Achievements, Challenges and Gender: The Case of Female Managers in a Company of Great Size in Brazil

Cleverson Molinari Mello[a*], Monica Gabriella da Silva[b]

[a]*PhD, Administration Department, Coordinator of the family business study group, State University of Paraná, Brazil*

[b]*Graduated in Administration, Postgraduate student, Member of the Family Business Study Group, State University of Paraná, Brazil*

[a]*Email: cleverson.mello@unespar.edu.br*

[b]*Email: mo_gabriella@hotmail.com*

Abstract

The increasing presence of the female manager figure in large companies has encouraged a lot of research on leadership and gender. In addition to stimuli in large organizations, women face different situations inside and outside companies. Those challenges require greater effort beyond technical skills. Keeping the role as a leader in the corporate environment, adjusting time and dedication to other roles (mother, wife, worker), raises for women the degree of complexity in the relationship between personal and professional life. This study brings up the discussion of women's challenges through a survey with female managers in a large company, from the historical critical perspective.

Keywords: management; gender; challenges; myth.

1. Introduction

There is a multitude of conceptions about work. One of them is to consider the act of working as something indispensable for the human being, which is part of their survival and social conditioning and that it is through work that the subject participates in the conception of culture, language, history and of themself [1]. In patriarchal corporations it was conceptualized that men were beings superior to women. The Hammurabi Code, considered the oldest jurisprudence in the world, determined that a woman who was not a good housewife, who led an idle life, who diminished or neglected her husband, should be thrown into the water. Inequality grew stronger over the years.

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* Corresponding author.

After the Hammurabi code, the Jewish law code was stricter with women regarding sexuality and the public role. At the same time, the practice of wearing the veil in the Middle East, when women were in public, showing their inferiority and that they were the property of their parents and husbands, arose [2]. Through the study of history, it is clear the man's obsession with relegating women to a position of subservience over time. As a result of the way of thinking of Christianism and of men in the modern age, the women were kept in this false imprisonment system, due to the customs that had been dragging along the centuries and through marriage, women were cloistered at home [3]. In Christianism, women's subservience has been institutionalized since, according to the church of Rome, Jesus chose only men to follow him and carry his gospel. During centuries, girls were considered property of men and only from the nineteenth century, after the feminist movements, the woman became visible and no more passive to men, being truly integrated into society [4]. Women's presence in the labor market has always been marked by struggles for equality for their rights. Women had no room to perform any function other than to raise a family. They were seen as sexual objects for men, and there was no opportunity for them to occupy prominent positions, always being harassed and suffering prejudice [5]. This gender inequality has characterized the society of classes since its start, about two thousand years ago, remaining through its three most important periods: slavery, feudalism, and capitalism. For this reason, the society of classes is essentially characterized by male domination, and this domination has been widespread and perpetuated by the system of private property, the state, the church, and the family institutions that serve the interests of men. Based on this historical situation, the myth of the alleged male social superiority was promulgated. Generally, as an unchanging axiom, it is said that men are socially superior because they are naturally superior. According to this myth, male supremacy is not a social phenomenon characteristic of a particular moment in history, but a natural law. Men, as it is claimed, have been endowed with the nature of superior physical and mental attributes. The entry of women into the labor market was driven by the need for their cooperation in services that were related to the family's financial income, and it began with the Industrial Revolution, with the labor force of women being absorbed by industries in order to depreciate wages, to which it was much easier to subject this new group of workers, and definitely bringing women into production. Immediately after World War II and the industrial revolution, there was a break in the prototype that distinguished men and women, putting them to work on the same machine and demanding them in the same way [6]. Even with the insertion of women in the labor market, there was still a lot of inequality, especially when it comes to pay and comparison to men. Women were always viewed as inferiors, and suffered various types of abuse and sexual harassment, as there was no protection in their work [7]. In the first half of the twentieth century, women were totally excluded from professional and management positions. They were chosen only when the industry needed typical attributes of women, such as patience, greater concentration and speed, or even physical characteristics, because they have smaller and thinner fingers than men. Only in the second half of this same century does the presence of women in the labor market begin to gain strength, opening space for discussion about women's career in management positions [8]. Although women's achievements are of great importance in the Brazilian labor market, when it comes to senior positions, women still face some difficulties. Senior executives face a problem known as the "glass ceiling" or "invisible barriers", which is the set of difficulties they face that are often unnoticeable within the organizational chart [9]. The gender stereotypes related to children and raising, which are reinforced throughout life, become reality in the world of work. Culturally, leadership positions have always been held mostly by men. Thus, women do not expect themselves

