

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP AMONG FEMALE MANAGERS IN THE SPANISH LOGISTICS INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

At present, the logistics industry in Spain is one that is mostly male-dominated, and women middle and top managers make up less than 10% of the workforce at these management levels. There is therefore an obvious lack of parity in this sector, even though Spanish regulation at present supports and promotes gender parity in different sectors including the logistics industry. Our article uses as a basis the fifth Sustainable Development Goal, “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, and we analyzed gender equality linked to sustainability based on the responses obtained from twenty-four female middle and top managers of the logistics sector who were interviewed via a questionnaire of 52 questions. The research for this study was based on (Avery & Bergsteiner’s, 2011) Honeybee and Locust Sustainable Leadership Model and had as its goal to determine how female middle and top managers in the logistics sector in Spain perceived leadership in their workplace. Findings showed interesting results, indicating that the Spanish logistics industry seemed to be a mixture of bee- and locust-type leadership.

Keywords: Sustainable Leadership, Sustainable Development Goals, Sustainability, Locust Leadership, Honeybee Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Contextual Framework

Sustainable leadership is a type of leadership with a long-term perspective and that is based on acting in a fair and ethical manner with all stakeholders (*i.e.*, both internal and external to the company). The adoption of a long-term perspective has aided companies to survive times of hardship such as economic depressions, recessions, and intense global competition (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011), and situations such as, for example, the whole of the COVID-19 context which we are experiencing at the moment. According to Avery and Bergsteiner, sustainable leadership is “reflected in the system of principles, processes, practices and values that a firm adopts in pursuing its future” (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011) and that “sustainable businesses should pursue to meet the needs of the present without affecting the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). There is therefore a need for new leadership styles. Leaders have shifted from leadership styles that are often more reflective of individual personality or self-interest to ones that are more people and societally oriented. Often, sustainable leadership has multiple advantages such as collegial management with wider people involvement, lower costs, and a better brand reputation and greater societal respect.

Research has analyzed sustainable leadership in several different settings, such as educational contexts and organizational structures (Barr & Downing, 2012; Davies, 2007; Lambert, 2011). The first sustainable leadership framework dates back to 2006 and was developed by Hargreaves and Fink who analyzed sustainable leadership at the organizational level in the educational sector. According to these authors, sustainable leadership enables the nurturing of an educational context that promotes the interchange of opinions and ideas. Furthermore, sustainable leadership possesses a futuristic commitment to the powers that

influence it and develops an educational environment of corporate multiplicity that stimulates the interchange of valuable opinions and effective exercises in societies of common learning and development (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

The authors Hargreaves & Fink (2006); Davies (2007); Lambert (2011) also developed sustainable leadership frameworks at the organizational level in the education sector both in the United Kingdom and the United States (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Davies, 2007; Lambert, 2011). According to Davies (2007), sustainable development entails key elements that determine the long-term development of the school concerned. Such leadership is based on a moral purpose that provides success that is accessible to all. According to (Lambert, 2011), sustainable leadership necessitates the commitment at all levels of the organization to developing a culture in which leadership skills may be developed (Lambert, 2011).

In 2010, Casserley & Critchley created a model that aimed at promoting sustainable leadership through the development of sustainable leaders, thereby not operating at the organization level but at the individual level. They described the performance of sustainable leaders as being based on three core elements: (1) reflection on action, (2) psychological intelligence, and (3) physiological well-being. These three elements would need to be accompanied by the adherence of the individuals to the culture of the organization. According to these authors, sustainable leaders were more likely to create sustainable organizations (Casserley & Critchley, 2010).

Avery & Bergsteiner (2011) developed a sustainable leadership model that is based on 23 key factors that underlie sustainable leadership and which, if addressed together, will contribute over time to organizational performance improvement. Compared to (Davies, 2007; Lambert's, 2011) models, Avery & Bergsteiner's framework has been applied to a more ample variety of contexts and not just the educational sector.

