

A feminine perspective on human talent management

Una mirada femenina a la gestión del talento humano

Seyna Almengor

Facultad de Administración de Empresas y Contabilidad.
Universidad de Panamá, Centro Regional Universitario
de San Miguelito.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5598-2548>

seynaalmengor@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study analyzes human talent management from a female perspective, highlighting women's strategic contributions and the structural obstacles they face in human resources. The objective was to analyze human talent management from a female perspective, highlighting the contributions, obstacles, and proposals that women have faced in human resources. The research was conducted through a documentary review, examining specialized literature and data from international organizations on gender, leadership, and talent management. The results show that female leadership, characterized by a transformational style and skills such as empathy, contributes to organizational sustainability and efficiency. However, representation gaps remain at strategic levels. The discussion suggests that, to achieve real transformation, it is necessary to eliminate biases in recruitment processes, diversify selection committees, and promote co-responsibility policies. The central conclusion is that integrating a female perspective into talent management is an intelligent strategy for building more humane organizations, adapted to current demands.



Autor de correspondencia
Ana María Neyoy Valenzuela

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Resumen

Este estudio analiza la gestión del talento humano desde una perspectiva femenina, destacando los aportes estratégicos de las mujeres y los obstáculos estructurales que enfrentan en el área de recursos humanos. El objetivo fue analizar la gestión del talento humano desde una postura femenina, visibilizando los aportes, obstáculos y propuestas que las mujeres han enfrentado en el área de recursos humanos. La investigación se desarrolló mediante la revisión documental, examinando la literatura especializada y datos de organismos internacionales en temas de género, liderazgo y gestión de talento. Los resultados explican que el liderazgo femenino, caracterizado por un estilo transformacional y habilidades como la empatía, contribuye a la sostenibilidad y eficiencia organizacional. Sin embargo, quedan brechas de representación en los niveles estratégicos. La discusión plantea que, para lograr una transformación real, se necesita eliminar sesgos en los procesos de reclutamiento, diversificar los comités de selección y promover políticas de corresponsabilidad. La conclusión central sostiene que integrar la perspectiva femenina en la gestión del talento es una estrategia inteligente para construir organizaciones más humanas, adaptadas a las exigencias actuales.

Palabras clave: perspectiva femenina, gestión del talento, liderazgo femenino, igualdad de género, recursos humanos.

Introducción

The increasing participation of women in the workforce has profoundly transformed organizational dynamics and the conceptualization of human talent management. Although the field of human resources has a significant female presence at operational levels, challenges persist regarding access to leadership positions, the endurance of stereotypes, and the imbalanced valuation of their contributions (International Institute for Management Development, 2025). This situation highlights a disparity between the numerical representation of women and their actual influence in strategic decision-making.

Women in HR leadership roles often adopt more collaborative and team-development-oriented approaches, characteristics associated with transformational leadership (Eagly et al., 2007). This leadership style, marked by empathy, collaboration, and emotional intelligence (Goleman et al., 2016), has proven effective in modern work environments by inspiring teams, fostering professional development, and cultivating inclusive workplaces (Eagly & Johannsen-Schmidt, 2001).

Women excel in their capacity to motivate teams and create positive work environments, which is crucial for contemporary human talent management where employee engagement is paramount (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Indeed, studies such as those by McKinsey & Company (2023) have shown a greater capacity for adaptation during the pandemic, highlighting the strategic importance of leaders who combine operational efficiency with human sensitivity. There's a current trend towards incorporating these approaches into organizational development programs, necessitating training in emotional intelligence, team management, and assertive communication. However, despite this contribution and the fact that women constitute the majority of the workforce in human resources (representing 76.1% of professionals in managerial roles in the U.S., according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021), a low percentage of executive HR positions globally are held by women (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

This persistent disparity, which is accentuated at higher executive levels (where only 33% of CEOs were women, according to 2021 data), exposes a broader issue known as vertical segregation in career progression. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2019) attributes this gap to unequal distribution of family responsibilities and unconscious biases in promotion processes and role assignments, emphasizing the need for companies to eliminate biases in attributing roles to women and men. When coupled with stereotypes that associate strategic leadership with traditionally masculine attributes, this contributes to what some researchers call horizontal barriers that limit access to certain areas of influence within an organization (Arnau Ripollés, 2005).

This disparity therefore exposes a larger problem within promotion processes and an unequal distribution of mentorship opportunities. Addressing this situation is essential for building more inclusive and equitable work environments, ultimately enhancing organizational efficiency and better leveraging available human capital for the 21st century.

