



Perspectives and challenges for the development of leadership in Latin American women

Perspectivas y desafíos para el desarrollo del liderazgo en las mujeres latinoamericanas

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Abstract

Throughout history, women have faced diverse challenges and played multiple roles in society. Today, the pursuit of equality in all economic sectors continues, with women striving to establish themselves as leaders in areas such as the productive sector, politics, and science. This transition has been characterized by constant changes and persistent challenges.

This article explores the development of leadership and emotional intelligence in Latin American women, analyzing various perspectives and associated challenges. It addresses the barriers they face in developing leadership skills, as well as the need to improve their emotional intelligence to seize opportunities, develop and execute strategies, and overcome these barriers and challenges.

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Leadership among Latin American women is a complex and multifaceted topic that requires recognition of the influence of cultural, social, and geopolitical factors that are constantly changing globally. These factors impact women's leadership in the region, perpetuating structural and systemic barriers such as gender discrimination, lack of access to educational resources, limitations in professional development, and socio-economic factors such as poverty and inequality. These conditions have hindered the full development of women in the public and professional spheres.

To promote female leadership, programs and policies are needed that promote gender equality through organizational and governmental practices that empower women and encourage their participation in leadership roles and decision-making.

Resumen

A lo largo de la historia, las mujeres han enfrentado diversos desafíos y han desempeñado múltiples roles en la sociedad. En la actualidad, continúan la búsqueda por la igualdad en todos los ámbitos económicos, con el fin de establecerse como líderes en áreas como el sector productivo, la política y la ciencia. Esta transición ha estado marcada por cambios constantes y desafíos persistentes.

Este artículo explora el desarrollo del liderazgo y la inteligencia emocional en mujeres latinoamericanas, analizando diversas perspectivas y desafíos asociados. Se abordan las barreras que enfrentan para desarrollar habilidades de liderazgo, así como la necesidad de mejorar su inteligencia emocional para aprovechar oportunidades, elaborar y ejecutar estrategias, así como para superar dichas barreras y desafíos.

El liderazgo en las mujeres latinoamericanas es un tema complejo y multifacético que requiere reconocer la influencia de aspectos culturales, sociales y geopolíticos en constante cambio a nivel mundial. Estos factores impactan el liderazgo de la mujer en la región, perpetuando barreras estructurales y sistémicas, como la discriminación de género, la falta de acceso a recursos educativos, las limitaciones para el desarrollo profesional y factores socioeconómicos, como la pobreza y la desigualdad. Estas condiciones han restringido el pleno desarrollo de las mujeres en las esferas pública y profesional.

Para impulsar el liderazgo femenino, se necesitan programas y políticas que promuevan la igualdad de género mediante prácticas organizacionales y gubernamentales que empoderen a las mujeres y fomenten su participación en roles de liderazgo y toma de decisiones.

Introduction

Throughout the centuries, humanity has evolved several types of leadership, continually adapting them to the changing social constructs throughout history. In the contemporary

era, marked by technological growth, global economics, and increasing competitiveness, numerous currents have emerged emphasizing the importance of effective leadership with a high degree of empathy, both in men and women. There is a focus on the necessity of social skills and emotional intelligence, including competencies such as self-awareness, self-motivation, integrity, empathy, communication skills, resilience, among many other necessary strengths (Roberts, 2007).

The concept of leadership has been debated for centuries and has reached a basic level of requirement in effective leadership skills for executives, extending to all individuals who have direct or indirect influence over others in society. Both the leader and the follower have a mutual relationship and influence since effective leadership must be centered on the needs of others rather than one's own, achieved through community building and fostering the development of members (Huang *et al.*, 2022).

The definition of leadership, although recent, has evolved into a holistic model. Researchers often define leadership according to their individual perspectives and the aspects of the phenomenon that interest them the most. Some of the most widely spread definitions of the concept of leadership include: leadership is a “particular type of power relationship characterized by a group member's perception that another group member has the right to prescribe patterns of behavior for the former regarding their activity as a group member” (Janda, 1960, p. 358). Leadership is “interpersonal influence, exercised in a situation, and directed, through the communication process, toward the achievement of a specific goal or goals” (Tannenbaum, Weschler & Fred, 2013, p. 24). A general definition of leadership is the ability to inspire, guide, and empower others to reach their full potential, promoting inclusion, collaboration, and mutual respect in all interactions (Thompson, 2008).