to become leaders, not aiming for such positions. The same applies to pay, as men continue to earn more than women even though they perform the same function [10]. Another stereotype portrayed in popular culture is that successful female professionals are women who end up consumed by their careers and have no personal life, which causes a sense of guilt for those who can reconcile their careers with their family. The same author points out that only 18% of women want to become leaders. This is also due to the fact that companies do not provide flexibility [10]. Women, both the ones in the early stage of their careers as the executives, believe that companies require professionals to set aside their personal lives. Thus, the main difficulty for them is to reconcile family and professional roles, which often seem antagonistic, and failing to do so is linked to the idea of failure. As a result, they have expressed fear of having their identities nullified (denial of personal projects, ideals of life, values) by the organization because they believe that women's identity is threatened by male domination in the workplace [11].

2. Labor market and gender

Women entered from the back door in the world of work, having to "prove" that they deserve the "opportunity" to them was being offered, whenever the market lacked labor force in a particular sector, although many times they were more attracted to another sector that offered better working conditions. They started entering professions that somehow, represented an extension of domestic work. If at home, they were responsible for cleaning and cooking, they became cleaners or housekeepers, cooks, laundresses and others of the sort. If, at home, they took care of the children, they became nannies and, at the most, teachers. Street sweeping was a typical case in the 1970s, transforming for them the designation "garis" (the word for "street sweeper") into "margaridas" (which means "daisies" and was used to refer to female street sweepers). The hiring companies then discovered that they were assiduous workers, swept properly, did not waste time "flirting over the fence with the housekeepers of the houses they passed by" or "drinking alcohol in bars around the corner", as the male street sweepers did. And, an additional gain for the hiring company, they were not paid as much as the men were - who, incidentally, preferred at the time, to work on the construction of the subway, which in addition to better pay, also offered lodging [12]. Women are still treated as second category workers. And this is basically observed in two aspects: in the salaries (women receive 70% of the wages obtained by men), and the famous "glass ceiling", responsible for the small presence of women in senior positions, even when they have the skills needed to do so [12]. The Ethos Institute survey in its sixth edition, which was released in 2016, with the 500 largest companies in Brazil, reveals that most of the companies participating in the survey still do not have measures to promote the presence of women in their staff. That negative reaches the proportion of 72.4% in the answers for the group of *trainees*, from which begins the bottleneck that reduces women's participation along the hierarchy. In the same survey, when managers were asked about the presence of women in companies at the four hierarchical levels (functional, supervision, management and executive), the following result was found: overall, a considerable share (52.24%) responded that the presence of women is adequate, a second significant portion (41.58%) answered that the presence of women is below what it should be, and a small portion (6.2%) answered that the presence of women is above what it should be. When asked about the cause of the restricted female participation in at least one of the hierarchy levels, the majority of 36.9% of the managers answered that there was a lack of knowledge or experience in their company to handle the matter. A slightly lower share, 34.2%, thinks that there is no interest from women. The research shows that, despite the achievements and

advances, women still have a long way to go in gender equality. It is also worthy to mention here the fact of prejudice on the part of women towards themselves, which constantly appear in surveys of this nature.