This article aims to analyze human talent management from a female perspective, highlighting the contributions, obstacles, and proposals women have encountered in the field of human resources. By identifying human talent management through a gender lens, it reviews the distinctive contributions of female professionals in this area and the challenges they face. A review of this topic is necessary to contribute to the creation of more inclusive and equitable work environments.

Literature Review

Gender studies applied to the workplace reveal how certain preconceived notions impact opportunities for women. Gilligan (1982) indicates that many women lead with a more collaborative approach, differing from traditional models based on individual competition. This has led to questions about which qualities are truly valuable in leaders. As Atagua-Díaz (2024) points out, female leadership is characterized by implemen-

ting inclusive policies and addressing gender inequalities, although its real impact depends on transcending symbolic representation to influence strategic decisions.

In practice, a series of obstacles continue to confront women seeking to reach high-level positions, even in fields where they are the majority, such as human resources. Eagly et al. (2007) explain that this isn't a single issue, but rather multiple barriers that emerge at different stages of a professional career.

When specifically analyzing leadership in human resources, studies like those by Bass & Riggio (2006) show that women excel in their ability to motivate teams and create positive work environments. These capabilities are particularly useful in modern human talent management, where employee engagement is key.

However, despite representing 5% of the initial workforce in the U.S., Latina women occupy only 1% of executive positions (Catalyst, 2024). The ILO (2015) attributes this disparity to the disproportionate burden of family care and the persistence of issues that associate leadership with traditionally male attributes.

Given this landscape, organizations like UN Women (2025) recommend implementing policies that promote equity, including mentorship programs and a review of promotion processes. As Ely et al. (2011) point out, the goal isn't for women to adapt to existing models, but rather for organizations to learn to value their particular leadership styles.

Methodology

This research is based on a literature review that examines women's participation in human talent management. It focused on analyzing, comparing, and synthesizing the findings of other studies to identify elements that help achieve the stated objective.

The information gathering process took place be-

tween January and May 2025. It involved consulting the Google Scholar database and conducting open web searches to broaden the scope. Additionally, technical reports from recognized international organizations in the field of gender and labor, such as the ILO, UN Women, and Catalyst, were included.

Selection criteria prioritized documents authored by specialists in the field and materials that explicitly addressed the areas of gender, leadership, and human resources conjointly. Although preference was given to publications from the year 2000 onwards, relevant older sources that contributed theoretically to this research were also considered.

Through the analysis of the selected documents, four themes were structured from the 27 included sources: the first examines the characteristics of female leadership in talent management; the second addresses female representation in human resources with persistent challenges; the third focuses on advancements in gender equality policies in human resources; and the fourth presents a proposal for talent management from a female perspective (Table 1).

Each section of the results was based on the most prominent author. The first theme (characteristics

of female leadership in talent management) drew on the findings of Eagly (in Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; and Eagly et al., 2007). Her studies allowed for a description of the transformational leadership style adopted by women and gender differences in leadership styles, explaining these differences as a result of social roles and expectations. Eight different sources were cited here.

The second theme (female representation in human resources with persistent challenges) was based on the findings of the ILO (2015). This organization was cited for attributing the disparity in upper executive levels of human resources to the unequal distribution of family responsibilities and the persistence of unconscious biases in promotion processes. Five sources were used to develop this theme.

In the third theme (advancements in gender equality policies in human resources), the ILO again emerged as the most prominent. This is because it has promoted conventions and, aligned with the 2030 Agenda for equity, has identified a lack of systems to measure the progress of these initiatives, as well as a tendency for women to adapt to structures without systemic changes. Six different sources were referenced in this third theme.

Table 1.
Classification of Sources by Analysis Themes on Female Leadership and Talent Management

Themes	Description	Sources
1. Characteristics of female leadership in talent management	They discuss female leadership styles, skills, and approaches, such as emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and leadership in business contexts.	Bass & Riggio (2006); Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt (2001); Eagly & Johnson (1990); Eagly et al. (2007); Ely et al. (2011); Goleman et al. (2016); Atagua-Díaz (2024)
2. Female representation in human resources with persistent problems	They discuss structural inequality, underrepresentation in management positions, and the institutional and social problems women face in the workplace.	McKinsey & Company (2021); McKinsey & Company (2023); IBM (2022); Deloitte (2022); US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021); ONU Mujeres (2025); UN Women (2019); Instituto Más Mujeres (2025); International Institute for Management Development (2025)
3. Advances in gender equality policies in human resources	They present initiatives, programs, and institutional and social theories that affect women in the workplace.	OIT (2015); OIT (2017); OIT (2019); OIT (2020); Naciones Unidas (2015); Unilever (2023); Unilever (2024); Catalyst (2024)
4. Proposals for talent management from a female perspective	They present theories on inclusivity and alternatives that promote a feminist, intersectional, and ethical vision for managing human talent.	Arnau Ripollés (2005); Bohnet (2016); Accenture (2022); Atagua-Díaz (2024); Ely et al. (2011); Instituto Más Mujeres (2025)

