for women leaders. Overall, this project will examine

three different pathways out of the labyrinth that are the following ones: how to balance those more communal qualities with the agentic ones expected from leaders; the structural changes that would help to encourage women to navigate the labyrinth; and finally how to invest in those necessary social interactions with other executive colleagues.

THE BALANCING ACT OF COMMUNAL AND AGENTIC PERFORMANCES

There still exists a more associated vision of the leadership role to the masculine character, and that seems to be one of the thoughts behind gender prejudices and discrimination in business. However, this one second-generation bias¹⁰ has declined because of a more extended, but not enough, division of labour and the shift to a more communal effective leading style (Carli and Eagly 2011; Rosette and Tost 2010). Moreover, women must decide which leadership style and behaviour to take properly as the doubts that surge from stereotypes of communion and agency converge in the *double bind* (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Hence, this is one of the principal obstacles within the navigation of the labyrinth. First, women need to develop an excellent level of competence to convince their male peers that they are equally competitive in terms of ability. Then, to some extent, women can try to weaken the line of choosing between displaying an assertive or caring performance. To do so, blending both styles by being both directive and verbally supportive and warm would diminish those doubts about her talent and agreeableness (Heilman and Okimoto 2007). Then, mixing both male and female stereotyped traits such as assertiveness, competence, sensitivity, compassion and empathy would be key (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Furthermore, the communal qualities often related to women's behaviour can increase their influence and success as leaders (Carli 1999). Because women may face resistance if they present aggressive behaviours (see *double bind* sub-section), displaying "*an amalgam of agentic and communal qualities*" might help to prevent that resistance and therefore, "*gain influence and lead effectively*" (Carli and Eagly 2011:259). However, resistance to women's management is tough and even stronger in male-dominated positions. It is in those

¹⁰ Second-generation bias refers to stereotypes and organizational practices that can be hard to detect (Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013).

job positions that demands on more authoritarian style reside, making more challenging the balancing act. Then, women need to learn how to take credit for accomplishments in an attempt to show others how competent they are without feeling uncomfortable and unauthentic. In reference to that, it is also need to take into account that self-promoting strategies are risk-taking for women as the *double bind* remains present in the minds of peers and management superiors (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Hence, increasing people's awareness about the psychological drivers of prejudice toward female leaders could be helpful when working to dissipate those pre-judgments (Eagly and Carli 2007b:16). Also, learning how to negotiate effectively can affect in obtaining a better leadership position or other managerial and career advantages (Bowles and Flynn 2010). Moreover, negotiation is a fundamental form of coordination in companies and contains some features through which gender inequalities, being a pervasive and crucial source of diversity in the workplace, can emerge (Bowles and McGinn 2008). Because of that, negotiation is a significant issue of the navigation¹¹. Obtaining as much information as possible could reduce or even avoid the pitfalls of underestimating women's work. Additionally, if women do not feel authentic when displaying such executive roles because of everything exposed during the first part of the project, the labyrinth might be impossible to navigate (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Hence, finding their ways to see themselves as effective and real leaders would also be key. In fact, creating a safe space and a community in which women can discuss their leadership identities without the need to feel judged has actually positive outcomes in the sense of feeling supported and therefore not ashamed of feeling good in a leading executive position (Ibarra et al. 2019). Nonetheless, a supportive organizational structure must contribute to women's development as leaders. Therefore, the next sub-section is dedicated specifically to those policies and acts that companies could perform to encourage and promote gender.

¹¹ For further understanding of negotiating as part of the obstacles within the labyrinth, check the work and research of Bowles et al and Mazei et al independently. For understanding on how gender and sex stereotypes affect persistence in negotiation check their work from 2010 (Bowles and Flynn 2010); For understanding how women can do for legitimizing their claims to top leadership positions see their work from 2012 (Bowles 2012); For further understanding in which degree gender differences affect in negotiation outcomes and affect effective negotiation behaviours see their work from 2015 (Mazei et al. 2015).

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES TO FOSTER GENDER

Throughout the project, it has been mentioned that organizational habits can sometimes benefit men (Carli and Eagly 2011). Additionally, HR practices are connected to organizational climates. These arise from what their members experience and are related to formal and informal shared perceptions of routines and procedures (Ostroff et al. 2012; Schneider, Ehrhart, and Macey 2010). Hence, organizational climates can affect to perpetuate gender inequalities. In contrast, these climates can also provide a more diverse and inclusive culture (Stamarski and Son Hing 2015). Yet, organizations ought to appreciate the complexities of the issue and act in accordance to puzzle out the labyrinth (Eagly and Carli 2007b). This subsection relates to those practices that can be implemented as to appreciate those complexities and to eliminate gender inequalities from organizational climates. Eagly and Carli (2007b; 2011) mentioned in their work several policies in reference to that. Hence, this will be exposed along with other pieces of research.