3. Methodology

To conduct the study, the qualitative approach was chosen. The material analyzed was a questionnaire with open questions targeting all 20 (twenty) women managers of a large company in the port sector of the city of Paranaguá, PR., Brazil. The collected data were interpreted through the technique of content analysis, through the organization in categories. Thus, based on the information contained in the questionnaires, we looked for instances in which the managers pointed their perceptions about their careers regarding the following aspects: achievements, challenges, and gender. For this study, three (3) categories were extracted from the analyzed material: the achievement of the position is due to meritocracy and to knowing how to work in a team; Leading, managing time and reconciling personal and professional life are constant challenges; The company strives to narrow gender differences. Although it refers to a limited group of twenty (20) managers, the study sought, at the same time, to bring the literature on the themes in the categories, and may, therefore, contribute to other studies on female managers in large companies.

4. Results and discussions

It is important to emphasize that the company in which this study was applied adopted, a little over six years ago, the meritocracy model, which promotes employees based on performance evaluation and on achieved results of the goals set. This format has brought many women to the managers' group of the organization, who came to occupy leadership positions. The research was applied to all twenty (20) women in leadership positions in the company, whether they were working as supervisors, coordinators, or management, in the administrative and operational sectors. Three (3) key questions were asked:

  i. What do you attribute your achievement to a management position to?

  ii. What are your main daily challenges?

   iii. Do you believe there may be gender differences within the organization in which you are working?

Following is the transcript of the answers:

Interview 01 : *i. meritocracy; ii. managing time; iii. no.*

Interview 02: *i. the work performed; ii. leading the staff and being 100% aware of the issues we are dealing with; iii. a little.*

Interview 03: *i. ability, competence, and preparation; ii. undoubtedly, reconciling professional and personal life, being able to separate the problems of each situation, not letting it affect either basis; iii. for sure.*

Interview 04: i. *how the challenges and problems of the day are faced, feeling like the owner and always*

seeking the best solution; ii. leading the team; iii. Yes, I believe it does.

Interview 05: *i. team; ii. amount of activities versus quality in team relationships and overall deliveries. Execution usually takes more time and takes the place of management; iii. for sure.*

Interview 06: *i. Dedication, commitment and responsibility; ii. Reconciling time with family and work, positioning as a woman in front of many men; iii. broadly speaking, we have an environment that accommodates diversity well and provides opportunities for all, regardless of gender. I believe we have room to advance, especially among women, in practices that promote greater engagement and mutual support.*

Interview 07: *i. leadership; ii. managing time and leading the team; iii. Yes. The market in which I have always been working is mostly populated by male managers, every day is there is a new challenge to get our position, we seem to have less value.*

Interview 08: *i. my way of accomplishing a team task and the commitment to complete an activity when it is delegated to me; ii. meeting every demand with agility and quality, respecting the limitations we have on a daily basis; iii. no. The set of attitudes of each person in the company leads them to their professional future.*

Interview 09: *i. focus! Sense of ownership; ii. organizing so that the demands of the area are met with quality, and reconciling that with the autonomy of the team; iii. Always. We work to reach goals, years ago will I believe I had already experienced that for being a woman, as at the end of there is a selection of outstanding work, through a score obtained based on the results achieved; my score was the highest, along with another man's, and the coincidence that he works in the same function, and since the choice is made by the managers, and they are all men, the result would not be different: he was chosen.*

Interview 10: *i. my previous deliveries; ii. my main challenges are: 1) team management and deliveries vs customer expectation; 2) administrative activities parallel to project deliveries; iii. I do not believe so. In my point of view, the company is very firm about the culture of meritocracy.*

Interview 11: *i. dedication and willingness; ii. Leading the team. I always hope that people have the same level of commitment that I have with deliveries; iii. I have not noticed differences so far, but I have been in a leadership position only recently.*

Interview 12: *i. commitment and quality of delivery as an analyst; iii. time management and focus; iii. No. In general, there are no actions outside the merit procedure, everyone has the same exposure opportunity.*