Avery & Bergsteiner's (2011) framework divides organizations into two main categories, which are known as (1) "locust leadership" and (2) "honeybee leadership". The locust leadership philosophy is very much based on the concept of making profit, and at the very extreme, of making profit at any cost, even if it involves harming the natural environment (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). This philosophy can be summarized as being an attitude that one's own advantage can be achieved only by making others suffer (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). On the other hand, the honeybee leadership approach undertakes a "stakeholder-oriented, social and sharing approach to leadership... Honeybee leadership assumes that a company can be sustainable only if the basic needs of all stakeholders are considered" (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Moreover, it is more holistic in nature and is based on generating stakeholder value. This is again very much aligned with the seventeenth Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations. Although the honeybee model has been found to be more sustainable and profitable in the long term, many companies still persist with the more conventional locust model, which is based on short-term evidence-lacking decision making (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Due to its more ample potential applicability, Avery & Bergsteiner's framework will be used as a basis for the methodological approach undertaken (*i.e.*, as will be later described in the Purpose section of this article).

Female Leadership in the Spanish Corporate and Public Sector

At present, women have scarce representation in management positions both in the private and public sectors in the Western world. Over the years, the participation of women in the workforce has increased considerably (*i.e.*, in lower and medium level positions), which is a very positive result (Velte, 2017); however, women are still poorly represented in higher positions. The European Commission (EC) has over the years developed a database on the participation of women in decision-making bodies so as to be able to analyse the evolution of the role of women in different sectors (Envision 2030 Goal 17, 2021). Women's employment rates have reached historically high levels in the European Union (EU), and women are more than ever in leadership positions; however, considerable work remains to be achieved to attain

gender equality. The participation of women in the labor market is still lower than that of men in the EU, and their average pay is still circa 16% lower. Women rarely reach high managerial positions, with only 6.3% of CEO positions being occupied by women (Achieving Gender Balance in the Decision-Making, 2021).

These figures on gender inequality clearly illustrate the necessity for the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which is “to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. We could extrapolate the following three specific targets (Achieving Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Goals, 2021).

- Target 5.1 – End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- Target 5.5 – Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life.
- Target 5.c – Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

Gender equality is considered by authors Miotto & Alexandre (Miotto & Villajoana, 2019) to be a multifactorial concept that is based on specific normative principles such as those of anti-poverty, anti-exploitation, and income equality, just to mention a few. Furthermore, it has been shown that the inclusion of women in corporate leadership positions leads to more diverse and inclusive management teams and improved intangible benefits such as those of reputation and legitimacy (Miotto & Villajoana, 2019). Furthermore, it is also linked to another basic concept, which is corporate social responsibility (Iglesias & Gonzalez, 2021).

The European Commission results expressed above may be surprising when we compare between different countries and consider that most recent graduates in Spain are women and that presently 45% of the Spanish workforce are women (PWC, 2012).

In Spain, the percentage of women in senior positions reached 20% in 2016, which is still under the European average of 23%. The leading public companies on which this information is based comprise the main index of the Spanish stock exchange, the Ibex 35 (Diez et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the Spanish Organic Law 3/2007 of 22 March 2007 sets out as a fundamental principle the equality of men and women and expressly mentions the participation of women on the boards of directors of mercantile companies, especially those that are obliged by law to publicly disclose their accounts. The idea behind this law was to increase the presence of women on the boards of directors of companies over the following years so as to reach parity in this respect between men and women. This notion is further supported by the Royal Decree 1615/2009 of October 26th that grants companies that meet specific requirements a distinctive gender equality badge dedicated to Gender Equality that is valid for a period of three years. This distinctive badge granted by the Spanish Equality Ministry recognized the excellent job that companies so recognized are doing to ensure equality between men and women in the workplace. It must be noted, though, that there is no obligation in this law for companies to achieve such parity, there being no “must” element; it is left to best intentions or, perhaps, pressure from shareholders to achieve results.

Specifically, in the logistics sector in Spain, women managers are not common, and the top management of logistics companies tends to be very largely male. According to a recent article from the Spanish online newspaper “El Mercantil” dated from March 6th, 2020, in a recent report, only 8.4% of managers in the logistics industry are women. Traditionally, the logistics sector has been very much thought of publicly as comprising only such stereotypically beefy activities as driving heavy trucks and heavy lifting and handling work in warehouses, but the growth of e-commerce, the automation of warehousing, and the advent of the digital transformation in recent years have created more and new opportunities for women in the logistics industry. Nevertheless, it is important to continue working on these policies to ensure that companies from different sectors (*i.e.*, including the logistics sector) continue to progress on the issue of gender equality in the workplace. This will surely impact the existence of a more sustainable type of leadership in the company.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The main aim of this study was to identify the level of sustainable leadership among female managers working in the logistics sector in Spain. The research for this study will take as a framework Avery and

Bergsteiner's Honeybee and Locust sustainable leadership model and will consider the following research questions:

- How do female managers in the logistics sector in Spain perceive leadership in the companies where they work?
- Is their perception aligned with a more honeybee or a more locust type of leadership approach, or neither?