In Latin America, it is considered that compared to men, women are less likely to have their proposals and speeches heard in different contexts, such as political environments, where they still have fewer opportunities to access power because the spaces are not suitable for women's involvement in that sphere. Women, when they engage in political activities or other endeavors that require being heard, usually do so because they experience specific situations that warrant a change to obtain rights and meet needs such as access to decent work and quality education (Soto, 2015).

Women have also been increasingly occupying decision-making roles, despite enduring various historical limitations. These advances have occurred under a series of challenging or complex contexts, such as the challenge of a society where male dominance still prevails in managerial and middle management positions (Barrera & Suárez San Román, 2012). The fact that women in the role of “wife-mother” continue to be a subject of debate and controversy when they manage to be included in the job market or in public

activities implies facing conditions of discrimination and exclusion (Bárcena, Prado & Nieves, 2016; Davaki, 2016).

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the main types of leadership and the adoption of key characteristics such as emotional intelligence and empathy that could support and enhance women's leadership in various roles, both in the workplace and in society. Additionally, it aims to highlight the importance of continuing to promote a more inclusive society that addresses the persistent challenges women face in their journey towards leadership and the decision-making process, guided by an ideology of ethical, human, social, and psychological capital.

Background and types of leadership in women throughout history

The complexity of leadership, being part of either internal or external motivation, is a dynamic and intricate phenomenon that has been the subject of study and reflection throughout history. As society has evolved and advancements have occurred in various fields, so too have the characteristics and types of leadership. From traditional hierarchical structures to more flexible and participatory models, the landscape of leadership, especially among women, has undergone constant transformations due to different social contexts, and cultural changes have influenced the evolution of empowerment and leadership in women. It is crucial to empower women with leadership skills through motivation as a key lever for the development of capabilities and align them with personal and professional goals (Correia-Harker & Dugan, 2020) to enable successful outcomes.

Leadership both globally and in Latin America has undergone significant evolution throughout history, influenced by various political, social, and cultural factors. In this context, the role of women in leadership has been particularly notable, albeit marked by challenges and limitations (Smith, Von Rueden & Fichtel, 2021).

In pre-Columbian societies of Latin America, women held significant roles in decision-making, economy, and community leadership, which varied depending on the Indigenous group they belonged to. However, with the arrival of the Spanish conquest, female leadership was relegated to traditional gender roles imposed during that time (Robles, 2014). An example is the "wixárika" women who, to this day, maintain responsibility for sacred care, the environment, health, participation in ceremonies, connection with the universe, energy, and ancestors, as well as knowledge transmission. Without women, ceremonies cannot be performed. Thus, it is possible to affirm an active participation as leaders in wixárika society and culture (Romero Bravo, 2022).

In the centuries that followed, leadership in Latin America was largely dominated by men, reflecting the patriarchal structures of society. Women faced numerous barriers to

accessing leadership positions in political, business, and social spheres, encountering discrimination and deep-seated gender stereotypes that persist to this day. Men still outnumber women among executives, high-ranking executives, and in the upper levels of professional jobs, while women remain concentrated in lower categories of leadership positions (Moncayo Orjuela & Zuluaga, 2015).

Table 1 provides an overview of the main types of leadership, along with their characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses. This analysis can serve as a guide to understanding the different leadership styles and determining which may be most appropriate in various situations within professional and social environments, considering the inherent qualities of each type of leadership.

Table 1. Types of leadership could have an indirect impact on socio-cultural development.