Interview 13: *i. commitment and adaptation; ii. Because I'm so straightforward sometimes I'm misunderstood, my daily challenge is to be more tolerant; iii. no.*

Interview 14: *i. willpower; ii. managing the time I have for what I have planned for the day and the demands that come along it, and prejudice for being a young girl with little company time already in a managing position. (The second, I believe it is because I started only a week ago. The potential and ability we prove with*

well-done work); iii. Yes. Many times, not so intentionally, but people of the same gender tend to interact more closely, getting closer and getting to know each other's work better within the company, so when it comes to recommendation, it is only natural to recommend that person you know best there. Another thing I have seen is that we judge the failure of a manager of the opposite gender based on their gender and not always simply on their actions.

Interview 15: *i. Hard work, with fast and expressive results, in projects led by me, with indirect teams (teams of other managers). Moreover, upon seeing the opportunity, I became and showed to be the best person to take the role at the moment, aiming at learning the demands as quickly as possible; ii. lately, leading the team and reconciling professional and personal life; iii. I don't believe so nowadays, we have many female managers.*

Interview 16: *i. merit and good work as an assistant; ii. Leading the team, I believe that due to the size of the team and reconciling professional and personal life; iii. no, we have more male managers than women, but we also have women working with management and growth opportunities.*

Interview 17: *i. dedication to work, and I enjoy working directly with people; ii. My challenge is always to be better, especially with teams, in order to deliver excellent work; iii. no, I think where I work, women get more space every day in every sector.*

Interview 18: *i. work commitment, I have always given my best to the company where I work, aiming at taking care and always doing the best; ii. time management; executing what was planned is a challenge, as other urgent demands arise throughout the day; iii. I believe so, but this is not explicit. In the 5 years I have worked here, I see that a lot has changed in this direction, for example, initially we did not have women in management positions and today they represent 27%. We even have a woman on the board of directors. A clear gender issue is the pay gap for men and women in the same position. This difference occurs in Brazil and is far from being solved.*

Interview 19: *i. organization, being firm and results. I believe the good relationship with peers was also a differential; ii. Because I do not have this skill naturally, my main challenge is to make sure that I act equally with all subordinates because I usually focus and develop more those who have a more agile profile; iii. I understand that the company strives to make it seem as if there was no inequality. However, in real life, it is apparent that most female managers do not have an active voice as much as male managers. Due to the predominance of men within the company, we have a hostile environment (sexual jokes, inappropriate approaches in parties) that we ended up adapting to.*

Interview 20: *i. My leadership position was achieved by achieving performance goals. I don't have leadership as an innate ability. I need to develop it constantly; ii. n/a; iii. n/a.*

After the analysis, organization of themes, coding, classification, and categorization, we present the classification in blocks that express the categories:

Table 1: What do you attribute your achievement to a management position to?

Category: Achievement of the position is due to meritocracy and know how to work in a team	
Definition:	Competence, dedication and responsibility to the work performed. How challenges are faced and problems are solved. Leadership and teamwork.
Themes	**Verbalized examples**
Merit	I3: Ability, competence e preparation I4: how the challenges and problems of the day are faced, feeling like the owner and always seeking the best solution. I6: Dedication, commitment and responsibility. I8: my way of accomplishing a team task and the commitment to complete an activity when it is delegated to me. I10: My previous deliveries I12: Commitment and quality of delivery as an analyst. E13: Comprometimento e adaptação. I14: Willpower I15: Hard work, with fast and expressive results, in projects led by me, with indirect teams (teams of other managers) Moreover, upon seeing the opportunity, I became and showed to be the best person to take the role at the moment, aiming at learning the demands as quickly as possible. I18: work commitment, I have always given my best to the company where I work, aiming at taking care and always doingthe best. I20: My leadership position was achieved by achieving performance goals. I don't have leadership as an innate ability. I need to develop it constantly.
Teamwork	I5: Team I7: Leadership I19: organization, being firm and results. I believe the good relationship with peers was also a differential.

