

The challenges of female leadership in technology

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, more and more emphasis has been placed on gender equality and women empowerment in the STEM domains. Undoubtedly, there is an improvement in the female presence in these fields, but there are still roles in which women need to be represented more. Examples of these roles are management roles within software development companies. This present paper conducts a study on women working in a software development company who currently hold a leadership role or not. We analyzed multiple factors that prevent women from pursuing a leadership role and the challenges faced by those who now have such a role. Therefore, by studying and discussing women's concerns regarding accepting leadership roles, we aim to highlight the main reasons why they choose to avoid following such a professional path. By doing this, we can help companies that want to have greater diversity in leading roles.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Even if it is a well-known fact that gender diversity in tech teams brings benefits, there is still a lack regarding the presence of women in the management roles of these teams [5]. This concern is also addressed by industry technology titans such as Meta or its parent Alphabet. Their reported percentage of women in leadership roles was 30,5% for Alpageth [3] and 36,7% for Meta [4]. However, even if we see these encouraging results, according to DDI's 2023 Global Leadership Forecast [2], there is a decrease in the percentage of women in leadership roles, the global percentage is now at 28% [1].

Because female presence in technology leadership is an essential topic, the present article proposes a research idea regarding the obstacles women encounter when pursuing a career in leadership in the software development field. The research was done via a questionnaire completed by 27 women working in the tech industry from Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

By studying and discussing women's concerns regarding accepting leadership roles, we aim to highlight the main reasons why they choose to avoid following such a professional path. By highlighting

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the causes that prevent women from taking leadership roles, we can help companies that want to have greater diversity in leading roles.

2 METHODOLOGY

As for methodology, we used a survey to collect our data. The survey contained nine questions and was answered by a total of 27 women currently working in the technology industry. The first four questions were single-choice and were related to age, education and the current role of the subjects. The following five questions combined single-choice, multiple-choice and text answers. We wanted to capture the main obstacles the subjects have encountered or are afraid of when it comes to a leadership position in a software development company.

3 ANALYSIS

The questionnaire was completed by a total of 27 women who are currently working in the technology industry. The majority of the subjects, 77,8%, are in the age group between 20 and 30 years old. The remaining 22,2% are in the 30-40 age group. The distribution of their education can be seen in the graph from Figure 1. Moreover, a percentage of 25,9% of them currently hold or have held a leadership role in the past.

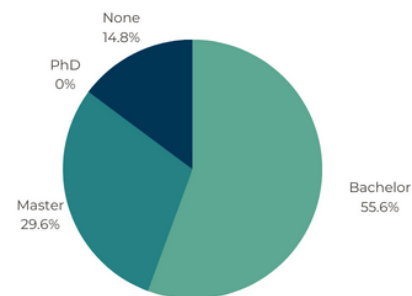


Figure 1: The distribution of education amongst the subjects

Figure 2 encapsulates the responses to the question, "What do you think are the main challenges in obtaining a leadership position?". The biggest fear when accepting a leadership role that

emerged from the questionnaire is that there will not be a balance between personal and professional life. The following three challenges are related to the subjects' personal development or obstacles preventing them from evolving (lack of mentors, not enough resources for developing leadership roles, lack of female role models.)

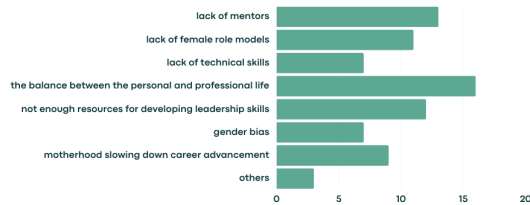


Figure 2: Answers to "What do you think are the main challenges in obtaining a leadership position?"

Among the disadvantages of pursuing a leadership role mentioned by the subjects are: a higher stress level and increased work and responsibilities that may also lead to difficulty balancing the professional and personal life. In addition, some subjects mentioned they do not want to sacrifice their lives as mothers to pursue leadership roles.

In terms of what can be done to improve women's access to leadership positions, some of the most common responses were related to having more role models and encouraging women to pursue these positions. Moreover, some answers suggested there is no knowledge gap between the genders, but women are more reluctant to apply to leadership positions. Therefore a safer space for them to develop the required skills and a mentoring system would be helpful.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The lack of female presence in technology leadership roles is a known issue. This paper aims to emphasise women's challenges when pursuing a leadership role. Moreover, the secondary conclusions that can be drawn from this study are related to the reasons why some women do not even consider this possible career path. The main reason women find it hard to transition to a leadership role is balancing their professional and personal life, especially those of them who are mothers. In addition, the lack of mentors and female role models and insufficient resources to develop leadership skills were also mentioned as the main challenges.

To address these worries of women who want to pursue a career in leadership, companies should create a favourable environment where they can develop the skills necessary for management positions. Moreover, there should be a mentoring system for them and the promotion of role models, especially for women who do not consider following this professional path.

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