Type of leadership	Main contributions	Strength	Weakness
Authentic leadership	Genuine, focused on positive relationships without manipulation	Positive relationships, high self-awareness	Requires time and effort to develop
Laissez-faire	Team free from direct leader control, encourages autonomy	Encourages autonomy and innovation	Lack of direction and supervision
Team leadership	Visualizes goals, strategies, and direction, fosters active listening	Collaboration, accountability, empathy	Advanced communication and conflict management skills
Transactional leadership	Supervises performance, appeals to self-interest, focuses on order and planning	Provides structure and clarity in goal achievement	Limits creativity and innovation
Facilitative leadership	Works according to group dynamics to achieve effective goals	Fosters cooperation and commitment	Delicate balance between leadership and participation
Directive leadership	Provides guidelines and structure, rigid and authoritarian	Offers clarity and guidance in task execution	Generates demotivation and resistance (authoritarian)
Strategic leadership	Influences long-term success, motivating and developing	Inspirational, oriented towards long-term goal achievement	Requires advanced vision and strategic skills
Spiritual leadership	Inspirational, based on ethical-moral theories	Based on ethical-moral values	Difficult to implement in professional environments
Cross-cultural leadership	Effective with diversity, leads multicultural teams	Ability to work in diverse environments	Requires understanding of diverse cultures
Charismatic leadership	Generates change, fosters participation, and enhances talent	Generates enthusiasm and commitment in the team	Overly dependent on the leader's personality
Visionary leadership	Imaginative, motivates towards long-term success	Motivates and inspires towards a desired future	May lack practical and concrete focus

Supportive leadership	Friendly, promotes teamwork and service attitude	Fosters an environment of trust and mutual support	Requires balance between support and direction
Flexible leadership	Open to change, adaptable to circumstances	Adapts to different people and situations	May be perceived as lack of direction
Democratic leadership	Considers opinions, fosters participation, and develops empowerment	Fosters creativity and participation	Slows decision-making and generates conflicts
Transformational leadership	Identifies and executes changes for development	Drives change and innovation	Requires continuous commitment to motivate
Coaching leadership	Supervises, teaches, and motivates the team for success	Develops individual and team potential	May require significant time and resources

Source: Own elaboration with information from Raygoza-L *et al.* (2024).

The issues of inclusion towards women and their leadership have garnered much attention since the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5. Women in leadership positions play an essential role in gender equality, bringing unique perspectives and experiences to leadership roles, resulting in better decision-making, inclusivity, and changes in the workplace environment. Despite all the obstacles women have faced throughout history, significant contributions have been made by women in all areas of humanity.

Inequality and discrimination against women continue to be very real challenges overall, especially for women aspiring to leadership positions. However, organizational research suggests that female leaders can bring a unique constellation of leadership-related traits, attributes, and behaviors and can provide many advantages in organizations (Offermann & Foley, 2020). Realizing the benefits of female leadership depends on an organization's ability to address the numerous barriers that female leaders face, barriers that male leaders often do not encounter.

Throughout history, women have held leadership roles, although for the most part their involvement in leadership positions seemed to be more of exceptions, reserved for women with economic privileges or royalty. Given this context, it is crucial in the contemporary era to develop strategies that promote women's participation in decision-making, both in the public and private spheres, occupying positions where their leadership can have a significant impact. The following Table 2 highlights some of the main women leaders throughout history, detailing their main contributions and the predominant type of leadership they maintained to face the challenges of different eras, considering the nature of the historical moment in which they made their contributions; their presence has always been highly relevant.

Table 2. Women leaders throughout history.

Historical period	Woman leader	Country	Main contributions	Type of leadership
1000 B.C.	Queen of Sheba	Ethiopia	Ruler of the Kingdom of Sheba, renowned for her wisdom	Authentic leadership
69 B.C.	Cleopatra VII	Egypt	Ruled Ancient Egypt, a shrewd politician who maintained power through strategic alliances and diplomacy	Charismatic leadership
12 B.C.	Deborah	Israel	Prophetess and judge of Israel, led the people in the war against the Canaanites	Supportive leadership
415 A.D.	Hypatia of Alexandria	Roman Alexandria	Mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher in Roman Alexandria	Visionary/Scientific leadership
1345 B.C.	Nefertiti	Egypt	Princess and Queen of the 18th dynasty of Egypt, renowned for her beauty and political and religious influence	Charismatic leadership
1566-1614	Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza	Spain	Spanish poet and mystic, renowned for her literary production and for being the first woman to present a doctoral thesis	Transcultural/Scientific leadership
1759-1797	Mary Wollstonecraft	United Kingdom	Writer, author of <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i> , pioneer of feminism	Transformational leadership
1762-1796	Catherine the Great	Russia	Empress of Russia, transformed Russia into a power and expanded its territory	Visionary leadership
1820-1910	Florence Nightingale	United Kingdom	Founder of the Red Cross, contributing to the improvement of sanitary conditions	Supportive leadership
1867-1934	Marie Curie	Poland	Scientist, winner of two Nobel Prizes in physics and chemistry for her research on radioactivity	Scientific leadership
1871-1933	Clara Zetkin	Germany	Politician and feminist, advocate for International Women's Day on March 8 th	Democratic (Participatory) leadership
1917-1984	Indira Gandhi	India	Prime Minister of India, political and leader in economic and social reforms, advocated for women's rights	Transformational leadership
1926-1962	Marilyn Monroe	USA	Prominent actress, contributing to female empowerment	Charismatic leadership
1937-1963	Valentina Tereshkova	Russia	First woman to travel to outer space in 1963, breaking gender barriers in science	Scientific leadership
1943-1922	Jocelyn Bell	United Kingdom	Discoverer of the radio signal from a pulsar, prominent in the field of Astrophysics	Supportive /Scientific leadership