Source: Made by the authors.

This category indicates that women generally consider meritocracy and being able to work in a team as key factors to reach management positions. In general, meritocracy can be defined as a management model based only on the fulfillment of goals and objectives, which does not value social variables such as origin, social

position, economic position, and political power. Therefore, meritocracy imposes the need to achieve goals and objectives so that the fittest are awarded [13]. This need to meet targets and objectives is explicit in the speech of interviews. "*aiming at learning the demands as quickly as possible*" (I15). " *I have always given my best to the company where I work, aiming at taking care and always doing the best*" (I18). " *I don't have leadership as an innate ability*" (E20). Expressions such as dedication, commitment and commitment are constant in the reports of managers. However, even if companies invest in diversity programs, so that meritocracy becomes truly fair among employees, regardless of race, gender, etc., biases of prejudice still interfere with leadership positions. Such analyzes will be better explained in the third category of this study, which will address the gender issue. In addition to meritocracy, the managers consider knowing how to work in teams as an important competence and that it contributed decisively to the achievement of the position. Teamwork is made up of a small group of people whose knowledge is complemented, members are committed to the goals and all remain responsible together for the performance and achievement of the goal, as the speed with which changes occur requires flexible and adaptable structures [18]. The focus of team definition is responsibility for achieving results. The team, in turn, would bring together the emotional aspects of the group, with responsibility for the team's outcome [19]. In the speech of the interviewees, two expressions are present: staff and team. Perhaps, this fact reveals that the company has not yet been able to standardize a methodology (team or team) with all sectors of the company, more specifically among managers. At least, not in speech. While meritocracy and knowing how to work in a team are essential conditions for the job, in turn, the daily challenges of the management position, according to women, often impose issues that go beyond professional life, which will be highlighted in the next category.

This category indicates that the main daily challenges of women are leadership, time management and learning to reconcile personal and professional life. Generally speaking, the leader can be regarded as having the power to influence and facilitate collective and individual efforts to achieve collective and individual goals. The multiplicity of analyzes that can be performed is immense: power relations, leader-group relationship, leader-individual relationship, etc.Leadership is the ability to influence people to follow them. And we can see that companies identify that women have unique characteristics that make them aligned with their desired leadership skills. People want to be less forced and more influenced, less criticized and more rewarded, less targeted and more included, characteristics which women have learned since childhood [20]. The natural talents of women, among which are included the satisfaction by networking and negotiation, emotional sensitivity and empathy, the ability to juggle multiple tasks, or ease of verbal communication, are particularly suited to the global society of the twenty-first century. The very growth and changes in today's society, the increase in global services and stronger communication policy, give women an advantage today. Their natural talents and capabilities are especially required by many companies [21]. When interviewees talk about leadership, the expression "*delivery*" appears many times. "*Quality in relationship with the team and in general deliveries*" (I5). "*team management and deliveries*" (I10). "*I always hope that people have the same level of commitment that I have with deliveries*" (I11). The term delivery means: action or result of delivering, of passing something to someone; transmission. That which was transmitted. Absolute and unrestricted dedication. Making an analogy with the game of chess, the good player is the one who literally "surrenders" ("delivers") themself in the game, that is, in addition to knowing well the movements of each piece (pawn, queen, horse, bishop), makes use of the strategy to master

the moves and reach their goals. "Surrendering" ("delivering" oneself) to the game includes studying the positions, sacrificing some pieces, conveying confidence and imposing oneself.

Table 2: What are your main daily challenges?

