AI & Robotics
Implementation and Pitfalls

Women Leadership in Healthcare – Time to Walk the Talk

Being a woman in leadership is a big challenge by itself. When we talk about female leadership in technological fields and healthcare that challenge becomes even greater. Women represent 70% of the 43 million workers in the global health care industry, according to the WHO.
Yet, at the executive level, women make up just 25% of healthcare leadership positions. The Glass Ceiling, as shown before, still exists and acts like an invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching the top leading positions. However, research has shown that having more women in leadership positions can bring a range of benefits to healthcare organisations.

RITA VELOSO

Executive Board Member
Centro Hospitalar Universitário de Santo António
Portugal

key points

- Women represent 70 % of the 43 million workers in the global health care industry, according to the WHO. Yet, at the executive level, women make up just 25% of healthcare leadership positions.
- Women shouldn`t think or act like men, they should think about finding a way to display and build the same confidence for leadership positions as man.
- Maybe the rise in AI will result in that leaders with the ability of managing people will be a better fit for leadership roles, and that will result in more room and opportunities for women in leadership positions.
- We need to better understand the challenges women encounter and identify strategies to increase the number of women in leadership roles and support their success.

Introduction

In 2021, the theme of the International Women's Day was 'choose to challenge'.

The main topic was based on the fact that, individually, we are all responsible for our own thoughts and actions – all day, every day. We can all choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequality. Under this context, the International Hospital Federation ask its Members, me included, to share how we were celebrating International Women's Day and working to challenge gender disparity in their organisations or work field. As a result I choose to challenge "Women in Tech" active within the healthcare sector.

Being a woman in leadership is an especially big challenge by it itself. When we talk about female leadership in technological fields and healthcare that challenge becomes even greater. It might sound counter-intuitive, but it is not: human and people management qualities are increasingly needed to achieve an effective and desired digital transition in our society, emphasising that going digital is not de-humanising and virtual does not necessarily means distant.

Fortunately, in Portugal, there are several companies, including multinationals, which are currently led by women who are excellent at this and highly competent. Particularly in my hospital, Centro Hospitalar Universitario de Santo António, more than 52% of leadership positions are occupied by women.

But we all know that there is still a long way to go.

In fact, when we look at some impressive statistics, the healthcare sector seems overwhelmingly "female." Women represent 70 % of the 43 million workers in the global health care industry, according to the WHO.

Yet, at the executive level, women make up just 25% of healthcare leadership positions. Women account for 71% of all global workforce professionals as well as 59% of all graduates in the medical, biomedical and health sciences fields. Despite women occupy the majority of positions in the medical field, it seems to be more

highest level in these two traits: taking initiative and being goal oriented.

So, if women are "more" competent than men, why is the number of women in management positions still unbalanced? Is it really a question of a misperception of confidence and not of effective competence?

> As a leader in healthcare, I #choosetochallege women in tech. It might sound strange, but it is definitely not, soft skills are increasingly needed to achieve a truly digital transition in our society, reminding that digital is not dehumanising and virtual does not means distant. And these skills are part of a female DNA

rare, more difficult for women to reach positions of responsibility and leadership.

It is encouraging that more women are now studying medicine than men (According to the AAMC (Association of American Medical College), the proportion of female medical students in 2019 being 50.5%, and still increasing. In Portugal more than 75% of the health field students are women.

Is Progress Finally Happening?

The digital world offers a great potential to promote gender equality, to be less prejudiced and more inclusive than the "traditional" world, and yet the digital world is still largely led by men. Why?

The Glass Ceiling still exists and acts like an invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching the top leading positions.

Men are still seen as the default leaders, even more so when we talk about technology, reinforcing the time-honoured perspective that to " think like a man" is a skill. If this is true, should women who seek leadership roles start "to think like a man"?

A Harvard Business Review study compared male leadership with female leadership considering 16 competencies that are associated with greater overall leadership effectiveness. The results are in line with the stereotype that women "care" - women scored higher than men in establishing relationships, inspiring and motivating others, boosting self-development. But it also contradicted the stereotype that men "take over" - revealing that women have outperformed men at the

Why does it seem so easy for "incompetent" men to become leaders? And why is it so difficult for "competent" people - especially "competent" women - to take the lead?

Well, we generally misinterpret demonstrations of confidence as a sign of competence, and because of that we are led to believe that men make better leaders than women.

Women shouldn`t think or act like men, they should think about finding a way to display and build the same confidence for leadership positions as man.

In my opinion, it is not true that women do not aspire to this type of roles. It is my strong conviction, that was reinforced over the years in which I had the privilege of dealing with many strong women who sought one day to take on leadership positions.

It is my true belief that men tend to perform better when the focus is on task management, while women tend to perform better when the focus is on managing people.

In the digital age, this may work to women's advantage: Along with the rise of artificial Intelligence, is it expected that automation of most task-oriented leadership components may occur. Maybe that will result in that leaders with the ability of managing people will be a better fit for leadership roles, and that will result in more room and opportunities for women in leadership positions.

We, women, have two unshakable forces in our favour: intuition and passion. In top management one is faced with situations that require immediate response in which

common sense and intuition are the indispensable tools to have in these crucial moments.