First, educating everyone about second-generation gender bias because without understanding what stereotypes are and why mental associations are made is the basis for being aware of them. Consequently, women might then feel empowered as they will know which actions can be taken in order to solve inequalities (Carli and Eagly 2011; Ibarra et al. 2019). Secondly, changing hiring, performance evaluation and promotion processes into less subjective and more critical ones could aim to leave behind the effects of lingering prejudice that surges from these procedures. Hence, promoting open-recruitment tools and not relying only in informal networks to fill positions and establishing transparent and explicit criteria to limit the influence of decision-makers' personal biases (Carli and Eagly 2011; Eagly and Carli 2007a; Ibarra et al. 2019). Lastly, women may feel more authentic and safer when discussing gender issues with other women (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Consequently, ensuring that there is a critical mass of other women executive and therefore avoiding having only one female member per team. Indeed, this could increase their self-confidence and have those essential informal networks to succeed in top-ranked managerial positions (Eagly and Carli 2007b). Additionally, the Grant Thornton report (2019) highlighted some actions to promote gender diversity in leadership such as ensuring equal access to developmental work opportunities,

providing mentoring and coaching, reviewing recruitment approaches and linking senior management rewards to progress on gender balance targets among others. Nonetheless, company-specific characteristics are needed to be taken into account when approaching the different diversity and inclusion practices and policies, in terms of gender in this case. Therefore, context-specific issues need to be recognized and treated as to transcend the most mainstream perspectives. Consequently, the application of these organizational changes would need to have as a goal to facilitate knowledge creation and skills and resources to move forward with this diversity initiatives (Nishii and Özbilgin 2007).

These policies normally increase female leadership, however, if not taken context-properly, they could also lead to pitfalls (Sojo et al. 2016). Nevertheless, the application of all these human resources-related practices is not only in the benefit of women. In fact, men are more committed than ever in the caring of their children and family, so, they have the same problems in balancing work and family. Even so, they might face more intolerance for these commitments. Therefore, good practices application is advantageous for both men and women in their active involvement in off-work activities (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Finally, *investing in social capital* can be itself a solution for evading the dead ends with the use of specific practices and organizational methodologies such the ones explained in the following sub-section.

INVESTING IN SOCIAL CAPITAL

A major barrier happens to be the lack of access to influential colleagues (Ibarra et al. 2019) and because informal interactions are crucial to rise to positions of power, if women do not have enough access to them, they find more obstacles to their advancement (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Participating in networks, therefore, creates social capital. As seen in the *social capital* sub-section, women need to establish supportive and emotional relationships with both their male and female counterparts. Additionally, women need to join and develop these networks and also cultivate them in a strategic manner (Moore 1988). Furthermore, time-management skills and resources available for women might be managed to deal also with this issue (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Not only investing in social capital is

building trustworthy relationships but also being close to making a change by acting directly near to those who have that paternalistic and stereotyped view of management and in general. Moreover, since family obligations are principally under women's responsibility, having the possibility to work flexible shifts would help in both their not-paid labour and to be able to manage their time as to develop those essential ties (Perschel 2008). Indeed, changing the long-hours norm and organizational mindset of being that the prime indicator of someone's devotion for the company could also make women meet with all types of responsibilities (Ibarra et al. 2019). One solution could be mentoring, as it could help, apart from showing how organizations is structured, by offering acceptance and coaching through personal support (Eagly and Carli 2007a). Moreover, "*when a well-placed individual who possesses greater legitimacy takes an interest in a woman's career, her efforts to build social capital can proceed far more efficiently*" (Eagly and Carli 2007b:17). Other practices that a company can adopt are family-friendly human resources practices (Prusak and Cohen 2005).

FINAL THOUGHTS

Although its limitations, this study around the *labyrinth metaphor* and the issue of why and how women are still underrepresented in leadership roles has given some insights on both causes and solutions to those twisting pathways that drive women to constant challenges and dead ends in their career's advancement. Women no longer confront monolithic barriers. Yet, impediments still exist, creating indirect paths that hardly enable women to succeed in high leadership positions. Discrimination, negative mental associations linked to feminine behaviours and styles and organizational policies that mostly favour men represent the main cause of female lesser advancement in business. Indeed, attitudes and societal beliefs towards the segregated division of labour and responsibilities beyond managerial ones do not help in balancing gendered roles.

Recently, leadership roles have been shifting to a more communal style, which might help women by facilitating them to perform a balancing act between communal and agentic qualities. Moreover, if businesses were educated in a more inclusive and not-gendered-bias manner, it would be possible to reduce stereotyped decisions and perceptions that could lead to the paradigm of *think manager-think male*. Then, it would be possible to reduce the existing resistance to female leaders and make them feel more empowered. This project has made me develop more my critical thinking, clarify what I already thought about which were the issues that needed to be addressed and have more technical understanding on the reasons. I continue to believe that by understanding the roots of the problems and by trying to study it from different perspectives, people become more aware and changing what you dislike can be possible. The gendered-biased or segregation issues that companies face are, mainly, because of social constructions such as stereotypes that create a negative association between the leader role and the feminine one. Besides, this associations are cultural, which means that society itself inevitably continues to expand the mentality of women as the ones that take care, and men as the ones that take charge. It is not only that men need to deconstruct their masculinity and allow themselves to feel and act in accordance to their innate beliefs, but for women to speak up and to not reflect with those biased mentalities.

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