

PERCEPTION OF FEMALE MANAGERS ABOUT BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

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Abstract

Objective: this study aims to identify strategies and actions of female managers to break the glass ceiling, as well as evidencing management practices to be carried out by organizations.

Methodology/Approach: A descriptive, qualitative survey was carried out based on the promoting factors of the glass ceiling. The survey was applied to female managers, resulting in 62 valid responses.

Results: The study points out that the strategies and actions of female managers to break the glass ceiling include: family-based education, professional qualification, legitimacy through competence and results, self-confidence, and female empowerment.

Study's Limitation/Implication: The first limitation concerns the sample size. Highlighted management practices to be executed by companies are: standardizing the promotion criteria, training policy, employee development program, company awareness of the benefits of diversity in management, and equal pay.

Study's Originality/Value: It presents evidence on the glass ceiling phenomena faced by female managers. The study also shows ways that organizations can combat gender inequality at work.

Keywords: glass ceiling, gender, women, management, Atlas.Ti.

Percepção de mulheres gestoras sobre a quebra do teto de vidro

Resumo

Objetivo: identificar estratégias e ações de mulheres gestoras para romper os fatores do teto de vidro, assim como evidenciar práticas de gestão à serem tomadas pelas organizações.

Metodologia/ Abordagem: Foi realizada uma *survey* descritiva, de cunho qualitativo, com base nos fatores promovedores do teto de vidro aplicados a gestoras, obteve-se 62 respostas válidas.

Resultados: O estudo aponta que as estratégias e ações das mulheres gestoras com o fim de romper os fatores do teto de vidro abrangem: educação na base familiar; qualificação profissional; competência e resultados para legitimidade; autoconfiança e empoderamento feminino.

Limitação/Implicação da Pesquisa: A primeira concerne ao tamanho da amostra. Destaca as práticas de gestão a serem tomadas pelas empresas pode-se destacar: normatização dos critérios de promoção; política de treinamento, formação de talentos dentro da empresa; conscientização dos benefícios da diversidade na gestão para a empresa e igualdade salarial.

Originalidade/Valor do artigo: A qual possibilita evidenciar sobre o teto de vidro enfrentado pelas mulheres gestoras. Mostrar formas que as organizações podem combater desigualdade de gênero no trabalho.

Palavras-chave: teto de vidro, gênero, mulheres, gestão, Atlas.Ti.

1 INTRODUCTION

Society is structured as a product of this social construction. This includes social organizations and social relations. Regarding companies, in addition to their internal structure, organizational charts, and processes, one can also perceive characteristics from its social agents. These delimit the functions in society attributed to gender, which has been maintained by the authors' framework—that the people, organizations, and society tend to keep things as they are (Berger & Luckmann, 1974).

As such, social inequalities perpetuate themselves in society even in the 21st century, such as those referring to gender, ethnicity, social origin, nationality, among others (Glass & Cook, 2014). Gender inequality in social spaces has ancient roots. One of the causes is the cultural and social construction of society (Lazzaretti et al., 2013; Ritter et al., 2021).

In this context, brought about with the Industrial Revolution and other social changes at the end of the 18th century, the public (those of paid work) and private (family) spaces were delimited. The world of work was defined as male, while women would be responsible for the private sphere of home and family life (Coutinho & Coutinho, 2011; Theophilo, 2019).

This order was only ruptured by means of the constant feminist struggles for equal rights that intensified in the 20th century when women grew weary of being perceived as lesser and single-handedly responsible for homemaking. Women have since conquered the right to vote and occupied workspaces after World Wars I and II (Rodrigues & Silva, 2015; Brieger et al., 2019; Lewellyn & Muller-Kahle, 2020). This rupture in reality, which Bordieu (2003) treats as in force in society, the history of (re)continued creation of the objective and subjective structures of male domination. This male domination is internalized in individuals through a long historical process (Bordieu, 2003) and strongly affects society's women and men, that are subject to the structures already in place. Theirs is the choice of continuing this process or not.

