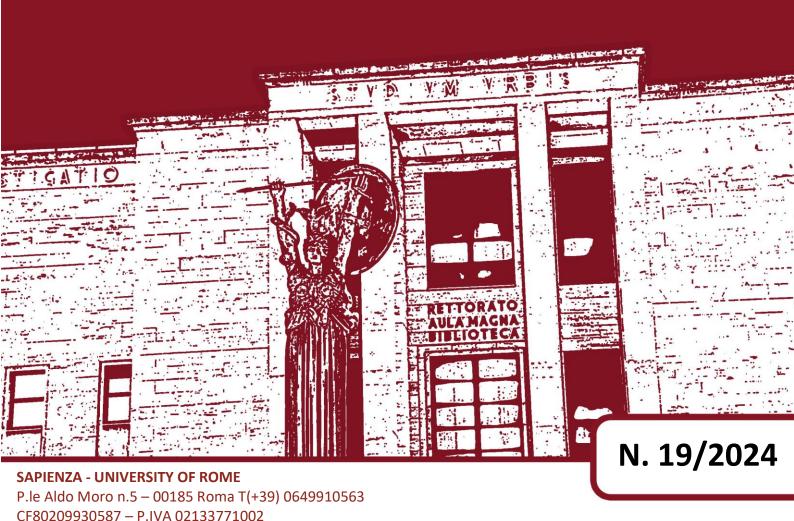## WORKING PAPERS SERIES
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How does leadership affect gender balance in senior positions within Iranian organizations: Organizational Sociology perspective

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Abstract

Although females are more triumphant than males in achieving higher educational ranks, and their turnover rates are less than males, they are still a minority in senior positions within firms. Leaders are in charge with delegation of authority within organizations. Thus, further investigation on how leadership can solve the gender balance issue at senior levels are necessary. This article aims to fill this gap through inquiring into the effect of leadership on an organizational culture providing opportunities in favor of women for senior positions. Leadership, the forgotten child of sociology, has been mainly explored through managerial and psychological theories after 1970's (Guillen, 2010). Hence, this research contributes to this emerged gap by focusing on sociological theories of leadership. This study employs semi-structured interviews with 20 CEOs of large Iranian companies and further analyze the collected data through abductive qualitative method to extract the most salient sociological themes relating to leadership concepts and gender balance in managerial positions. Inductive interviewing with leaders provides required data, while deductive theming extracts the most salient themes of interest.

Keywords: Organizational Sociology, Leadership, gender equality, managerial positions, Iranian organizations.

Introduction

The positive impact of gender diversity in senior positions on firm performance is well documented. For instance, Christiansen et al. (2016) provides empirical evidences from around 2 million companies in Europe supporting the aforementioned association. However, still, the gender imbalance (inclined to male) in senior positions are prevalent globally (e.g., Christiansen et al. 2016; Mun & Jung, 2018; Pinar et al., 2011; Rink et al. 2019).

Although females are more triumphant than males in achieving higher educational ranks, and their turnover rates are less than males, they are still a minority in senior positions within firms (Rink et al. 2019). Rink et al. (2019) delineates that one of the major factors explaining the gender imbalance in managerial levels is that this male-dominated levels of organizations choose successors based on their own respective interpersonal fit. This seemingly vicious cycle involving males choose males for leading roles hinders the gender balance in senior positions. Align with Rinke et al. (2019)'s conclusions, many studies suggest that the only way to solve the gender imbalance is to employ female leaders within organizations to foster organizational change towards gender equality (de Vries, 2015; Sethi et al. 2021; Tate & Yang, 2015). The aforementioned line of reasoning stresses difference in leadership among men and women. However, literature on gender difference in leading positions are controversial. Some implies there are significant difference among male and female leaders (e.g., Rink et al. 2019; Shanmugam et al. 2007; Yaseen 2010) and some suggest there are not (e.g., Kanter, 1977; Martinez-Leon et al. 2020). Thus, further investigation on how leadership can solve the gender balance issue at senior levels are necessary.

As mentioned priorly, the literature on the impact of gender on leadership philosophy are prevalent and paradoxical. However, the impact of leadership attitudes and behaviors on gender equality are much less investigated. This article aims to fill this gap through inquiring into the effect of leadership on an organizational culture providing opportunities in favor of women for senior positions.