For the fourth and final theme of the results (proposal for talent management from a female perspective), Bohnet (2016) was the foundational author. Her arguments underscored the need to review recruitment and promotion processes to eliminate unconscious biases, and her specific proposals were used to focus the suggested strategies in that section. Three sources were used in this final section of results.

This methodology of document review provided a structure for understanding how female participation contributes valuable insights to human talent management processes in organizations. The results are supported by all documented evidence, strengthening the validity of the conclusions presented.

Results

Characteristics of Female Leadership in Talent Management

The evolution of organizational leadership models over recent decades has progressively incorporated competencies traditionally associated with a female management style. Goleman et al. (2016) is among the authors who emphasize that certain skills such as empathy, collaboration, and emotional intelligence have proven particularly effective in modern work environments, noting that “it is no longer possible today to continue ignoring emotions as irrelevant to the business world” (Prologue, Section 1, para. 4). This shift responds to the need to manage diverse teams and adapt to more flexible organizational structures.

According to Eagly & Johannsen-Schmidt (2001), women more frequently adopt a transformational leadership style, characterized by their ability to inspire teams, foster the professional development of employees, and create inclusive work environments. This differs from more traditional models focused on hierarchical structures, as Bass & Riggio (2006) indicate in their organizational leadership studies.

With this 2001 study, Eagly & Johannsen-Schmidt

complement Eagly & Johnson’s previous review of task-oriented, autocratic, and democratic interpersonal styles, presenting three specific results: transformational leadership (as noted); transactional leadership, based on contingent rewards and management by exception—with no significant gender differences—; and laissez-faire leadership, characterized by non-intervention or evasion of responsibilities, which is slightly more frequent in men. They explain these differences as a result of social role expectations, gender conformity pressures, and the type of organizational contexts.

Various multinational organizations have implemented programs to enhance these competencies. IBM (2022) has increased the global representation of women, with their annual executive incentive program now including a diversity modifier to drive accountability in improving executive diverse representation and closing the gap. In that same year, 42.2% of global promotions went to women. They invested \$250 million in skills-focused training programs, and their STEM for Girls program, launched in India, is designed to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation among the next generation of women in that country through mentorship and project-based learning paths. IBM also notes it was recognized by the Comparably Awards for Business Culture Excellence as the Best Company for Women and Best CEOs for Women, demonstrating their commitment through representation metrics.

Unilever (2024) has similarly integrated conscious leadership workshops into its management development programs and has demonstrated that gender equity in management positions (55% in middle management) requires systemic policies. These policies range from accountability metrics to female leadership development programs and equitable parental leave. Accenture (2022) also reported benefits in talent retention after implementing policies that promote work-life balance. With 50% of its board of directors composed of women, they achieved an increase in the number of women by 5.9 percentage points overall and 3.8% among executive staff, also increasing “the

number of multicultural women to 21.2%, up from 15.6% previously” (2022, para. 12).

The pandemic accelerated the appreciation for these leadership skills. According to the McKinsey & Company report (2021), organizations with greater female representation in leadership positions demonstrated a higher capacity for adaptation during the crisis, highlighting the strategic importance of leaders who can combine operational efficiency with human sensitivity during that period.

There is currently a trend to incorporate these approaches into organizational development programs. Training in emotional intelligence, managing diverse teams, and assertive communication has become a necessity in the executive training of leading companies. This transformation in human talent management models reflects institutional recognition of the strategic value of competencies that have always been traditionally associated with female leadership.

Persistent Challenges in Female Representation in Human Resources

As established in the previous section, the field of human resources shows a significant level of female presence globally. In the U.S., according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), women represent 76.1% of professionals in managerial roles within this area. However, this representation significantly decreases at higher executive levels. Data reveals that only 33% of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) are women, indicating a clear vertical segregation in career progression.