Regarding the labor market in Brazil, although men are still the majority in the formal job market, women's participation has been increasing. This is indicated by the data of the Annual Social Information Report (RAIS) of the Brazilian Ministry of Labor and Employment (MTE), going from 42.79% in 2013 to 43.25% in 2014. This is observed mainly in recently-created job posts. In 2014, more than 493 thousand new posts were occupied by women, while more than 130 thousand were occupied by men. Regarding salary, women of color have been paid less than white women. Such a factor points to race as one of the relevant issues when discussing inequality in the labor market. Despite this panorama of inequality regarding access to new job posts, another relevant piece of data on employment in Brazil is that women have greater representativeness regarding higher education degrees (58.86%). That is, they are seeking to specialize themselves, on average, even more than men. Among other motivations, women are using specialization as a tool to enter the labor market (Brasil, 2015).

RAIS 2014 data indicates that women still are paid less than men at the same level of education regarding undergraduate degrees. Women receive 61.67% of men's average salary (Brasil, 2015). Women occupy about 19% of management positions in Brazil according to the *Women in Business – Grant Thornton International Business Report* (2016), and an even lower percentage when it comes to the Management Board. In May 2011, women occupied 7.7% of the positions in the management boards of Brazilian companies (Instituto Brasileiro de Governança Corporativa [IBGC], 2011).

Despite the progress of gender equality concerning occupied vacancies in the Brazilian labor market, this is not fully reflected when it comes to the parity in remuneration and representativeness in management positions, in management boards, and even more in Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) positions. The previously mentioned context refers to the discussion of the glass ceiling phenomenon, first characterized in 1986 in the United States by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986).

This phenomenon as part of a study field has been discussed for more than 30 years, framing the issue of gender inequality in the leadership of organizations (Steil, 1997).

Therefore, this is a social issue that can contribute to the development of humanity in its various facets, since such a change is capable of increasingly including women in the decision-making processes and management positions. As such, the glass ceiling is an important phenomenon to be studied to further gender equality at work. (Silva e Martins 2017; Moreno-Gómez & Calleja-Blanco, 2018; Bugdol & Pokrzywa, 2019; Cohen et al., 2020; Ritter et al., 2021). Understanding the glass ceiling phenomenon requires knowledge of the stories of women who deal with this reality, analyzing their struggles, how they overcome them, and lessons learned. It is only so one can understand a corporate universe not yet described in the field of organizational theories (Botelho et al., 2010; Silva & Martins, 2017; Bugdol & Pokrzywa, 2019).

In this context, the following research question arises: What strategies do female managers use to break the glass ceiling? As such, this study aims to identify strategies and actions of women in management positions to rupture the factors related to the glass ceiling, as well as highlighting management practices to be undertaken by companies which female managers perceive as possibly contributing to breaking the glass ceiling.

The justification for studying this issue is its contemporaneity, which has been discussed in several arenas (Gonçalves et al., 2016; Lazzaretti et al., 2013; Madalozzo, 2011; Silva & Martins, 2017; Cohen et al., 2020; Ritter et al., 2021), thus evidencing the need to identify factors that improve the level of current female representativeness, to add into the scientific knowledge pool regarding the subject, and to stimulate transformations in society in search of gender equality.

This paper is structured as such: following the introductory aspects of this section, we present a literature review, the methodological procedures, data analysis and discussion, and, finally, our final considerations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was carried out in two instances. The first one focusing on aspects related to the glass ceiling phenomena. The latter, aiming the disclosure of corporate and public policies.

2.1 *Glass ceiling*

The expression glass ceiling was originally introduced by Katherine Lawrence from Hewlett Packard (HP) in the *Conference of the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press*, held in a club for United States journalists (National Press Club) in July 1979. At the time, there was an ongoing discussion regarding the disparity between stock promotion policy and actual opportunities for women at HP. Thus, this term was coined by Lawrence and Maryanne Schreiber, HP managers (Hanne, 2015).

Glass ceiling is defined as a subtle, transparent, and strong barrier that prevents the rise of women in organizations (Steil, 1997; Santos et al., 2014; Lima et al., 2018). For Hanne (2015), the imagery of a glass obstruction suggests that women were being deceived about their real ascension opportunities because the barrier was not easy to be perceived. Lima et al. (2018) emphasize that the metaphor of the glass ceiling is given both by the "glass," which corresponds to the invisible barriers, and the "ceiling," corresponds to the difficulty of ascension to higher levels.

Sociocultural customs permeate the glass ceiling. If society still perceives the role of women as inferior to men, this reproduces itself in the organization. Sexual identity as the basis of male and female duties based on a biological and non-professional scope is a concept already refuted in

several studies, where the priority of male work no longer follows traditional outdated standards. It results in companies being culturally less accepted in refusing to provide equal opportunities to men and women (Santos et al., 2014; Reddy, & Jadhav, 2019).