Leadership concept in academia was established by sociologist. However, sociology scholars have lost their interest in leadership phenomenon after 1970's, while management scholars became

obsessed with this phenomenon afterwards (Guillen, 2010). The sociology has many things to offer regarding gender equality in groups and communities. Thus, this research tries to investigate leadership sociologically to find new themes and pathways for gender equality within organizations. Leadership, the forgotten child of sociology, has been mainly explored through managerial and psychological theories after 1970's (Guillen, 2010). Hence, this research contributes to this emerged gap by focusing on sociological theories of leadership. Since many experts have a top-to-bottom approach to solve gender equality within firms. This study believes that the first step to total gender equality in organizations is to balance gender prevalence in top positions. Therefore, this paper would contribute to literature of gender equality through providing empirical evidences explaining how leadership affect gender balance in senior positions in companies.

Literature Review

Leadership through the Lens of Sociology

From nineteenth century until 1970's, sociologist were the most active scholars of leadership among all the social science disciplines. Nevertheless, after 1970's, other experts from other social science fields started to notice the phenomenon of leadership and changed the proportion of contribution in academia drastically. The analysis of prominent articles on leadership in terms of further citations in 1970's indicates that leadership grabbed the attention of management academicians with a much greater degree compared to sociologists. Sociologists were traditionally more interested in the relationship between the leaders and their respective followers, the promotional path to leadership level and the Pareto's circulation of elites rather than personality studies of the leaders. Leadership has never become an exclusive subfield of sociology, but sociological terms of leadership has even entered the dialect of non-academic people of societies (Guillen, 2010).

In general, sociological approached to leadership can be divided to four main categories of doctrines, namely the Weberian approach to ideal authority, the social integrative approach of

intuitionalists, the Neo-Marxist take on leadership and leadership through social networks (Convert & Heilbron, 2007; Guillen, 2010).

The infamous philosopher, Max Weber, introduces three types of ideal authority which is his main input into the sociological studies. He outlines three paths for leaders to foster legitimacy for themselves among followers. In order to understand the categorization of authority by Weber, first we have to consider the traditional and historical base it. The story of these paths begins when the empire founders wanted to obtain authority over their followers. In order to do this, founders preached ideas about themselves such as having unique talents of leadership, distinctive personality traits, proven résumé of success, or even divine inspirations, which were mainly the case for religious leadership. Then, they created a strong closed network of experts along with die-hard followers to reinforce their control over their organizations. However, the most pivotal constraint for their under-establishment authority was that the subordinates and clients always expect a continuous trend of success based on leaders' competencies (Guillen, 2010).

On the other hand, the successors of founders face different challenges to prove themselves as competent leaders. First, they have to behave in accord with the established traditions by original founders. Second, successors should be sufficiently legitimate in the eyes of main actors of the emerged powerful network assisting the foundation in order to implement their series of plans. Third, they have to be the deserving resemblance of the founder in stakeholders' perceptions. Forth, the successor should be fluent on the history of barriers facing the established foundation (Guillen, 2010).

The traditional description of leadership of founders and successors assisted Weber to create a base for transitioning the authority from traditional nature in old-fashioned world to legal nature of authority in modern world. In modern world, leaders and managers legitimize their authority through their competencies. The main challenges to contemporary leaders' authority are their failure in the competitive markets and the behavior of subordinates and clients against their authority and legitimacy. Weber characterized three types of authority for modern world, namely Traditional Authority, Rational-Legal Authority and Charismatic Authority (Dow, 1969).

Traditional authority similar to old-fashioned nature of authority is based on traditions and customs of societies. Traditional authority occurs in modern world through inheritance and religious beliefs. Since inherited authority does not require qualification, traditional authority is extremely rare in modern and competitive organizational environment. Traditional authority is the least favorable type of authority characterized by Weber and is against the concept of modern democracy (Zompanakis, 2020).

Rational-legal authority is the fruit of modern democracy and instead of being derived from inevitable and unchangeable traditions and customs, it is based on people's election and backed by its surrounding legal environment. The rational-legal authority stems from a legal position not an individual and it transfers to the next elected individual. For instance, a syndicate chief is an example of a legal position that gives authority to an elected individual to lead a field or industry. The footprints of elites' circulation are less bold in rational-legal authority compared to traditional authority (Guzmán, 2007).