Category: **Leading, managing time and reconciling personal and professional life are constant challenges.**	
Definition:	Reconciling time with family and work, position as a woman in front of many men. Leading a team and reconciling professional with particular. Meet every demand with agility and quality, respecting the limitations we have on a daily basis.
Themes	**Verbalized examples**
Leading	I2: leading the staff and being 100% aware of the issues we are dealing with I5: Amount of activities versus quality in team relationships and overall deliveries. Execução geralmente demanda mais tempo e assume o lugar da gestão. I10: my main challenges are: 1) team management and deliveries vs customer expectation; 2) administrative activities parallel to project deliveries I11: Leading the team. I always hope that people have the same level of commitment that I have with deliveries. I13: Because I'm so straightforward sometimes I'm misunderstood, my daily challenge is to be more tolerant. I17: My challenge is always to be better, especially with teams, in order to deliver excellent work. I19: Because I do not have this skill naturally, my main challenge is to make sure that I act equally with all subordinates because I usually focus and develop more those who have a more agile profile.
Time management	I8: . meeting every demand with agility and quality, respecting the limitations we have on a daily basis. I9: organizing so that the demands of the area are met with quality, and reconciling that with the autonomy of the team. I14: managing the time I have for what I have planned for the day and the demands that come along it, and prejudice for being a young girl with little company time already in a managing position. (The second, I believe it is because I started only a week ago. The potential and ability we prove with well-done work) I18: time management; executing what was planned is a challenge, as other urgent demands arise throughout the day.
Reconciling profissional and personal life	I3: Undoubtedly, reconciling professional and personal life, being able to separate the problems of each situation, not letting it affect either basis I6: Reconciling time with family and work, positioning as a woman in front of many men. I15: Lately, leading the team and reconciling professional and personal life I16: . Leading the team, I believe that due to the size of the team and reconciling professional and personal life.

Source: Made by the authors.

In addition to leadership, time management is a daily challenge for female managers. Managing time is a tool that can be used in companies to allow planning with less expenditure of physical and mental energy. However, sentences such as "what do you do from midnight to six o'clock in the morning?", spoken in a casual tone by the boss, which seem to be harmless, unconsciously create the need to produce more and more without taking in o account the limits of what is considered tolerable. "*Meeting every demand with agility and quality, respecting the limitations we have on a daily basis*" (I8). This report illustrates a veiled but constant situation, a circumstance that goes unnoticed by most managers in companies, that is, the impression that 24 hours in a day, or 8, 10 or 12 hours in the company are insufficient. The pressure experienced by managers and managers to manage time increases when other urgent demands appear. "*Executing what was planned is a challenge, as other urgent demands arise throughout the day*" (I18). If leading and managing time is a daily challenge for the interviewees, reconciling work and personal life requires additional effort from women. Mothers, wives, girlfriends, housewives, housekeepers, leaders. There are numerous roles played by women. "*Reconciling time with family and work*" (I6). Unfortunately, "reconciling" requires an additional effort by women, which goes beyond that. The need to "*position oneself as a woman in front of many men*" (I6) is another issue and that elevates the difficulty for female managers to: maintain their positions, sustain unity in their families (whether with husband and / or children), and also try to cultivate physical and mental health.

When a manager says, "*We work to reach goals, years ago will I believe I had already experienced that for being a woman, as at the end of there is a selection of outstanding work, through a score obtained based on the results achieved; my score was the highest, along with another man's, and the coincidence that he works in the same function, and since the choice is made by the managers, and they are all men, the result would not be different: he was chosen*" (I9), it makes us believe that the evaluation process may lose its function in the attribution of merit and reinforce the distrust in its use, due to the low efficiency in the of some factors, such as: low level of senior management involvement; lack of preparation to manage people, limited to bureaucracy; assessment as a specific day event, influenced by the most recent events; non-involvement of the employee in the discussion process of their own improvement, reducing it to only communicating the result to them [16]. Organizations need to reevaluate how they assess, and a more participatory methodology is recommended, one that includes people in the process and development of measures, which can increase the chances of commitment and promote greater understanding and acceptance [17]. The tension between profit and morale, between company survival and consideration for the human being, could pave the way for lasting compromises. What we identify in the competitive environment is the total opposite. Durable commitments are increasingly rare and a liquid society is established: a society in which work does not exist as a means to a better future, but only as a search for a better present, lacking an ethical sense, understood only as a result of financial gain [14]. "*We seem to have less value*" (I7). Whatever the instrument, performance assessment should always be a critical analysis of the gap between the expectation of performance, whether of the organization or individual, and its actual performance, based on merit criteria, spread around and understood by the public concerned [15]. The process is subject to disagreement and distrust regarding the evaluators' interpretation of skills and efforts, in regards to established criteria and metrics, and to equal opportunities [13].