2.2 Corporate and public policies

Corporate and public policies aimed at promoting gender equality in companies are still scarce and modest considering the society we live in, as studies point. A few corporate policies even began to surface. However, it is still something gradually applied in organizations (Bibi, 2016; Reddy & Jadhav, 2019).

Samkange and Dingani (2013) emphasize legislation and policies carried out by the government as a way of promoting gender equality in Zimbabwe. It has shown results in the public sector, but the author's point that the same had not yet occurred in the country's hotel industry. In Pakistan, Bibi (2016) reports the existence of corporate policies, but that these are not mandatory, only directives, and have not been implemented or follow-up on.

Regarding public policies, some countries have carried out activities for the promotion of gender equality. However, it has had little to no effect on high-level management positions. As such, a government proposal as the likes of implementing a legal quota to increase the number of women on management boards is necessary (Lazzaretti et al., 2013; Martinez-Jimenez, Hernández-Ortiz, & Fernández, 2020). Few countries have accomplished this, even with attenuating inequality levels in so-called first-world countries. As pointed by Geiler and Renneboog (2016), in England, only 2% of CEOs and 4% of all executive-level professionals are female in publicly-listed British companies. They also highlight that England does not enforce extensive quotas or policies regarding the glass ceiling.

Therefore, policies that require the implementation of quotas in companies' management boards have been one of the tools used by some countries as a means of achieving lower gender inequality levels (Sharif, 2015 Reddy & Jadhav, 2019; Sarabi & Smith, 2021). This phenomenon is becoming a trend of recent years in Europe as means to accelerate the gender equality process since the issue has not considerably advanced regarding positions of power and management, especially in private companies. It is the case even after the intensification of discussions on issues such as the glass ceiling, discrimination, and others related to existing gender inequality (Nekhili & Gatfaoui, 2013; Cohen et al., 2020; Martinez-Jimenez et al., 2020).

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study is characterized as a descriptive, qualitative survey, as supported by Yin (2016) and Richardson (2017). The study population is female managers. The selected sample covers women who currently occupy management positions or have so previously and who have completed or are attending an MBA, specialization, Master's or Doctorate degree in the areas of management, controlling, or finance. 99 responses were obtained, of which 62 were valid and have corresponded to all initial filters for sample composition.

A questionnaire was designed based on the literature, focusing on the promoting factors of the glass ceiling and divided into the following blocks: Block 1, Survey conditioning variables; Block 2, Respondent profile; Block 3, Questions surrounding the issue.

The research instrument was pre-tested to verify incongruities, possible misunderstandings regarding the content of the questions and answers, any subtleties not covered in the initial version of the script, and modification viability before being applied to the final sample. Data from the pilot test were analyzed and adapted into the new version of the questionnaire applied to the final sample.

The pre-test was applied to five graduate students, which are or have already been in managerial positions, similar to the sample chosen by Xie e Zhu (2016) e King et al. (2012).

The questionnaires were submitted to validity tests, and the qualitative items were examined following content analysis (Bardin, 2004). The answers were analyzed guided by the study's hypothesis. The questions are affirmative, and the respondents were able to answer regarding their agreement or disagreement with the statement, as well as report situations that have exemplified their positioning.

The Atlas.Ti software was used to manipulate and organize the data for analysis. This software is used for qualitative data analysis and assists in the treatment of large amounts of data. Atlas.Ti aids in the analytical process. Qualitative analysis software such as Atlas.Ti enable dimensionality and structure to theoretical and emerging codes (Maclaran & Catterall, 2002). It is an efficient, systematic, and enabling way to bring objective technical details to contribute to the analysis, which is subjective but must follow reflective and iterative coherence, whichever way it is organized. Respondents had their identities protected in order to preserve their professional integrity.

4 DATA ANALYSIS

First, we carried out a descriptive analysis of the companies and female managers. Approximately 47% of the organizations are from the service sector, about 75% are non-family businesses, 93% have capital of national origin, and 89% of respondents are not related to the company founder.

Around 76% are white women, 68% are between 26 and 41 years, 90% have a graduate degree (MBA, specialization, Master's or Doctoral degree), little more than half are married, and about half are childless. Regarding their schedules and activities, respondents work between eight and ten hours a day. Most are between three and five years at the current company and the same period in the current position.