Source: Own elaboration.

According to current studies, global data indicates that countries such as Norway, France, and Spain, where laws were enacted by the European Parliament to ensure 40% of seats in corporate boards, are held by women, after 10 years, the worst fears of incorporating women into boards have not materialized but improvements are suggested. In countries like Norway, quotas had no effect on changing women's representation in corporate leadership where quotas were applied in external boards (European Commission, 2012).

Efforts have been made to integrate women's leadership into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) initiatives in the United States, a country that has been a pioneer in promoting women's inclusion in corporations. However, it still exhibits low participation, particularly in Science and Engineering (S&E) occupations. Indicators show a gender disparity in S&E occupations, with 72% of men compared to 28% of women, and in Middle-skill occupations, with 89% of men compared to 11% of women (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2023). Globally, only 29.3% of women are involved in STEM fields according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In the Latin America and Caribbean region, data from 2017 reveals that out of the total number of researchers in engineering and technology, only 36% were women in Uruguay, 26% in Colombia, 24% in Costa Rica, 17% in El Salvador, 21.5% in Honduras, approximately 19% in Bolivia and Peru, and 38% in Mexico (UNESCO, 2020).

The gap in STEM may be a representation of one of the various areas where women continue to lag behind in comparison to male participation and acceptance, also highlighting an educational gap observed from earlier educational levels, which then widens at each subsequent level in different forms, hindering their social influence and thus their leadership. The budgets and expectations held by parents, teachers, and peers influence girls' choices of fields of interest and the studies they wish to pursue to integrate into society. Women are also subject to prejudices in hiring processes, promotions, and compensation compared to men (ONU Mujeres, 2020).

Practices that can set back women's development in different social and work environments are still being carried out, currently, with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI), although it can be used as a tool for security, the debate on the feminization of AI arises as virtual assistants are found to have feminine names. These virtual devices have a design of submissive personality, associating women with weakness, which could reinforce harmful gender stereotypes (Ramirez, 2023).

The leadership of Latin American women

In recent decades, goals have been set by international organizations to advance gender equity, as seen in 1995 with the platform for action presented at the United Nations

World Conference on Women held in Beijing. One of the strategic objectives outlined was: “Take measures to ensure women’s equal access and full participation in power structures and decision-making”. These efforts have yielded positive results in today’s context, where women can hold public office and leadership positions in private enterprises (ONU, 1995).

The challenges of leadership generally stem from concrete tests that leaders face, which vary according to culture, time period under analysis, and geopolitical aspects. Some authors argue that new data constantly needs to be provided to demonstrate the leader’s impact on present circumstances and conditions (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). Adopting strategies that anticipate circumstances appropriately can offer women opportunities to lead and overcome boundaries, as well as develop skills in emerging female leaders. The challenges and obstacles that women face is diverse and require them to be more reflective in learning the challenge of developing themselves as leaders, facing these challenges with leadership skills to increase the likelihood of success.

In Latin America, it is crucial to continue addressing diversity management as a strategic approach to harness individual differences among all people as a resource for success, creating inclusive environments for women where everyone feels valued, respected, and provided with equal opportunities to contribute to their fullest potential, promoting equity (Forrester & Alexia, 2017), justice, and acceptance by reducing biases and stereotypes towards women that often occur, consciously or unconsciously. Additionally, women must overcome a variety of challenges when assuming leadership roles or aspiring to become leaders (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023).