Charismatic authority is derived from unique personal characteristics of leaders. Charismatic leaders are able to tap on the hearts and souls of their followers. Charisma is a Greek term which Max Weber borrowed from Christian texts to describe a natural talent of an individual to captivate followers (Joosse, 2014). Charisma is a superpower in the eyes of Weber, which separate true leaders from ordinary people. There is no scale for measuring charisma itself and scholars investigate its outcomes to understand it (DeGroot et al., 2000). The overlapping areas of authority can occur when a leader of traditional authority is also a charismatic individual or a charismatic leader establish a tradition for authority (Lanoue, 1988). In addition, usually a charismatic individual can win an election by influencing the voters and obtain rational-legal authority (Lanoue, 1988). The charismatic leaders in traditional or legal positions makes it difficult for successors to secure legitimacy due to constant comparison of charismatic predecessor and successor by followers (Wilner & Wilner, 1965). Therefore, charismatic leaders usually declare their own replacements in order to make the authority and leadership survive (Sylla & Goldhammer, 1982). Weber considers charismatic authority as the most favorable authority type (Guillen, 2010).

The Weberian approach to leadership stresses the roles of power and ideology, while the institutional perspective tries to integrate and makes a bridge between leaders and followers. Institutionalists believe that both leaders and followers are highly dependent to each other and therefore, there is a necessity for a leadership framework to consider both sides simultaneously (Washington et al., 2008).

Institutional leadership emphasize on the role of values to create the "good" organization based on those values, protect that organization and develop it constantly (Askeland, 2020). The aforementioned values stem from cognitive, symbolic and normative elements of institutions (Guillen, 2010). Institutional leadership means to align organizational goals with group goals and the pace of this process is highly dependent on the characteristics of organizational goals (Washington et al., 2008). The more value-based and devoid of technicality these goals be, the alignment process would be faster and the transition of organizations to institutions would be easier (Selznick, 2011). The most important factor in an institutional leader is to be capable of managing external and internal demands through an appropriate organizational culture as a communication tool (Washington et al., 2008).

There are three main sets of behavior that belongs to institutional leaders. First, they have to be committed to internal values and missions in order to foster internal consistency within their respective organizations. Second, they have to be capable of creating powerful external networks to secure legitimacy. Third, they have to actively confront the external rivalry and overcome existing external barriers. These three sets of behavior would guarantee the legitimacy and sustainability of an organization (Washington et al., 2008).

In response to shortcomings of Weberian approach in terms of overstressing the concept of power and institutionalism approach in terms of insufficient attention to group-based hierarchies, the neo-Marxist take on leadership has emerged. Neo-Marxist embraces the Weberian concept of leadership as interplay of power and authority, however, it has changed the capitalist view of it and dismissed the notion of elite transformation as psychological fact and introduced it as a mere capitalist political economy concept (Guillen, 2010).

Wright Mills (1956) as a "plain Marxist" by his own introduction, describes the American society as elites' playground in which the American elites have the majority power and influence in military, business environment and governmental entities, and therefore, they have created a socially homogenous society based on their own demands. Afterwards, many scholars investigated the influence of elites globally and they found the elites' footprints of domination even in communist countries (Guillen, 2010). Neo-Marxist perspective is a radical humanist perspective, which not only encourage to abandon functionalist perspective, which Weberian and institutionalist doctrines also preach, but also actively seeks to delegate authority among lower social classes in order to improve the well-being of workers, something that Weberians and institutionalists failed to accomplish due to having systematic bias inclined to elites (Saros et al., 1997).

Social network approach to leadership view leaders as a third party influencing existing relationships at micro-, meso- and macro-levels of organizations. In this approach leaders can influence dyad relationships in four scenarios. First, two parties are hostile to each other and thus, they compete for an important resource to defeat each other. Second, two parties are after an important resource and thus, they become hostile to each other. Third, an unbiased mediator tries to create a sustainable balance between two parties. Fourth, a biased influencer tries to create conflict between to parties in order to take advantage from the created conflict in order to reach a superior position to those two parties (Guillen, 2010). Social network theory of leadership suggests that leader can have "brokage advantage" through creating new relationships in social network systems and gain unique benefits from resulting information flows (Bert et al., 2021). The basic social network analysis includes two main elements of nodes representing active actors and ties manifesting relationships between those actors (Borgatti et al., 2018). Social network analysis as a study of organizational and interorganizational processes, can explain leadership behavior and its respective outcomes from an individual level perspective (Carter et al., 2015).