Over the years, the sustainable leadership approach has been gaining ground among a few scholars. This study will examine the concept in more detail *via* a qualitative analysis using as an empirical sample, a group of 24 female middle and top managers in the logistics industry. The study itself is innovative in the sense that it is unusual for topics of sustainable leadership and female leadership to be combined in one article. Furthermore, it is not usual to apply this type of analysis to a sector that is male dominated, as is the case of the logistics industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this study was to identify the level of sustainable leadership among female managers working in the logistics sector in Spain, a fairly select target group, since only 8% of managers in this sector are women.

To accomplish this goal, a qualitative study was carried out entailing the development of a questionnaire composed of 52 questions, which were aimed at middle and top managers in the logistics sector in Spain.

This questionnaire was developed and based on the sustainable leadership framework of Avery and Bergsteiner. Avery & Bergsteiner's (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011) framework was used as a model for our research and adapted it to our research context. Twenty-four female supply chain managers participated in our study and contributed their views on their current leadership situation in this sector.

The questionnaire comprised 52 questions, 44 of which aimed at analyzing the level of sustainable leadership, while 8 introductory questions aimed at getting to know a little more about the profile of each woman being interviewed. A five-point Likert scale (*i.e.*, 1–5) was used in further refining the answers to all 44 "sustainable leadership" questions. The questionnaires were created using Google Forms and were sent digitally *via* email and WhatsApp. The whole of the COVID-19 context forced us to select this method of data collection. It is important to note that all questionnaires were anonymous.

Overall, 24 middle- and top-level female managers completed our questionnaire. The profile of the female managers interviewed was very ample as shown below regarding the sectors in which they worked.

Sector	Number of Female Managers
Nutrition sector	1
Logistics and transport	3
Logistics	5
International logistics	2
Education	2

Pharmaceutical industry	1
Entertainment	1
Industry	2
Trains	1
Mobility	1
Supply chain operators	1
Research	1
Technology	1
IT	1
Distribution	1

12.5% of the interviewees had CEO or General Management positions, 79.2% had middle managerial positions, and 8.3% were categorized as “other” (*i.e.*, positions that were non-managerial). Most of the interviewees had considerable work experience: 3 had 1–10 years’ experience, 11 had 11–20 years’ experience, and 10 had 21–30 years’ experience. When the interviewees were asked the percentage of female managers at their company, 62.5% of the women interviewed said that women occupied 30% or less of the managerial positions at their company (with 25% of the women highlighting that less than 10% of their managerial staff was female).

The questionnaire was carried out in Spanish and consisted of the questions below, which have been translated into English.

Part I: Introductory Questions:

- Sector
- Role
- Years of experience
- You work in organization X. Could you tell me a bit more about your organization?
- Have you always worked here? Why did you join this company?
- What challenges do you currently face in your organization? Name one or two (the most relevant)
- Would you say that there are many female managers in your organization? Could you give us a percentage estimate of how many women there are in your organization?
- How do you think the role of women managers in logistics could be improved?

Part II: Sustainable Leadership Questions:

- 1) In terms of training and development, I aim to develop everyone continuously.
- 2) In terms of training and development, I aim to develop everyone selectively.
- 3) I value long tenure at all levels.
- 4) I accept high staff turnover.
- 5) I mostly make promotions from within the organization wherever possible.
- 6) I mostly appoint people from outside the organization wherever possible.
- 7) I care about employees’ welfare.
- 8) For me employees are interchangeable and employee costs entail a significant part of the organization’s overheads.
- 9) In my opinion, a CEO works as the top team member and speaks for the collective group.
- 10) In my opinion, a CEO is a decision maker here.
- 11) “Doing the right thing” in the business is more important than profit.
- 12) For me, ethical behaviour is negotiable, an assessable risk.
- 13) I prioritize long-term business objectives over those that are short-term.
- 14) I prioritize short-term profits and growth.