4.1 Women's strategies and actions to break the glass ceiling

In this step, we analyzed the actions indicated by female managers which they understand could improve the reality of the glass ceiling and lower existing access barriers between women and management positions.

Based on the responses, we used the Atlas.ti software for categorization and identified some strategies and actions that women can take individually and with their families. Strategies highlighted by respondents are mainly related to education, but pertaining to different outlooks. The main strategies and actions are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: Women's strategies and actions that can contribute to breaking the glass ceiling.

Strategies and actions	Arguments by female managers
Formal education and family values	"I believe that the family and school education that allows women to develop their potential equality to men." (Respondent 62)
Cultural and social change	"The male-dominated and patriarchal society does not accept gender inequality as a reality. This is the biggest challenge that women face in their careers because barriers are so invisible that they often cannot be seen. This causes women to believe only and exclusively in meritocracy, without visualizing the limitations imposed by society." (Respondent 15)
Agreements with the family—on domestic and family responsibilities	"Family acceptance, since women are criticized often for prioritizing their careers. Also, the resistance of high-ranking professionals in giving these opportunities to women" (Respondent 15). "Greater contribution of men in domestic chores and child-raising." (Respondent 32)
Professional qualification	"A person's very level of preparation and development. From my experience, even in a male-dominated culture, when the woman knows how to "sell" and push forward her ideas, no prejudice will stand between her and her rise in the organization, because the return and results are guaranteed!" (Respondent 58)
Competence and legitimate results	"Investing in training, "selling" themselves properly regarding their skills, not letting others take ownership of the results of their work." (Respondent 5)
Leadership style suitable for the team	"The leadership style should be adequate the maturity of the led team. There is no recipe for success, you have to win the trust of the team with knowledge, leading by example, among others." (Respondent 38)
Female self-confidence on one's capabilities	"Self-confidence of her own, proving herself for her competence." (Respondent 5) "Self-confidence, knowing what she's capable of. We're often self-boycotting." (Respondent 46) "Self-esteem, negotiation capacity {...}, willingness to pay the price" (Respondent 44)
Female empowerment and search for challenges	"The way a woman faces life makes all the difference. Women's ability to influence is amazing! If she knows what she wants for her personal life and career, she will articulate a plan and reach the desired results." (Respondent 58) "For the woman to show herself available for challenges." (Respondent 59) "Posture, daring, not being afraid of showing and proving herself competent!" (Respondent 58)

Note. Source: Research data.

The first three actions evidenced in Table 1 concern education and family-based values, cultural and social change, and agreements with the family regarding household and domestic responsibilities.

On family values, a respondent answered there is a lack of awareness of the problem and that the biggest problem would be in family values regarding male and female roles.

The woman is already raised with the mindset to take care of the house, husband, and children. If each of us taught our children to care for the house, prepare food, wash clothes, and show that there is no difference between men and women, that would be a good direction to go. Because organizations are reflexes of what each one of us learns at home (Respondent 17)

On the other hand, a respondent pointed out that she had a positive experience of encouragement in her family and this gave her confidence to seek a career that better pleases her.

My parents never limited me and have always encouraged their sons and daughters' financial and emotional independence in the same proportion. This gave me confidence to test my limits and seek the career that pleased me the most (Respondent 15).

Values reinforced by the family, encouraging girls and boys at the same measure to explore their capabilities and the resignification of male and female roles in the family and society as a

whole helps girls and boys understand that there are no limitations for any of the genres. As such, it becomes possible to encourage and offer the proper conditions for future women to carry out activities that better match their skills and desires without limitations. Other studies corroborate with the notion that these actions related to family and society-based values would produce cultural and social changes in the way women are seen from both male and female perspectives, regardless of the function they may assume in society (Nekhili & Gatfaoui 2013; Cohen et al., 2020).

Some measures in the short and medium-term are highlighted, such as agreements with the family, mainly regarding household and domestic activities, emphasizing the understanding and respect of the family over their work, and their partner's ownership to the shared responsibility of private life (Coutinho & Coutinho, 2011; Lewellyn & Muller-Kahle, 2020). This point is important as lack of family acceptance frequently impacts a woman's career. According to one of the respondents, an alternative to this is "not letting others impose over her and devalue her work."