Sociology categorize leadership by functions and styles as well. Leadership functions are categorized as instrumental and expressive. Instrumental leadership is goal oriented aligned with economic and functionalist perspectives of leadership. Expressive leadership is in accord with

humanist school of thought seeking the well-being and the consequent satisfaction of employees. Leadership styles from sociological perspective are categorized as democratic, authoritarian and laissez-faire. Democratic leaders believes in allowing subordinates in decision-making processes, however, the final decision is made by the leader after assuring that group member are fully heard. Authoritarian leaders or absolutely goal-oriented in accord with instrumental functionality of leadership. They set goals and tasks and afterward they reward or punish group members accordingly, while they have least attention to group members opinions and demands. Laisses-faire leaders are almost an observer and let the group members to function. This style of leadership mainly can be seen in scenarios when the founder of company has trusted managers at hand and believe that he has created a self-leading system that does not need his/her involvement (Kanter, 1976).

Organizational Sociology and Gender equality

The modern Organizational sociology has two dominant theories, namely neo-institutionalism and the network approach (Grothe-Hammer & Kohl, 2020). Neo-institutionalism is a theory with focus on the legitimacy of organizations, which emerged as a response to incomplete picture of organizational structure created by structural contingency theory, which has a machinist approach to human studies through merely focusing on efficiency of organizations (Friedberg et al., 2001). Neo-institutionalism added the significance of culture along with cognitive and normative concepts to organizational structures which were derived from exclusive economic perspectives (Friedberg et al., 2001). Neo-institutionalism stresses the importance of considering unique characteristics and experiences of humans in organizational design by borrowing the coined term of social action from the prominent philosopher Max Weber (Nee, 1998). The aforementioned theory is capable of explaining how organizational isomorphism occurs meaning how environmental forces surrounding organizations shape similarities in organizations in a specific field (Pederson & Dobbin, 2006). This theory pictures a sophisticated causal model embracing social actions, group dynamics and meso- to macro aspects of environment surrounding firms related to culture and law (Brighton & Nee, 1998). In conclusion, Neo-institutionalism is an appropriate theory for explaining how organizational structure, culture, norms and rules can shape opportunities and actions of members (Marschlich, 2022).

Studies on gender equality through new-institutionalism approach offer interesting findings. Allemand et al. (2014) provides empirical evidences on some European countries suggesting that coercive pressures derived from societies, policy makers and stakeholders have significant power to reduce gender imbalance in top management because of legitimacy-seeking behavior of organizations. In addition, they found that normative pressure in terms of common career path of female leader in countries can facilitate the promotional path of future female leaders within those countries. Studies such as Mackay et al. (2010) and Waylen (2014) proposed a shift towards feminist institutionalism in order to improve gender equality within institutions. Zhang (2020) through a longitudinal and cross-national research, discovered that positive association of gender diversity and firm performance is highly dependent on the gender diversity acceptance across industries or countries.

Around 1980's, organizational sociologist started to pay attention to network frameworks in order to understand and explain group dynamics within organizations at industry level (Grothe-Hammer & Kohl, 2020). Similar to neo-institutionalism, network frameworks were created as a critique to efficiency-centered economic approached to organizational sociology (Podolny & Page, 1998). Viewing organizations as networks of actors cultivates legitimacy, improves organizational performance, provides autonomy for subordinates and facilitates resource acquisitions (Podolny & Page, 1998). The organizations can be investigated from: 1) macro-perspective, the relationship between an organization with a society (social network); 2) meso-perspective, the relationship between organizations (interorganizational network) and 3) micro-perspective, the relationship between an organization with its members within an organizational network (Ferreira & Armagan, 2011). There is no universal network theory capable of explaining organizational sociology and organizational behavior thoroughly, however, the emerged network frameworks are great complimentary theories assisting other approaches to reach, accuracy and credibility and validity with their findings (Galaskiewicz, 2007). Moliterno & Mahony (2011) believes that since organizations are multilevel systems of relationships, thus, the appropriate network framework for organizations should be multilevel. Ramarajan (2014) believes that in order to apply network frameworks properly into organization studies, scholars should consider multiple identities for actors within organizations.

Academic works on gender studies through network approaches provides useful insights. Dennissen et al. (2019) through investigating on five Dutch firms applying diversity network frameworks, concludes that if companies neglect to consider macro-level gender inequalities, despite of acceptable individual and group level considerations, they will fail to establish diversity values fully in their respective firms. Lutter (2015) provides evidences from a massive-scale time-series data of around 100 thousand actors and actresses suggesting that the survival and promotions of film performers are highly dependent on their social ties with a limited and closed network of board members. McGuire (2002) reports based on a survey data from around thousand employees active in financial industry that females even when they had acceptable network ties with board members, they were less likely to be successful to gain occupational assistance in comparison with white males. Therefore, it can be concluded that organizational changes for gender diversity should include interventions from upper-level networks in order to force/encourage lower-level networks to adapt diversity.