Daniel Kahneman, the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002 for his work "Thinking, Fast and Slow", defends the existence of "two brains": one that effectively thinks fast and the other that thinks slowly, and we all rely on both in our different decision-making processes.

When we look at today`s digital world, a world augmented by the recent pandemic that affected us all,

The challenges of the Leadership in Healthcare in 2030 is likely to be influenced by several emerging trends and challenges in society, technology, and the business world.

Some of the key changes that are likely to shape leadership in 2030 include:

- Greater emphasis on collaboration and teamwork: Leaders in 2030 will be expected to foster a culture of collaboration and teamwork, leveraging

> women in leadership positions can bring a range of benefits to healthcare organisations, including improved patient satisfaction, enhanced collaboration and teamwork, and a more inclusive workplace culture

it is precisely the personal characteristics of empathy, closeness, fast decision making, emotional intelligence, leading by example, and the ability of making more and better leaders, that enables Institutions to deal with this new reality and to survive.

It could further be said that the current world desperately needs women`s leadership, it needs their aptitude to motivate their staff and teams, their talent to make things happen particularly in demanding and adverse scenarios like the one we currently face.

Studies on female leadership in healthcare illustrate the experiences and perspectives of women in leadership positions within the healthcare industry. This can encompass areas such as hospitals, clinics, in public health, and in medical education. Some of the topics studied within this field include the challenges faced by women in leadership, the impact of gender on leadership style, diversity and inclusion, and the influence of mentorship and networking on career advancement.

Research also show that having more women in leadership positions can bring a range of benefits to healthcare organisations, including improved patient satisfaction, enhanced collaboration and teamwork, and a more inclusive workplace culture.

However, women in healthcare leadership continue to face gender-based barriers and biases, including a lack of representation at the highest levels of decision-making, unequal pay, and limited access to mentors and networking opportunities. The goal of these studies is to better understand these challenges and identify strategies to increase the number of women in leadership roles and support their success.

the strengths of individuals and teams to achieve collective goals.

- Increased focus on ethics and social responsibility: As consumers become more socially conscious, leaders in 2030 will be expected to prioritise ethical and socially responsible business practices.

- Adaptability to technological change: Leaders in 2030 will need to be agile and able to quickly adapt to rapidly evolving technology and its impact on their organizations and industries.

- Empathy and emotional intelligence: As emotional intelligence becomes increasingly valued, leaders in 2030 will be expected to demonstrate empathy, emotional intelligence, and an ability to connect with and motivate their employees.

- Strategic thinking and foresight: Leaders in 2030 will be expected to have a clear vision for the future and the ability to anticipate and prepare for change, both within their organisations and in their wider industries and markets.

- Cultural competence: Leaders in 2030 will need to be culturally competent and able to lead diverse and inclusive teams in an increasingly global and interconnected world.

This can be illustrated by the response to generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012), an enormous challenge for leadership. We will face "new" hospitals, "new" employees, "new" patients from this generation, why?:

- Technology integration: Generation Z has grown up with technology and expects it to be integrated into their work environment, including the use of electronic health records, telemedicine, and other digital tools.

- Flexibility and autonomy: Generation Z values flexibility and the ability to work from anywhere, as well as the freedom to make decisions and take ownership of their work.
- Diversity and inclusivity: Generation Z is more diverse and culturally aware than previous generations and values a workplace that is inclusive and promotes diversity.
- Personal and professional growth: Generation Z is interested in developing their skills and advancing their careers, and they expect opportunities for personal and professional growth within their healthcare positions.
- Social responsibility: Generation Z is socially conscious and values employers who have a positive impact on society and the environment.

All these challenges in healthcare will need both new and old skills, both "brains" (fast and slow) and that's why the presence of more women in leadership in healthcare institutions is so crucial to face our future and provided better and more healthy workplaces and better health for everyone.

Together, we can inspire and thrive – it´s time to walk the talk.

Conflict of Interest
None. ◼

references

Association of American Medical Colleges (2019) The Majority of U.S. Medical Students Are Women, New Data Show. Available from https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/majority-us-medical-students-are-women-new-data-show

Geneva: World Health Organization (2019) Delivered by women, led by men: A gender and equity analysis of the global health and social workforce. (Human Resources for Health Observer Series No. 24). Available from https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311322/9789241515467-eng.pdf

Harvard Business Review (2019) Research: Women Score Higher Than Men in Most Leadership Skills. Available from https://hbr.org/2019/06/research-women-score-higher-than-men-in-most-leadership-skills

International Handball Federation (2021) International Women's Day. Available from https://www.ihf.info/media-center/news/international-womens-day-2021-and-ihf

International Hospital Federation (2021) Celebrating International Women's Day 2021. Available from https://ihf-fih.org/news-insights/iwd-2021/

Mousa M et al. (2021) Advancing women in healthcare leadership: A systematic review and meta-synthesis of multi-sector evidence on organisational interventions. eClinicalMedicine. 39,101084.

Pordata (2021) Alunos do sexo feminino em % dos matriculados no ensino superior: total e por área de educação e formação. Available from https://www.pordata.pt/portugal/alunos+do+sexo+feminino+em+percentagem+dos+matriculados+no+ensino+superior+total+e+por+area+de+educacao+e+formacao+-1051-8515

HealthManagement

Promoting Management and Leadership