In this sense, respondents said that debates must be carried out in schools and the family so that household tasks and expectations about women and the mother figure are reviewed within the family dynamics. This proposal of openly discussing these responsibilities with the family is also highlighted by Brieger et al. (2019) in his study with 6.300 companies in 30 different countries. The discussion should also point towards attitudes that not only allow but motivate and encourage women to take leadership roles in management boards and provide the proper conditions for women to ascend to management positions.

Regarding technical education, some strategies such as professional qualification and legitimacy through competence and results are highlighted by female managers as strategies that women aiming managing roles can seek. This confirms the findings of Liu (2013) from the interviews with Chinese female managers. As pointed out by the respondents, the constant search for professional qualifications by women is a factor that will make them more prepared and trained for the promotion processes and duties required by companies. However, women already practice this more than men and still have fewer opportunities, as pointed out by Chávez and Rios (2014). Therefore, professional qualification and proving one's competence is a strategy for women to achieve legitimacy toward companies, managers, and subordinates. However, it should not be regarded as the only possible action by women who trust a meritocratic promotion system as, according to the interviews, that is not how the process works in most cases. Instead, it should be considered a stepping stone that enables the technical capacity required for a promotion into a management position.

Acting the proper leadership style to a specific group and company moment is pointed out as necessary for the success of female leadership. Some female managers stated that in their experiences, women who adopted a short and direct style obtained better results. Others pointed out that a leadership style prioritizing communication and active participation of employees should be the one adopted by men and women, and that their company had better results. This demonstrates that no consensus exists among the respondents as to the best leadership style, whether short, direct and fact-based, or transformational. In any case, they pointed out that the woman does not have to modify herself to fit a male pattern, but rather to the type of company and work activities. In China, Liu (2013) highlights that women overall employ a leadership style that stimulates participation and collaboration, and it could be better used by companies.

According to the respondents, feminine self-confidence in their capabilities, female empowerment, and a quest for challenges are characteristics that women may use to achieve their goals. The respondents also highlighted that women must believe in themselves, not settle in their current positions and that they can fill management positions as much as men. These notes coincide with Liu's (2013) findings with Chinese female managers, proving that this is a challenge for women both in Brazil and in China.

Regarding female empowerment and seeking challenges, participants have shown that women should know themselves and reflect on their possibilities. They can leverage their communication

skills, empathy, professionalism, boldness, and competence to face challenges. Holton and Dent (2016) point out that a good level of self-consciousness is one of the main success factors of a career, and that women need to know their values, strengths, and weaknesses, leveraging them and believing in their own capabilities, seeking to take advantage of the opportunities that may appear in the company.

4.2 MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TO BE UNDERTAKEN BY COMPANIES

In this section, we present the considerations of female managers participating in the study regarding management practices that companies can take to contribute to the breaking of the glass ceiling. Practices highlighted by respondents are policies, programs, one-time, specific actions, and campaigns that companies can develop and/or participate in to increase the opportunities of good working conditions and promotion possibilities for women and men in their company and society. These practices are highlighted in Table 2 and are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Table 2 Management practices for promoting gender equality in management positions.