Throughout the history of Latin America, there have been numerous women leaders whose contributions have left an indelible mark on society. From pioneering figures in the fight for human rights and social justice to visionary political and business leaders. Table 3 presents a list of some of the women who in Latin American history have played fundamental roles in the construction and transformation of their communities.

Table 3. Women leaders in Latin America throughout history.

Historical period	Woman leader	Country	Main Contributions	Type of leadership
1692	Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz	Mexico	Distinguished poet and advocate for women's rights in colonial times	Visionary leadership
1810	Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez	Mexico	Known as “La Corregidora”, played a crucial role in Mexico's Independence	Transformational leadership
1919	Eva Perón	Argentina	Political leader and social activist who advocated for workers' rights	Charismatic leadership

1926	Rosalía Lombardo	Mexico	Union leader and political activist who fought for workers' and women's rights in Mexico	Supportive leadership
1959	Rigoberta Menchú	Guatemala	Human rights advocate and indigenous activist, Nobel Peace Prize winner for her work on behalf of indigenous peoples	Supportive leadership
1992	Lucrecia Pérez	Dominican Republic	Victim of racism and xenophobia in Spain, her murder in 1992 raised awareness about discrimination and racial violence in the country	Supportive leadership
2006	Michelle Bachelet	Chile	President of Chile twice, advocate for human rights and gender equality, first Executive Director of UN Women	Transcultural leadership
2007	Cristina Fernández Kirchner	Argentina	First woman reelected president of Argentina, implemented economic and social policies promoting inclusion and national development	Transformational leadership
2010	Laura Chinchilla	Costa Rica	First woman president of Costa Rica, promoted citizen security and sustainable economic development during her term	Transcultural leadership
2011	Dilma Rousseff	Brazil	First woman president of Brazil, focused on social and economic policies to reduce poverty and promote equality	Supportive leadership

Source: Own elaboration.

Teamwork in modern science motivates achieving a common goal, where the role of leadership in science encompasses empowering a diverse team and fostering an inclusive culture that energizes and commits to support so that everyone can contribute. A collective mindset shapes culture and efficiency (White, Sheenah & Winn, 2019). Despite women's constant pursuit of participating in human development across all spheres, gender bias within different types of leadership continues to exhibit high prejudices and discriminations. Women face undervaluation of their work, lack of recognition for their achievements, unequal promotion opportunities, and pressure to meet higher standards than their male counterparts. These biases can hinder women's professional progress in science, society, political and economic participation, as well as create barriers to their equitable involvement in leadership roles.

Leadership is a great responsibility, where both male and female leaders may face setbacks, failures, and pressures. Consequently, within the scientific, public, and private spheres, the talent of women is lost because they have been intimidated. These losses are detrimental to the economy, science, and society.

The gaps faced by women at all stages, including family environment, academic setting, and positions in various sectors, social and cultural environments, must be addressed through education at all levels. Figure 1 below depicts the percentage of women in leadership positions by country in Latin America.