Table 3: Do you believe there may be gender differences?

Category: Company strives to narrow gender differences	
Definition:	The market in which I have always been working is mostly populated by male managers, every day is there is a new challenge to get our position.
	We seem to have less value. Another thing I have seen is that we judge the failure of a manager of the opposite gender based on their gender
	and not always simply on their actions. A clear gender issue is the pay gap for men and women in the same position.
	I understand that the company strives to make it seem as if there was no inequality.

Themes	Verbalized examples
There are differences regarding gender	I7: Yes. The market in which I have always been working is mostly populated by male managers, every day is there is a new challenge to get our position,
	we seem to have less value.
	I9: Always. We work to reach goals, years ago will I believe I had already experienced that for being a woman, as at the end of there is a selection
	of outstanding work, through a score obtained based on the results achieved; my score was the highest, along with another man's,
	and the coincidence that he works in the same function, and since the choice is made by the managers, and they are all men,
	the result would not be different: he was chosen.
	I14:Yes. Many times, not so intentionally, but people of the same gender tend to interact more closely, getting closer
	and getting to know each other's work better within the company, so when it comes to recommendation, it is only natural to recommend that person
	you know best there. Another thing I have seen is that we judge the failure of a manager of the opposite gender based on their gender and not always
	simply on their actions.
	I18: I believe so, but this is not explicit. In the 5 years I have worked here, I see that a lot has changed in this direction, for example,
	initially we did not have women in management positions and today they represent 27%. We even have a woman on the board of directors.
	A clear gender issue is the pay gap for men and women in the same position. This difference occurs in Brazil and is far from being solved.
	I19: I understand that the company strives to make it seem as if there was no inequality. However, in real life, it is apparent that most female managers
	do not have an active voice as much as male managers. Due to the predominance of men within the company, we have a hostile environment
	(sexual jokes, inappropriate approaches in parties) that we ended up adapting to.
Women have been getting more space	I11: I have not noticed differences so far, but I have been in a leadership position only recently.
	I12: No. In general, there are no actions outside the merit procedure, everyone has the same exposure opportunity.
	I15: I don't believe so nowadays, we have many female managers.
	I16: No, we have more male managers than women, but we also have women working with management and growth opportunities.
	I17: No, I think where I work, women get more space every day in every sector.

Source: Made by the authors.