Strategies by companies	Arguments by female managers
Standardization of promotion criteria	"Companies with career plans and clear promotion criteria." (Respondent 62); "Formalize standards, skills, and capabilities that should be developed for promotion and clear ranking by means of egalitarian competition." (Respondent 2); "A consolidated career plan (Respondent 11)"
Training policy, strengthening and training of company talents	"That companies provide tools for female empowerment." (Respondent 61); "Training and actions with common dynamics to both genders, joint reviews." (Respondent 29); "Women should seek leadership training, not feel inferior, and equal family support rights." (Respondent 31)
Awareness of the benefits of diversity in management for the company	"My 24-year experience in a multinational company was working to promote women to management positions. The multi-skills and ease of managing many subjects simultaneously with attention and caring were successful factors for achieving results. Therefore the goal was to increase women at all levels of organizational management." (Respondent 58)
Equal pay	"The difference in wages is very large and responsibilities are the same." (Respondent 22); "Equal salaries for the same role regardless of gender". (Respondent 40); "The biggest differences are the wages;" (Respondent 8)
Flexibility of management and schedules	"Not offering flexible work hours, particularly when the woman is breastfeeding. I believe taking the woman away from motherhood is one of the largest barriers to promotion. The female potential is equal to or greater than the male in management." (Respondent 8)
Nursery-related aid or daycare services linked to the company	"Greater access to childcare within companies." (Respondent 44); "Companies need to offer in-house nursery/schools/support for mothers" (Respondent 59); "Each company or holdings should offer daycare services so that the children would be near their mothers." (Respondent 25)
Legislation that allows gender equality in management positions	"The establishment of a minimum number of women in leadership roles in a given company" (Respondent 26); "Effective equity legislation." (Respondent 49); "Legislation that imposes an equality percentage." (Respondent 29)
Increased paternity leave	"Equal responsibility within the family and paternity leave rights." (Respondent 46); "Paternity leave for the same period as maternity leave" (Respondent 23)
Gender equality support program	"Accepting that the glass ceiling exists and it needs to be discussed." (Respondent 15); "Monitoring prejudiced actions of companies in promotion processes" (Respondent 54); "Debates in the organization on woman and authority in the work environment." (Respondent 40)
Fighting moral and sexual harassment	"More effective (ie. fast) punishments for moral and sexual harassment, regardless of the aggressor's position or gender." (Respondent 5); "Actions aimed at respecting differences and actions against sexual and moral harassment." (Respondent 45)

Note. Source: Research data.

It is noted by the testimonies transcribed in Table 2 that female managing point out that a consolidated career plan and standardizing the company's promotion criteria, presenting a clear and formal roadmap of the skills and capabilities necessary to be promoted to management positions would allow for further equal competition concerning gender. According to Liu (2013), for Chinese female managers breaking the glass ceiling and their barriers requires of companies that their recruitment and promotion methods are objective and fair, with clear rules, so that women and men could acquire the necessary skill and outstanding ability needed if they want to occupy a management role. Holton and Dent (2016) also realize that in the United Kingdom, a structured career plan and clear promotion criteria, which identify key areas for development, can enable greater gender equality in the promotion conditions of management roles.

For that matter, Liu (2013) points out that Chinese companies do not offer mechanisms for women to acquire leadership skills and capacities, which is also perceived by female managing in Brazil. Thus, a training policy aiming at strengthening and training company talents in order to develop company leaders can enable women and men interested in this role to acquire the tools for their development. Female managers also pointed out that these training policies must tackle each group's particularities, especially women since they represent a lesser percentage in business management.

The conditions for developing leadership capabilities, clarity of promotion criteria, and other management practices highlighted in Table 2 can make companies better employ women's potential for management, bringing them better long-term results.

I had the experience of trying to increase the number of women in management positions due to their skills that leveraged results (Respondent 58).

Where I work, women are leaders in many sectors. They are respected and admired by their teams and contribute significantly to the growth and development of the community (Respondent 18).

Diversity helps to change some concepts and beliefs in the company because the arrival of female engineers, lawyers, and administrators brought about a better valuation of women in the labor market (Respondent 24).

The answers reported by these managers, both these highlighted respondents and those described in Table 2, demonstrate the perception of how diversity in management can bring better results to companies and future female leaders. In addition to enabling better results, other women perceive themselves as capable of acting at the highest levels of management through specific company actions. This also impacts other people's perceptions, such as other managers, subordinates, or their own families. It sends the message that women working in managing positions are as possible as it is for men. Evans (2014) also found reports in France on improved organizational results of companies with greater leadership diversity. The author identified that female leaders had larger proximity with the transformational leadership style and stimulated greater participation and cohesion of the managed teams.

Liu (2013) also highlighted that companies being aware of the benefits that diversity in management can bring and, thus, have its executive officers commit to this policy is perceived as a challenge both for companies in Brazil as for those of China. Bibi (2016) identified in Pakistani businesses that the non-development of gender equality policies in companies and employee development programs considering diversity negatively affects organizational effectiveness and efficiency as some employees are not valued and opt to leave the organization or aren't able to use their full potential.

Regarding salary equality concerning gender, Brazilian managers have experienced situations in which there were gender-based salary differences in the companies they worked. Companies must be attentive to this fact, especially concerning male and female employees who hold the same responsibilities in the organization.