From interdisciplinary approach, Organizational sociology should borrow empirical evidences from other organization studies such as management and organizational psychology in order to suggest practical organizational structures capable of fostering appropriate organizational cultures in order to deal with contemporary issues of firms (Scott, 2020). There are significant differences in genders provided in management and organizational psychology literature that lead to gender wage and promotion/recruitment gap within companies. For instance, studies on the associations of personality traits with gender gaps within organizations suggest that lower agreeableness of males have yielded to more salaries in the same positions compared to females (e.g., Mueller & Plug, 2006; Nyhus & Pons, 2012; Risse et al. 2018). Hence, in order to solve the aforementioned wage gap, one solution aligned with organizational sociology perspective might be to implement gendered organizational change frameworks to protect females from negative consequences of gender differences in terms of personality traits.

Considering gender differences such as personality traits in design of new organizational structure for organizational changes and further social changes can be extremely beneficial. The reason is because the mechanism of group dynamics within organizations are highly associated with individual personality traits. Thus, if an organizational structure is devoid of considerations

for social interactions and group dynamics, then it would not be sufficiently practical and effective. As Friedberg et al. (2001) conclude, considering only for structural legitimacy- and efficiency-related factors for creating organizational forms leads to neglecting the significance of actors' characteristics within these organizational forms and consequently, neglecting one of the main predictors of desired organizational outcomes.

Gender equality in Management; Global Perspective

A surge in the variety of firms has occurred due to globalization. As a result, requirement for organizations and institutions free from oppression has increased. Gender isn't an individual's "natural" attribute or possession. It's a result of our social actions, built on essentialism- the belief that men and women are inherently different from one another. With this being believed, we're able to justify hierarchical structures and gender inequity. Not only that, but we're also able to normalize power dynamics. The gendered nature of an organization should be acknowledged as soon as it's identified. Gender is utilized in every aspect of these organizations and even the smallest details. Divisions such as male and female or masculinity and femininity can only be structured using benefits, disadvantages, exploitation, control, actions, emotions, meaning, and identity. Thus, when you hear someone trying to convince you that "a man is just stronger" or "a woman is more emotional," now you know why. Gender is shaped by the everyday operations in an organization. This includes routine procedures/practices/operations/etc., division of labor (based on gender), disparities in both status and money (also based on gender), and lastly the perceptions that these organizations project. When it comes down to it, these are all practices that have been around for centuries with no reason to change them. Differences between genders don't stop there either (Tafvelin & Keisu, 2023).

Women still face discrimination in workplaces all over the world today; no matter what sector of the economy or country they're in. They're grossly underrepresented in senior management and leadership roles relative to males as well. A college degree could set anyone up for success, except for women apparently. No matter how advanced a country may be or how many educational investments have been made- women will always fall behind men when it comes to job promotions. The same can be said about professional service industries like accountancy and

law. These industries have an equal number of men and women starting at entry level positions, but only a fraction of those women will go on to reach top positions. It's clear that there is a large gap when it comes to gender diversity in the workplace. While some countries are better off than others, they are still far from equal (Traavik, 2018).

Some studies have even made it all the way down to career preference between men and women. Using their results, they tried to support the idea that men are just naturally more interested in top roles than others. However, this study was criticized for being too simple, not taking into account how organizations play a part in society and decision making, in addition to not accounting for changes in landscape of women's job preferences over time (Tari, 2023).

Even more reasons women may avoid leadership or advancement roles stem from self-evaluations, gender expectations, and the fear of stereotypes impacting personal decision-making. This line of research finds that a woman's behavior and decision-making are influenced by cultural roles and assumptions about men, women, and leadership. For example, the fact that gendered expectations about leadership positions — which assume that a manager is a man — keep women from considering or picturing themselves in those roles. And the gender roles for women seem to conflict with the dominant responsibilities of being a leader. Women's tendency to underrate their own performance along with men's tendency to overrate their performance could also make them hesitant to aim for higher professional levels. Finally, there is stereotype threat, which finds that women are less likely to take on leadership roles when they are primed with assumptions about women. In an interesting Harvard study, it was found that highly skilled women want these types of roles just as much as men do at the beginning of their careers, however because these desires are not weighted equally at work or at home, women's job satisfaction dwindles over time. Even though desires for leadership roles are possibly part of why there is so few women in such position's studies indicate that individual preferences and views of attainable goals can be impacted by organizational structures and practices, biases, and society (Elçi et al., 2021).