This disparity becomes more pronounced when analyzing specific functions: while women predominantly serve as human resources specialists (75.5%) and training managers (65.8%), their presence is lower in strategic positions linked to senior management. The ILO (2019) attributes this gap to the unequal distribution of family responsibilities and persistent biases in promotion processes, stating that “companies need to put aside biases when attributing roles to women and men in the labor market, workplaces, and the home” (p. 80).

The ILO (2015), in identifying the factors explaining this situation, highlights that biases in promotion processes, women’s limited participation in informal power networks, and stereotypes associating leadership with traditionally masculine characteristics are unconscious biases. These elements create what some researchers refer to as horizontal barriers that limit access to certain areas of influence within the same organization (Arnau Ripollés, 2005).

A recurring pattern shows a differentiated distribution of functions by gender in human resources. Women are concentrated in areas of employee well-being and training, while men dominate roles in organizational transformation and global talent strategy (Ely et al., 2011). This division reinforces biased perceptions about the strategic capabilities of female leadership.

The situation is also complicated by factors external to organizations. UN Women (2019) emphasizes that the disproportionate burden of family care and social norms regarding gender roles create disadvantages in female professional trajectories. When examining this situation in relation to organizational cultures that restrict high-level positions to female personnel, it becomes evident that a large percentage of women must overcome additional obstacles to reach leadership positions.

What has been presented reveals a pattern that, although not exclusive to the human resources field, is clearly manifested in this sector, where a high percentage of female representation does not translate into equal opportunities at executive level.

Advancements in Gender Equality Policies in Human Resources

In recent decades, human resource management has gained increasing relevance with gender equality policies, a progression driven by international commitments and corporate initiatives. The ILO (2020) has been instrumental in this process, promoting Conventions III (1958, concerning discrimination in employment and occupation) and 156 (1981, concerning workers with family res-

possibilities), as well as SDG 5 of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015). These initiatives include participation quotas, mentorship programs, and work-life balance measures to correct imbalances and improve conditions for women.

These foundations of international commitment have been implemented to help organizations understand the need for equitable access to jobs, taking differences into account. To varying degrees, this has been achieved at the corporate level, as evidenced by reports from McKinsey & Company (2023), which “reveals hard-won progress in management positions, with female representation in senior leadership at its highest level ever” (para. 3).

One of the main challenges identified is the lack of systems to measure the progress of these initiatives. The ILO (2017) acknowledges that organizations lack structured indicators to evaluate the improvement of opportunities for women, a monitoring task that, paradoxically, also falls to human resources. Added to this is the fact that, in many cases, initiatives do not go beyond adapting women to organizational structures. At first glance, there seems to be nothing wrong with this adaptation, but it becomes problematic when the adaptation occurs within a system that remains unchanged.

Senior leadership commitment is crucial for the success of these policies. Companies like Unilever reported in 2023 that 55% of women were in managerial positions: “we have made progress through sustained leadership accountability and awareness, clear goal setting and measurement, and programs to recruit, retain, and develop female talent” (Unilever, 2023, para. 8).

In the corporate world, where the retention of both male and female talent seeks equity, this has shifted from an aspiration to a strategic necessity. Increasingly, companies are taking on the challenge of transforming their organizational cultures to foster female talent. The Women Approved 2024 ranking by the Más Mujeres Institute (2025) highlights companies that have made concrete progress

toward the professional development of women. This year's top 10 companies demonstrate that it's possible to create such work environments where women have access to opportunities, serving as an example for other organizations to follow.

Unilever's case demonstrates that progress requires support beyond quantifiable goals linked to direct incentives, specific budgets, and other ways of showing movement in the right direction. Their approach combines equitable parental leave, annual salary audits, and gender-aware leadership development programs. This involves an understanding of cultural change, where policies become practices that transform the experience of working at a company.

A female perspective on human talent management transforms the experience by integrating expectations and leadership styles into the design of organizational strategies. This perspective highlights dimensions that might otherwise go unnoticed in decision-making, contributing to professional development not as a symbolic gesture, but as a strategy to create work cultures capable of retaining true talent.

Proposal for Talent Management from a Female Perspective

From the literature review, it's clear there's a need to continue implementing concrete strategies to advance toward equitable, gender-aware human talent management. Looking at this situation, human resources departments must conduct a systematic review of recruitment and promotion processes. Bohnet (2016) argues that many gender biases in selection, evaluation, and promotion processes aren't due to ill intent, but rather unconscious biases. To counteract them, she proposes designing environments and processes that limit opportunities for these biases to influence decisions.