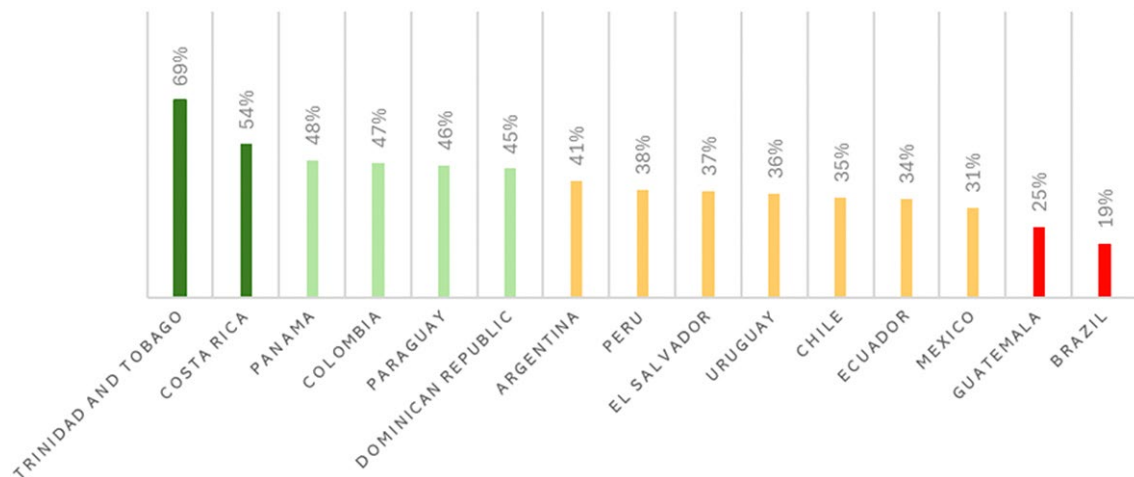


Figure 1. Percentage of women in leadership positions.

Source: Own elaboration with information from Villanueva, Lupica & Roza (2023).

According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), countries with gender parity participation (>50%) are at 55.9%, those advancing towards parity (41%–50%) are at 46%, those with low participation (30%–40%) are at 36.7%, and those with very low participation (<30%) are at 19.8% (Villanueva, Lupica & Roza, 2023). It is imperative to continue with a focus on policy guidance for negotiation to develop roles in policymaking and lay the groundwork for support to prioritize support demands within partisan political campaigns that set goals for women’s inclusion at all hierarchical levels (Rodríguez, 2021).

Likewise, the IDB presents data indicating that there still exists a high level of vertical segregation in the labor market, where women occupy lower-ranking positions within organizations while men tend to hold higher hierarchical positions. Existing advances in social and organizational structures have not been reversed, and this continues to be one of the major challenges for women to break through the so-called “glass ceiling”, which refers to the challenges or barriers that prevent women from acquiring executive positions in institutions and reaching leadership positions. It represents a subtle yet powerful barrier that obstructs their advancement to leadership positions and decision-making due to stereotypes and lack of equitable opportunities (Camarena Adame & Saavedra García, 2018). If men have much greater influence in political decision-making, the passive representation of women does not result in active representation, requiring an intelligent and inclusive design of public policies.

However, over time, significant progress has been made in the recognition and promotion of female leadership in the region. Social movements, struggles for civil rights, and growing awareness of gender equality have contributed to opening up spaces for women in leadership roles (Lwamba *et al.*, 2024).

Challenges of the Latin American woman and skills in the development of her leadership

The following challenges continue to be faced by Latin American women, requiring greater priority on government agendas to drive women's development, as well as increased participation from civil society to promote women's leadership through the adoption of social policies. Despite the increased levels of institutionalization in neoliberal globalization, negative effects have been perceived, and most academics are pessimistic about its transformative effects on Latin American society (Ribeiro Hoffmann, 2019).

Direct or indirect discouragement or discrimination, such as obstacles from other members of the organization, harassment.

- Salary disparities in middle and high-level positions.
- Few female role models in leadership positions currently.
- Cultural barriers due to sociodemographic issues.
- Gender gap in access to education, where there continues to be limited access to quality education in indigenous women's communities.
- Lack of motivation and encouragement to pursue STEM careers and develop leadership skills from early levels of education.
- Low self-esteem and fear of failure due to the social, familial, and economic conditions in which she grew up during childhood and adolescence.
- Obstacles that keep women in low or middle-level positions without allowing them to reach management or leadership positions due to hidden microaggressions in organizations and merely seeking to meet the goals set by international inclusion organizations.
- Stereotypes hidden in current society that judge women's outcomes based on socioeconomic status and physical appearance.
- Sociocultural norms that relegate women to family or household care roles.
- Invalidating women's opinions by arguing vulnerability of character and low emotional intelligence in decision-making without statistical evidence on the matter.
- Lack of necessary financial capital to have an entrepreneurial vision.

- Few government grants or mixed funds that finance women’s projects that could have an impact on the national economy.
- Difficulties in balancing work and family life.
- Systemic gender discrimination: despite advances in gender equality, discriminatory practices rooted in culture and social structures persist, making it difficult for women to access leadership roles and be valued in their functions.

For greater clarity, the analysis delves into the four primary challenges women may encounter in reaching their leadership potential across various aspects of their professional lives. In Figure 2, there’s an analysis that identifies “challenges in women’s leadership” as the central issue, using a problem tree diagram to break down the main levels of causes and effects of this significant challenge.