Looking at the organizational factors, there are few women in top management and leadership. It is argued that a general bias against women persists throughout a woman's career, not only at

the top, and that understanding of these barriers is necessary to address the lack of women in these positions. Men and women start their careers at professional service firms with similar qualifications as measured by their education and contemporary hiring standards, as well as by similar preferences. In Scandinavia, women enter professional service firms at the same rate as men do, but they are not admitted into partnership, top management or equal compensation. Women represent 50% or more of entry-level roles at such companies. But as they make their way up the ladder, they account for fewer than 25% of partner roles (McLaren et al., 2023).

Organizational policies and practices are tied to the barriers women face at different stages of their careers. There is evidence that professional service firms often discriminate against women through their rules and practices. Stereotypes and expectations affect procedures and regulations, which can lead to differential treatment of men versus women (Ismail, 2023).

The business's success models and norms are further organizational obstacles that contribute to career disparities. The authors find that it is difficult for women to fit into professional service firms because the model of success there is "unambiguously male." The social life and temporal commitment standards in accounting are dictated by a masculine culture, making it hard for those who abide by different norms to gain acceptance (Al-Asfahani et al., 2022).

Another practice that often slows down the advancement of women is offering them fewer opportunities than men have. Research shows substantial differences in how work assignments leading to visibility and power are allocated between men and women — with restricted access for one gender (Schmidt, 2022).

On a broader level, the existence and awareness of gender discrimination also matter. The British researchers cite qualitative interviews with doctors and accountants showing that gender bias still affects men's and women's differing professional paths. There was "consistent" evidence that "women's performance evaluations are similar to men's, but women receive 14 times fewer rewards, such as promotions." — in line with other research showing that women were rated as having better performance but worse prospects for promotion. These findings suggest that job advancement is not fair even when performances are equal, implying more explicit forms of discrimination (Traavik, 2018).

The number of women managers in the U.S. increased overall as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which also boosted the proportion of women in nontraditional (male-dominated) occupations.But "women have advanced very slowly into leadership positions." Ninety-seven percent of vice president-level roles and 93% of all line officer roles at Fortune 1500 firms are still held by men—indicating that while the number of women serving on boards is slowly rising in the U.S., there are still barriers to their advancement, and very few are able to overcome them (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

Women's employment in the UK has increased only in part-time positions, mostly in the service sector. disparity in the workforce and economic disparity persist for women in the UK. Women make up 75% of workers in sales, personal and protection services, and management, yet females only occupy 24% of management roles and 9.9% of directorships (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

In China, women still have significant obstacles in their ascent up the managerial ladder. Equality is still an illusive dream. Although they make up 47% of the workforce, very few Chinese women hold managerial positions. When they do get a managerial role however, women don't get promoted at the same rate as men do on average. This could be because Laws and policies are keeping them out of certain parts of "the male's world" to protect them but also limiting their ability to succeed in life by doing so. Empathizing with women through a feudal traditional social value system keeps them out of significant facets of contemporary life (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

It is widely believed that Australia's adoption of post-feminism and neoliberal concepts of choice and leaning-in have blinded us to the fact that gender is no barrier to accomplishment and that gender disparity isn't a problem. But our gender equality ranking slid to 46 in 2016, improving slightly to 35 in 2017. According to the Fair Work Australia ruling, "gender discrimination contributes significantly to the pay gap," which is "particularly high for recent graduates." This confirms that the "glass ceiling" and "glass escalator" both start early. Laws and policies target gender disparities in leadership such as "equal opportunity legislation, affirmative action programs, and gender targets." Organizational practices often involve mentoring, benchmarking, building support networks, and making structural adjustments for a more family friendly work

environment. But men's refusal to accept their privilege and work against it impede women's path to leadership roles (Parkinson et al., 2019).

In Australia, 40% of companies view mothers as undesirable employees while male-dominated industries are highly valued. Long-standing norms of masculinity impede women from taking charge. The current approach focuses on women conforming with traditional gendered norms rather than addressing the harms caused by certain performances of femininity. Therefore, women blame stylistic differences for their relatively few promotional opportunities (Parkinson et al., 2019).