This reality regarding salary gender inequality has been identified in several countries in the world and is aggravated with the increase in the salary level, as evidenced by statistical and perception studies in Colombia (Chávez & Rios, 2014), China (Xiu & Gunderson, 2014), Spain (Martinez-Jimenez, Hernández-Ortiz & Fernández, 2020), Mauritius (Tandrayen-Ragoobur & Pydayya, 2015), the US (Cohen et al., 2020), 12 Latin American countries (Carillo, Gandelmann & Robano, 2014), and England (Geiler & Renneboog, 2015), where female and male CEOs are paid similar salaries but high-level executive managers of a given sector, such as the company's financial sector, has about 23% lower remuneration than their male colleagues. In Lebanon, women earn about 76% of a man's salary in Lebanese banks (Hejasea & Dah, 2014). This factor also interferes in the devaluation of the work these women carry out, also impacting the self-confidence in their work in several countries, including Brazil.

This study's respondents reported that the flexibility of management in dealing with gender differences and flexible schedules are practices that can enable women to carry out their professional and external tasks with more compatibility. Managers who visualize other people's difficulties allow them to demystify prejudices and create greater empathy. These issues are even more pertinent to women who are mothers, particularly in the initial postpartum period.

A measure that some companies have sought and that female managers also pointed out was or nursery-related aid or a company daycare service, which would enable mothers to remain longer in the company and work with peace of mind. These practices are also perceived by Evans (2014) in France. The author points out that conditions such as child care, daycare, flexible schedule, and remote work have been employed by French companies, and it has offered conditions for women to maintain their active careers and develop their talent in the companies.

From a legal and normative standpoint, some respondents indicated the need for government legislation or internal HR standards that promote gender equality for management positions. Some respondents have pointed out the need for this tool while others delved into defining it, describing that it would be necessary to set a minimum percentage of women acting in the company's high-ranking management positions. This concern is also found in the study by Lazzaretti et al. (2013) held in Brazil with companies active at the B3 stock exchange, which pondered on the adoption of minimum quota legislation to increase the number of women in company boards.

Regarding the issue of legislation and business standards, a specific proposal was reported by several respondents: to increase the time of paternity leave, equaling it with maternity leave, since the responsibility for raising children befall culturally and legally on women. This causes uneven burdens and puts women in unfavorable situations in their careers compared to men.

Equaling paternity leave, 4 months, for instance, hence we wouldn't be at a disadvantage when having children (Respondent 46).

The reality identified by the respondent is also found in England in the study of Geiler and Rennebog (2015), which point out that marriage and parenting affect women's careers to a much larger extent than men's. In this sense, increasing the paternity leave and scheduling it in a different period than maternity leave could enable greater liability of both parents in raising their children and impact less on the career of women who become mothers.

An internal gender equality program is a business policy that has been highlighted as a tool that consolidates and acts in the awareness of managers and other company employees, as well in managing gender discrimination incidents. Firstly recognizing the existence of the glass ceiling and seeking to combat it through courses, debates, and other actions that explore women's role in the company, both for men and women.

It's important to highlight that women also select candidates for higher positions (as recruiters, advisors, etc.). Which means that not only men are gender-biased. (Respondent 44)

The woman is often seen as sentimental and not able to support the pressures of the position. (Respondent 15)

The lack of decision-making error possibilities that in men are deemed "acceptable" (Respondent 40).

The existence of this cultural gender bias creates a lack of understanding about the women's role, coupled with an outlook that the female gender is fragile, constitutes a limiting factor as well pressures women in the sense that their mistakes are not as accepted as that of men. These outlooks on the role of women and how to treat them point to the need to develop gender-specific policies according to the needs of both genders. These are practices to be developed by this program. This perception is also a result found by Bibi (2016), which alerts to the need for appropriate implementation of these policies and continuous monitoring, reinforcing the program long-term in the organization.

So that managers and employees know how to deal with women openly and improve, and for colleagues and managers to perceive us not just as "assistants" but also as experts and possible leaders. (Respondent 12)

This research's respondents on the need for this type of internal company policy also approaches the findings of Pinnington and Sandberg (2013) in advocacy firms in Australia, who point out the importance of company employees as a whole, especially HR professionals, to specialize in the practice of diversity management and be supported by high-ranking executives to debate and construct practices related to equal opportunities, and to offer flexible work practices.

The managers point out that making opportunities out of challenging experiences is fundamental for women. This being a task carried out by the company and the woman since this process of consciousness and cultural change pertains to both of them.