What afflicts human beings is not labor, but exploitation and forced labor. When women started working, no one taught them how to do it. They had to learn the hard way with their courage and perseverance. They got some notions probably from their own nature [22]. All this veiled prejudice present in companies puts women under highly harmful psychological pressures, influencing their productivity and mental health, with the latter apparently being left to fate: "*we seem to have less value*" (I7). Despite the company's efforts to reduce gender differences, prejudice is still widespread, as reported by the interviewees, confirming what has already been said about the myth of male social superiority. "*In real life, it is apparent that most female managers do not have an active voice as much as male managers*" (I19). That demonstrates how the historical situation of the alleged male superiority insists on perpetuating itself to the point of subjecting women to awkward situations. "*Due to the predominance of men within the company, we have a hostile environment (sexual jokes, inappropriate approaches in parties) that we ended up adapting to.*" (I19). No one can feel entitled to violate a woman's sexual dignity or commit other types of violence against her, humiliate her and find it funny or enjoyable. Such attitudes are subject to indemnity. According to Brazilian law, the damage is indemnifiable if the disturbance made by the illicit act in the psychic relations, the feelings, the affections of a person impairs their ability to make use of their right. Among the fundamental rights established by the Federal Constitution are respect for the dignity of the human person and their intimacy, expressed in article 5, items III, V, and X, in addition to article 6 in regard to the right to (mental) health of the Major Charter. Article 5 - All are equal before the law, without distinction of any nature, guaranteeing to Brazilians and foreigners resident in the country the inviolability of the right to life, liberty, equality, security and property. III - no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment; V - the right of reply is guaranteed, proportional to the offense, in addition to indemnity for material, moral or image damage; X - the intimacy, privacy, honor, and image of persons are inviolable, ensuring the right to compensation for material or moral damage arising from their violation. As noted before, a little over six years ago the meritocracy model was adopted by the company researched, thus bringing to the group of managers of the organization many women who have come to occupy leadership positions. The implementation of the meritocracy model is a major step that the company has taken and which shows its willingness to reduce gender inequality. However, due to the historical culture of the male superiority myth, both the company and women should be aware that sexual harassment, for example, should not be dealt with in a pedagogical way, but instead, it should be extirpated from the corporate environment. There are different types of situations, some of which should not be tolerated.

5. Conclusion

History (written by men), like the great religions (also written by men), in propagating the myth of male superiority, creates a second myth: that women are socially inferior. Men achieved their social supremacy fighting against women and their achievements. But this fight against the sexes was only part of the great social struggle: the disappearance of primitive society and the institution of the society of classes. Women's inferiority is the product of a social system that has caused and provided innumerable inequalities, inferiorities, discrimination, and degradation. But this historical reality was concealed behind a myth of female inferiority. In primitive society, women were the ones who organized and directed social life. For a brief period of time, in

historical terms, the division of labor between the sexes was a reality. Men and women together increased social welfare and consolidated the first sedentary settlements. But the woman-led Agricultural Revolution, which separates the time of harvest from the time of production, likewise separates barbarism from civilization and, even further, marks the development of a new social system and an inversion of economic and social leadership of the sexes. These new conditions of life, which began with plenty of food necessary for a growing population, created a new productive force, and with it, new productive relations. The old division of labor between the sexes has been replaced by a new social division of labor. Agricultural labor has been separated from urban industrial labor, manual labor from intellectual labor. And women's activities gradually shifted to men. The man seized the furnaces invented by women and turned them into frills and forges to melt the raw metals and obtain copper, gold, and iron. The Metal Age was like the dawn of man's age. The same causes that led to the emancipation of men led to the fall of matriarchy and the enslavement of women. The moment when men appropriated the means of production, women were relegated exclusively to their biological functions of mother, and were denied any form of participation in the productive social life. Men took the reins of society and founded a new one to serve their needs. From the destruction of the matriarchy, class society was born . It is therefore unscientific wanting to discuss the superiority of men or women without regard to historical experience. Throughout history, we have seen a major reversal in the social superiority of the sexes. The leading role belonged first to the woman, biologically endowed by nature; and then to men, socially endowed by women. Understanding these historical facts means avoiding falling into the trap of arbitrary valuations based solely on instinct and prejudices. And understanding this means destroying the myth that makes women naturally inferior [22]. Therefore, analyzing the challenges and achievements of female managers in large companies today, from the historical critical point of view, basically collaborates on two issues. It allows us to understand that the conflicting relations between men and women occur as a result of a whole historical movement that, at a given (primitive) moment, had women as its leader and, after the emancipation of men, relegated to women a supporting role in the now masculinized society. Similarly, analyzing the challenges and achievements of female managers in large companies allows us to question the programs of meritocracy that, by only focusing on the results and achievement of goals, disregard the myth of male superiority that interferes in the relations of power and in the management positions of companies.

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