Women are under-represented in South African corporate boardrooms where they constituted just 7.1% of directors compared with 8.4% in Australia, 11.2% in Canada and 13.6% in the US Women hold only one-third of senior management roles globally but South Africa lags other countries in terms of female board directors (and female workers) as a percentage overall so much so that even if there were an average proportion of women holding senior management roles internationally we would still trail behind our peer nations' levels of representation at this level despite amazing strides made locally over the past decade or two (with just one-third of female board directors and female workers in the population). This suggests that the country's business environment remains far from equal for women. In fact, laws and regulations that hinder rather than help women's opportunities for growth and progress were put in place. However, little is known about why women succeed in political leadership and public sector positions but struggle in corporate governance (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

Racism and traditional gender norms have long stood as barriers to women's success in South Africa, a society created by white men. As black people, black women suffered additional prejudice due to apartheid. Women thus experienced an additional dimension of discrimination throughout apartheid (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

It is found that when women go up the ladder in major law firms that have clear career paths, promotions and gender parity at the entry level, they face a growing number of barriers compared with men. Women face myriad glass ceilings over their careers (Traavik, 2018).

It may soon become nonsensical to continue hiring men as CEOs if we want to maximize quality. If the only people being considered are men, then there is only one configuration of qualifications that will ever be used to choose board members — and it usually implies a lower caliber than if we chose from the best of all (Including both men and women) (de Luis-Carnicer et al., 2008).

Descriptive articles examining the relationships between gender diversity and company performance are few. These kinds of investigations yield unclear findings. While some of them show no correlation at all or negative relationships, others discover favorable associations between company performance and the proportion of women on executive boards and senior management teams (de Luis-Carnicer et al., 2008).

The most common theoretical framework used by finance and economics researchers to understand the link between board composition and firm value is agency theory. In an agency setup, the board's role is to resolve disputes between managers and shareholders by setting pay and firing managers who don't deliver for owners. Managers will be motivated to act to maximize their own utility rather than always maximize returns on capital investors have put in. Complying with corporate governance rules may protect outside investors from insider expropriation. Board independence is another claim coming from agency theory, which holds that boards must act in the best interests of shareholders. It suggests that people of different genders, ethnicities or cultural backgrounds may raise issues that directors with more traditional ones would not and thus diversity can enhance the independence of a board. Research shows boards with many female directors had a significant positive effect on their ability to affect management decisions (de Luis-Carnicer et al., 2008).

A further justification for arguments in favor of more women on corporate boards comes from resource-based company view, which posits that management's physical, organizational and human resources significantly affect company performance. Companies can build strong competitive advantages through distinctive or difficult-to-imitate bundles of resources owned or controlled by management as well as dynamic capabilities to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competences to respond quickly to changing contexts. Social structures, processes and arrangements defining and channeling gender differences stemming from status-

power disparities cause gender inequalities in leadership under structural-cultural frameworks (de Luis-Carnicer et al., 2008).

Social identity theory explains how self-categorization and socialization influence organizational outcomes; workers compare their demographic characteristics with those of others in their work group or unit, which influences their identification with their work group and consequently work-related outcomes like commitment-absenteeism-turnover, performance and innovation, relationships within the work group, and citizenship behavior. The association between demographic dissimilarity and these outcomes can be negative-neutral or even positive depending on the extent to which employees base their social identities on their demographics (de Luis-Carnicer et al., 2008).

Gender roles influence leadership responsibilities because leaders themselves and others have gendered expectations. Hence, it is hypothesized accordingly that men and women leaders behave differently. Managers are taught the norms that their elite group accustomed to. But men and women go through different socialization processes so that can change how well organizations perform based on gender diversity. The negative social and psychological effects of potential miscommunication, distrust, or misunderstandings between men and women might be increased by this diversity. An example of why is that disparities in gender could make senior managers more aware of differences between genders in the company. The second reason in the vein of social identity is it's easier for us as humans to get along with people who look like us (de Luis-Carnicer et al., 2008).

Leadership studies on women, especially when it comes to leadership philosophies and practices, have always been focused on the differences between male and female leaders. This creates a problem because when we talk about styles and behaviors it adds to the idea that gender is something someone holds rather than something they do which only solidifies current power structures. Although new seen feminine approaches to leadership have been introduced by post-heroic leadership styles, they're also based on a different perspective that keeps stereotypes alive. Since management and leadership are seen as inconsistent with femininity, leadership is perceived as having been masculinized which isn't true. Women's agency is complex which

changes things and this happens because of their identity as women in traditional male roles (Elliott & Stead, 2018).