One of this program's goals would be to combat moral and sexual harassment in companies, which deals with the event itself, in prevention, and after it occurs, as an ombudsman and a way to offer a more friendly work environment for women and men. As such, the relationship a female or male manager establishes with its employees can be more focused on the company and its objectives, and both managers and employees can contact for the employee to develop their activities and have confidence in seeking or be sought by their manager. As Dent (2016) points out, this is an action focused on the company's tasks that enables potential development and new skills.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed at identifying strategies and actions of female managers looking to break the glass ceiling, as well as identify management practices to be taken by organizations that female managers consider could contribute to breaking the glass ceiling.

Regarding the strategies and actions of female managers to break the glass ceiling, the main responses highlighted by the study's participants are: Education and family-based values, cultural and social change, and agreements with the family regarding household and domestic responsibilities; professional qualification and legitimacy through competence; leadership style suitable for the team; feminine self-confidence in their capabilities, female empowerment, and a quest for challenges.

Among these, we especially highlight education and its many facets, be it family or school-based education, in the sense of clarifying the capacities of women and men in carrying out tasks and their fair division. Education also encompasses the academic aspects by which female managers seek appropriate qualifications. It is important to note that education and family-based values assist children to understand that there are no limitations for any of the genres. As such, it enables the possibility to encourage future women.

It is a change and cultural re-evaluation that would gradually contribute to a diminishing gender bias, which is a limiting factor for women's daily life. As a more practical and individual strategy, but still within the realm of education, the constant search for professional qualification by women is a factor that will make them more prepared and trained for the promotion processes and assignments required by companies.

Regarding the management practices to be taken by companies which female managers consider could contribute to breaking the glass ceiling, the following can be highlighted: Standardization of the promotion criteria; training policy, strengthening and training of company talents; awareness of the benefits of diversity in management for the company; equal pay; flexibility of management and schedules; nursery-related aid or daycare services linked to the company; legislation that allows gender equality in management positions; increased paternity leave; gender equality support program; fighting moral and sexual harassment.

Companies also play a fundamental role in the presence and rise in the career of female managers, as they can offer an environment more conducive to this end by ensuring inclusive actions, such as total or partial nursery aid. As such, women can have reduced concerns about their children since the chief responsibility for child-raising in society has been designated to women.

This situation had been identified as a limiting factor of women's presence in areas of power such as management positions, or even flexible or differentiated schedules if needed since some women give up investing in their careers due to family duties. Training, group dynamics, mentoring, coaching, and employee onboarding all contribute to a more empathetic and less predatory work environment. Carrying out group dynamics exercises, for instance, contributes to men and women from various positions to interact with each other and humanly observe others, putting themselves in their place and having the opportunity to know the abilities and skills of others, thus contributing to greater harmony among employees, bringing advantages to themselves and the company.

Another way of showing appreciation for female managers is through equal pay and promotion opportunities, as a respectful wage will cause women to tend towards better self-esteem and thus serve as an example to encourage others. Standardized evaluations and selection or promotion processes carried out without considering genre were also highlighted as a way for women's skills to be perceived.

As a contribution, due to the sample being composed of female managers who either hold or are attending MBA, specialization, Masters or Doctorate courses in management, controlling or finance positions, the study contributes to the understanding of the glass ceiling and the development of positive practices regarding gender equality in promoting for management positions, in addition to corroborating the literature on the glass ceiling phenomena.

Concerning the limitations of this research, the first one relates to the size of the sample, which enables evidence on the glass ceiling faced by female managers, but that can not be generalized. As such, we suggest seeking means to expand the sample, as well as replicate this methodology in other countries in order to promote comparisons.

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DECLARATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ARTICLE - CRediT

ROLE	LBCarneiro	DGGomes	VHorz	MASouza
Conceptualization – Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.	X	X		
Data curation – Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later re-use.	X			
Formal analysis – Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyze or synthesize study data.	X			
Funding acquisition - Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication.				
Investigation – Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection.	X		X	
Methodology – Development or design of methodology; creation of models.	X	X		
Project administration – Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.		X		
Resources – Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools.				
Software – Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components.				
Supervision – Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.		X		X
Validation – Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs.				
Visualization – Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/data presentation.	X		X	
Writing – original draft – Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation).	X	X		
Writing – review & editing – Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision – including pre- or post-publication stages.		X	X	X