Bohnet also insists that diversity within selection committees (in terms of gender, ethnicity, experience, and thought) reduces the possibility of biased decisions and improves evaluation, making it fairer. In homogeneous committees, deci-

sions generally reflect shared stereotypes, whereas diversity introduces perspectives that can challenge prejudices and enhance the analysis of candidates' competencies and potential. Among her proposals, it's highlighted that personal information (name, age, gender, or even educational institutions that could generate biases) should be removed from resumes in the early stages of recruitment to reduce gender discrimination and other types of bias that might arise

According to Ely et al. (2011), the most effective mentorship and professional development programs combine theoretical training with access to organizational influence networks. Deloitte (2022) indicates that leading companies successfully implementing this inclusion report improvements in process equity due to increased motivation and productivity, and also experience a significant reduction in turnover among female staff, especially in leadership roles. These organizations succeed in attracting and retaining diverse talent, building work cultures where women feel valued and have opportunities for advancement.

In addition to these measures, the following are recommended:

- Establish gender-focused evaluation indicators to monitor the true impact of inclusive policies on women's promotion and working conditions.
- Train leaders and middle managers in bias awareness and inclusive leadership so that transformation doesn't solely depend on human resources departments.
- Promote schemes for shared family and work responsibilities, such as equitable parental leave and flexible hours that benefit both men and women equally.
- Increase the visibility of female leadership through internal campaigns that support professional women to strengthen their confidence and retention within the organization.

These measures aim to advance talent management with a gender perspective, from a female viewpoint, making it not just a matter of equity, but also of organizational efficiency, sustainability, and leveraging available human capital.

The conducted document analysis helps acknowledge that the female perspective in human talent management asserts that women don't contribute something men cannot, but they have consistently brought organizational practices aligned with talent development-oriented leadership styles. This isn't a biological difference, but rather the result of social and cultural trajectories that have shaped emotional and communicative competencies in different ways. In human resources, where management requires soft skills like active listening, negotiation, adaptability, and systemic vision, these competencies are especially valuable.

The feminine is not inherently better or more effective, but its integration into talent management has broadened the landscape, making new forms of leadership visible. It has also pushed organizations to abandon structures that hinder this growth in favor of those adopting more humane and sustainable models. Thus, the value isn't in idealization; it's in recognizing that a diverse perspective, including the feminine without excluding the masculine, improves management and fosters a more just company that adapts to the modern world.

Conclusions

This study draws four conclusions regarding female leadership in human talent management:

The first conclusion is that female leadership brings distinct strategic value to organizations. Competencies such as empathy, collaboration, and emotional intelligence, traditionally associated with a female management style, have proven particularly effective in today's work environments. Women more frequently adopt transformational leadership, focusing on inspiring teams and fostering inclusive work atmospheres.

res, which is crucial for retaining and developing talent. This contribution became highly visible during the pandemic, when organizations with greater female representation in leadership roles demonstrated greater adaptability.

The second conclusion is that significant obstacles still hinder women's professional progression in human resources. Although women account for 76% of managerial positions in this field, their presence sharply declines at higher executive levels. This gap is explained by the unequal distribution of family responsibilities, biases in promotion processes, and stereotypes that associate strategic leadership with traditionally masculine characteristics. There's also evidence of functional segregation, where women concentrate in areas like employee well-being, while men predominantly occupy roles in organizational transformation.

The third conclusion is that while progress has been made in gender equality policies, driven by international commitments like the SDGs and ILO conventions, these efforts need more rigorous application for a greater transformative impact. Companies like Unilever demonstrate that progress requires quantifiable goals, dedicated budgets, and strong commitment from senior lea-

dership. Implementing isolated measures isn't enough; it's essential to transform organizational cultures to make them truly inclusive.

The fourth conclusion is that gender-aware talent management benefits the entire organization. Strategies like reviewing selection processes, mentorship programs with access to influence networks, and implementing equity indicators have proven effective in leading companies. Integrating diverse leadership styles helps build more adaptable organizations prepared for the challenges of the 21st century.

As a documentary review, a limitation of this study is its reliance on secondary data, which restricts the ability to provide direct empirical findings or analyze specific organizational contexts. However, for future research, we recommend conducting empirical studies with primary data to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed strategies for talent management from a female perspective. The ILO has highlighted the lack of such measurement systems in organizations, which is necessary to truly transform the working world rather than just making adaptations without the necessary systemic changes.

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