There are several theories that explain the dearth of women in top management positions. One such theory is that women do not amass social capital as well as men do. A person's gender can also affect their ability to acquire and use social capital for professional advancement. Women seem to have less social capital than men — especially when it comes to higher positions, which could hinder their career growth. When they accrue and use social capital in networking efforts, they appear to have different motivations and goals than men do. Both senior women and senior men were enacting gender-appropriate actions. Senior women are creating expressive networks and choosing selective homophily to protect themselves from male organizational culture while senior men are relying on earlier reflections and engaging directly and indirectly in aspirational homophilous networking activities in order to advance their careers. Women may face more difficulty building social capital for professional advancement because of organizational gendering processes that create opportunity structures preferential to males and masculine styles of behavior. While at high ranks, all participants were indeed making efforts on building up their social capital, but the reasons behind each interaction varied. Older women were less likely than younger ones or older men to describe situations where they had purposefully accumulated or used their social capital in an effort to move ahead professionally. In this way, they're conforming with conventional notions of masculinity and femininity and staying within the bounds prescribed by the gender hierarchy (Broadbridge, 2010).

Methodology

In order to reach the sample population to conduct this research, purposive sampling has been employed. 20 CEOs of large enterprises with gender-balanced and gender-imbalanced managerial positions have been purposefully selected. Firms with at least 40 percent female managerial positions have been considered as gender-balanced companies. The data-collection process has been executed through semi-structured interviews with the leaders.

The abductive method of qualitative research has been utilized in order to collect data and further to analyze the resulting data. The interviews have been carried out through inductive approach with general questions regarding leaders' philosophies of leadership, institutional structure, environmental forces, gendered group dynamics and their opinions about gender differences in managerial positions. Inductive approach to interview devoid of substantial guided questions allows leaders to talk freely and based on their own original opinions, which minimize the bias of the research. The analyzing phase of research has been accomplished through deductive reasoning in order to reveal how sociological theories of leadership and gender equality can explain the phenomenon of interest.

A draft of diversity interventions based on two informal conducted interviews:

Since, I have close relationships to two CEO of big companies, I plan to have several informal interviews with them to pilot test my interview sessions and examine the extracted sociological concepts to explain themes and conclude some exemplar interventions.

Case 1: A CEO of a pharmaceutical food supplement (Vitamins are considered as pharmaceutical products which can be distributed only into pharmacies; therefore, it has different legal environment compared to European countries which vitamins can be purchased from health shops and even general shops such as retailers, supermarkets and hypermarkets).

Case 2: A CEO of a car accessories manufacturing company.

In Iran, the syndicates are mainly male dominated even in industries such as pharmaceutical food supplement, which there are gender-balanced boards. From network perspective, interorganizational networks bridging micro and macro networks of organizations play crucial roles in effectiveness of interventions and policies. Therefore, the presence of females in an environment where there are crucial and effective rational-legal authorities can be game-changing.

Mimic pressures derived from globalization benchmarking and successful Iranian companies have led pharmaceutical food supplement firms to utilize gender diversity in their senior positions, which have had improvements in organizational performance. Normative pressures in

terms of successful career paths for female managers have motivated females to reach top and encourage recruiters to employ or promote more women for managerial positions. Firms active in pharmaceutical food supplement industry are creating a diverse organizational form in order to be attractive to competent female managers to exploit the available human resources fully. Legitimacy- and efficiency-seeking behavior of leaders in accord with economic and neo-institutionalism perspective are evident in this industry. Hence, interventions including the benefits of having female leaders in this industry can be effective to motivate all firms in this field to implement gender diversity plans. The benefits of gender diversity in terms of improvements in organizational performance can attract even the most instrumentalist leaders who always prioritize economic perspectives in terms of variables such as efficiency and revenue maximization.

Traditional authority based on Islam can influence Iranian societies as well. Islam has a significant capacity to honor mothers based on a famous saying of the prophet Muhammad: "Paradise is under the feet of mothers". Muslem Influencers can stress the sacred role of mothers within an Islamic society to facilitate the path for effectiveness of interventions supporting females to be promoted without having concerns regarding work-related conflicts with having children.

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