- 15) I think that change is an evolving process.
- 16) I think that change is something rapid, volatile, perhaps even ad hoc.
- 17) I think that people should work with maximum independence from others to increase their profits
- 18) I think people should follow their managers and obey instructions.
- 19) When I set up business objectives, I always stress the importance of protecting the environment.
- 20) In my opinion, the environment is there to be exploited to increase profit.
- 21) I think that the interests of the people and of the community are a big part of the business environment and should be carefully considered when making business decisions.
- 22) I think the people and community that comprise the business environment should be exploited since they are there to help the business to make profit.
- 23) I think that everyone matters, independently of whether they are related to the business or not.
- 24) I think that the shareholders are the only stakeholders that matter.
- 25) I believe in vision statements embodying a shared view of the future as an important strategic tool.
- 26) I believe that a shared view of the future is an essential strategic tool.
- 27) I believe the decision making in the business should be consensual and devolved.
- 28) I believe the decision making in the business should be primarily manager centred.
- 29) I believe staff can manage themselves.
- 30) I believe managers should manage their staff.
- 31) I think team working should be extensive and empowered.
- 32) I think team working should be limited and manager centred.
- 33) I believe in fostering and enabling widely shared culture.
- 34) I think culture is weak except for an emphasis on a short-term focus.
- 35) I believe that knowledge should be shared throughout the organization.
- 36) I believe that knowledge-sharing is not important, in fact, possession of knowledge should be limited to a few gatekeepers.
- 37) In business, I need to foster a high degree of trust through relationships and goodwill.
- 38) In business, we must control and monitor in order to compensate for low trust levels.
- 39) In my opinion, strategic innovation is especially important and therefore should be encouraged at all levels of the organization.
- 40) In my opinion, innovation is risky and therefore should only be decided by managers.
- 41) I highly value emotionally committed staff.
- 42) In my opinion, financial rewards suffice as motivators, therefore I do not expect emotional commitment from the staff.
- 43) In my opinion, quality ought to be embedded within the culture of the business.
- 44) In my opinion, quality may only be achieved through mechanisms of control.

Each of these questions was evaluated *via* a Likert scale with a range of 1 to 5.

RESULTS

The second part of the questionnaire was aimed at evaluating the level and application of key elements making up Avery and Bergsteiner's (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011) framework that if undertaken together will contribute over time (*i.e.*, and in the long term) to organizational performance improvement. The initial results are shown in Table 3. The results are presented in two different formats: firstly, as the number of respondents and secondly as the percentage of respondents that gave a specific answer (*i.e.*, number of respondents divided by 24).

Research Questions	1	2	3	4	5
1			5 (20.8%)	6 (25%)	13 (54.2%)
2		2 (8.3%)	4 (16.7%)	11 (45.8%)	7 (29.2%)
3		1 (4.2%)	6 (25%)	9 (37.5%)	8 (33.3%)