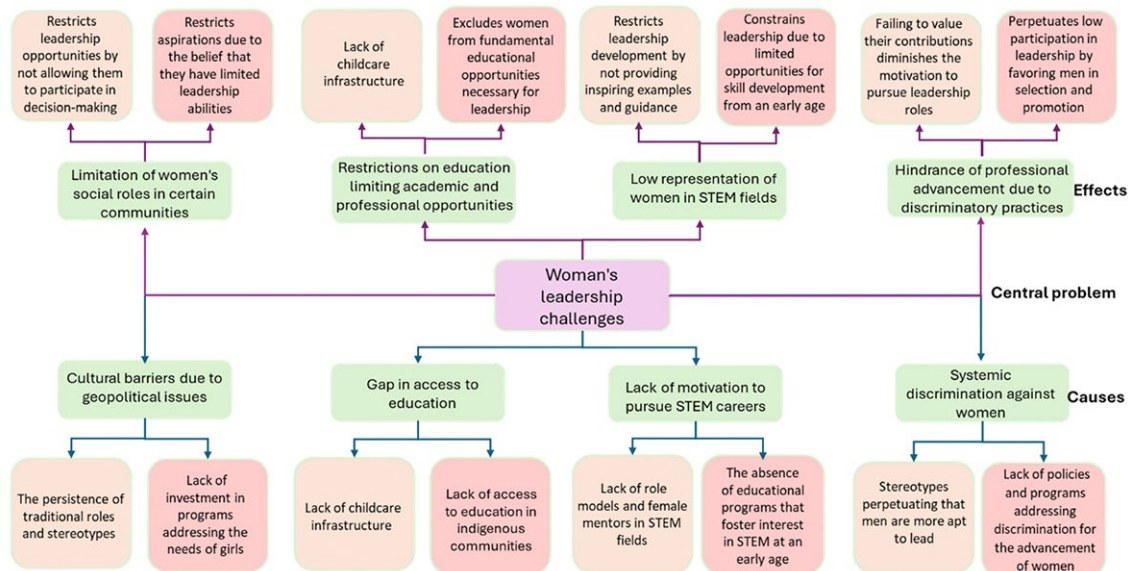


Figure 2. Problem tree diagram of women’s leadership challenges.
Source: Own elaboration.

These challenges remain significant hurdles for the development of women’s leadership. Confronting discrimination within organizational structures is a social development challenge that profoundly affects professional progress for women. Therefore, the development of initiatives should aim to address this gender gap by fostering gender-friendly work environment. The following points outline the internal and external capabilities that can help address the challenges that limit and exclude women from leadership positions (Fitong Ketchiwou & Dzansi, 2023).

Internal skills to address the challenges of leadership development in women:

- **Self-confidence and self-awareness development.** To make decisions and face challenges, recognizing and valuing one's own strengths and abilities, effectively managing emotions by understanding one's own and others' emotions, maintaining a positive attitude, and setting personal and professional goals.
- **Continued building of emotional intelligence and resilience skills.** Stress and difficult emotions management, adapting to changes and overcoming failures with determination, developing empathy and effective communication skills, maintaining healthy relationships.
- **Development of internal skills such as self-motivation in personal and professional vision.** Maintaining motivation to achieve goals, being persistent and focused on the path to success, cultivating a mindset of growth and continuous learning, staying true to personal and ethical principles. Motivation can be achieved through leadership among individuals that make up a society, with minor changes that can bring about a radical impact on society. The adoption of different positive leadership techniques can lead to increased motivation, which is essential for generating behavior changes and directing efforts towards goal achievement (Raygoza-L *et al.*, 2024).
- **Maintain determination and equity.** Identify and define personal and professional values, uphold fairness and justice, be aware of one's own strengths and weaknesses, establish boundaries and respect rights and opinions, seek opportunities for growth and contribute to collective well-being.
- **Develop leadership and teamwork skills.** Inspire and motivate others, foster an environment of trust and collaboration, delegate responsibilities and empower others, listen and value others' opinions, resolve conflicts constructively and fairly (Magnano, Craparo & Paolillo, 2016).

External skills to address the challenges of leadership development in women:

- **Provide diverse perspective and collaborative approach.** Contribute innovative ideas, work in teams to achieve common goals, take on several roles and responsibilities, collaborate with individuals from diverse perspectives, seek consensus and commitment to achieve results.
- **Strengthen technical and professional competencies through collaboration networks.** Participate in training and professional development programs, establish

mentoring and coaching relationships, share knowledge and experiences, seek continuous learning opportunities, collaborate on interdisciplinary projects to broaden skills and knowledge.

- **Negotiation and conflict resolution skills.** Identify common interests and seek solutions, communicate assertively, use persuasion and influence skills, address conflicts with empathy and understanding.
- **Promote a positive culture.** Foster collaboration and teamwork, recognize and celebrate individual and collective achievements, maintain open and transparent communication, promote diversity and inclusion, create a supportive and respectful environment.
- **Develop networking and public relations skills.** Establish and maintain strong relationships, participate in networking events and activities, build a positive and trustworthy reputation, present oneself and communicate effectively, seek opportunities to collaborate and share resources (Kotsou, Mikolajczak & Heeren, 2019).

These skills require training programs, organizational practices, and governmental policies that promote gender equality and female empowerment, emphasizing the importance of building support networks and fostering an environment for active participation for women in leadership roles and decision-making. This can be achieved through an efficient integration of public policies that reach governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as research centers, universities, civil society, and funding sources that promote research, innovation, and development projects, thereby driving and advocating for equality (Raygoza-L *et al.*, 2023).

Based on their profile and professional, work, political, and social management trajectory, women must adopt a series of personal resources and capacities that provide them with solid elements to be able to hold positions or perform in a role autonomously and effectively, thereby increasing their capacity for real impact.

The following points outline possible actions in Latin American countries regarding closing the gender gap:

- Breaking down access barriers to achieve formal equality in decision-making positions by ensuring women's access to leadership positions.
- Facilitating conditions to achieve substantive equality by using tools to mainstream policies for women and strengthening them.

- Producing disaggregated and periodic information on the presence of women in leadership positions in the public sector.
- Numerous studies confirm that the participation of women in positions with decision-making capacity on public policies drives additional objectives of coverage, efficiency of public services, introduces different perspectives in the design and implementation of public policies and programs.

The participation of women allows, for example, understanding the particularities for access to public services and designing routes that adapt to these particularities in an equitable environment (Naranjo *et al.*, 2022). It is important that from childhood, girls are engaged with cutting-edge technologies to access a quality education, such as the use of Artificial Intelligence, which can address educational challenges from early levels and begin to develop their leadership in all branches of science and technology (Orduño-Osuna *et al.*, 2024).

Conclusion

Despite women's advancements in combating the "glass ceiling" and gender discrimination, significant obstacles persist, limiting the full exercise of female leadership. However, history shows us the fundamental role that women have played in transforming society, underscoring the importance of overcoming these barriers and creating equitable spaces for their leadership. In this regard, strengthening internal skills such as self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and resilience is crucial. These competencies not only enable women to confront challenges with determination and composure but also empower them to inspire and motivate others towards achieving common goals.

Developing external skills is important as well, such as teamwork, negotiation, and promoting an inclusive organizational culture. These competencies not only enhance the effectiveness of women's leadership but also contribute to creating more equitable and productive work environments. To drive significant change towards a more equal and just society, concrete actions must be implemented at institutional and governmental levels. Facilitating conditions for substantive equality, promoting women's participation in leadership positions, and adopting public policies that foster gender equity are essential steps in this direction. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize and value women's leadership in all spheres of society, challenging gender stereotypes and promoting a culture of inclusion and respect. This entails eliminating entrenched biases and prejudices that may hinder women's professional advancement and limit their impact as leaders.

In this context, it is important to highlight the notion of "second-generation gender biases" or more subtle and ingrained gender prejudices that persist in society and may

inadvertently influence decisions and perceptions related to female leadership. Recognizing and addressing these biases is essential to promote more inclusive and diverse leadership, as well as understanding that women's leadership goes beyond a position but has a significant impact in all roles they undertake, being a motivator and driving force for change within the family, society, as well as public and private positions through unique characteristics such as solidarity, empathy, and resilience.

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