4	1 (4.2%)	6(25%)	6 (25%)	8 (33.3%)	3 (12,5%)
5		1 (4.2%)		7 (29.2%)	16 (66.7%)
6	1 (4.2%)	6(25%)	9 (37.5%)	5 (20.8%)	3 (12.5%)
7				3 (12.5%)	21 (87.5%)
8	7 (29.2%)	10 (41.7%)	4 (16.7%)	1 (4.2%)	2 (8.3%)
9	1 (4.2%)	4 (16.7%)	8 (33.3%)	4 (16.7%)	7 (29.2%)
10	2 (8.3%)	2 (8.3%)	2 (8.3%)	9 (37.5%)	9 (37.5%)
11		3 (12.5%)	5 (20.8%)	7 (29.2%)	9 (37.5%)
12		4 (16.7%)	7 (29.2%)	8 (33.3%)	5 (20.8%)
13		1 (4.2%)	11 (45.8%)	8 (33.3%)	4 (16.7%)
14	8 (33.3%)	12 (50%)	3 (12.55)	1 (4.2%)	
15			1 (4.2%)	4 (16.7%)	19 (79.2%)
16	3 (12.5%)	9 (37.5%)	7 (29.2%)	3(12.5%)	2 (8.3%)
17	5 (20.8%)	10 (41.7%)	5 (20.8%)	3(12.5%)	1 (4.2%)
18	3(12.5%)	10 (41.7%)	9 (37.5%)	2 (8.3%)	
19		2 (8.3%)	6 (25%)	9(37.5%)	7 (29.2%)
20	20 (83.3%)	4 (16.75)			
21				7(29.2%)	17 (70.8%)
22	19 (79.2%)	5 (21.8%)			
23			3 (12.5%)	2 (8.3%)	19 (79.2%)
24	14 (58.3%)	8 (33.3%)	2 (8.3%)		
25				6(255)	18 (75%)
26	13 (54.2%)	7(29.2%)	2 (8.3%)	2 (8.3%)	
27		2 (8.3%)	5 (20.8%)	9 (37.55)	8 (33.3%)
28	4 (16.7%)	7 (29.2%)	9 (37.5%)	3 (12.5%)	1 (4.2%)
29	1 (4.2%)	4 (16.7%)	11 (45.8%)	7 (29.2%)	1 (4.2%)
30	1 (4.2%)	4 (16.7%)	7 (29.2%)	7 (29.2%)	5 (20.8%)
31			1 (4.2%)	3 (12.5%)	20 (83.3%)
32	11 (45.8%)	9 (37.5%)	3 (12.5%)		1 (4.2%)
33			2 (8.3%)	5 (20.8%)	17 (70.8%)
34		1 (4.2%)	2 (8.3%)	9 (37.5%)	12 (50%)
35				4 (16.7%)	20 (83.3%)
36	19 (79.2%)	4(16.7%)	1 (4.2%)		
37		1 (4.2%)	3 (12.5%)	9 (37.5%)	11 (45.8%)
38	7 (29.2%)	8 (33.3%)	7 (29.2%)	2 (8.3%)	
39				5(20.8%)	19 (79.2%)
40	15(62.5%)	7 (29.2%)	2 (8.3%)		
41			1 (4.2%)	3 (12.5%)	20 (83.3%)
42	6 (25%)	16 5(66.7%)	2 (8.3%)		
43			2 (8.3%)	6(25%)	16 (66.7%)
44	7 (29.2%)	8(33.3%)	5 (20.8%)	4 (16.7%)	

Avery & Bergsteiner's sustainable leadership classification was used to analyse how female managers in the logistics sector in Spain perceive leadership in the companies where they work. The categorization system used in our research was based on the following three criteria:

foundational practices (questions 1 to 26), higher-level practices (questions 27 to 38), and key performance drivers (questions 39 to 44). These three criteria served as the basis for the analyses of the study's results, as is shown hereon.

DISCUSSION

The survey results demonstrated that there is a clear need for companies in the logistics sector to continue working toward achieving sustainable business practices.

Continuous training and development of employees did not seem to be a priority for companies (50.4% of the interviewees completely disagreed that there was such a need). This seems to contradict the current notion that businesses and corporations from all over the world should be people-centred and people should therefore lie at the core of all organizational activities (Jamal et al., 2021; Goffee & Jones, 2013). The latter creates long-term value not only for employees, but also consumers, besides a host of different stakeholders (Shah, 2019). The above findings were surprising, especially in the times we live in, when there are companies that are considerably advanced in this regard and which even allow the workers to select the courses and training that they consider most adequate for them (*i.e.*, thereby further giving employees ownership of and responsibility for their training and encouraging their personal development). With respect to the issue of promotions, the internal promotion of employees did not appear to be commonplace (66.7% of the interviewees completely disagreed that internal promotions were performed on a frequent basis), even though it is a recommended practice that contributes to employee development and nurtures the commitment between the employee and the company. Many of the female managers understood that, in general, there seemed to be a tendency for companies to hire people from outside the organization. Most respondents recognized and accepted the existence of change management; 40% of them considered that change is an evolving process, and more than 50% defined it as something fast, volatile, and even something that could occur spontaneously.

A good part of the respondents did not agree to high rates of employee turnover at all levels of the organization. Staff turnover can be costly for companies, and therefore it would be ideal to keep the latter to a minimum. Therefore, organizational leaders must properly guide staff through changes by maintaining their commitment and engagement toward the organization (Qablan & Framnesh, 2019; Irfan & Husam, 2021). Furthermore, greater organizational effectiveness may be achieved through the alignment of human capital with corporate goals and objectives (Marimuthu et al., 2019; Douglas et al., 2017).

The female managers interviewed prioritized long-term over short-term business objectives, not giving priority to the company's profits above all else. They considered that effective company management was a strategic tool that ensures the achievement of future objectives.

The well-being of employees was found not to be the companies' main concern, as affirmed by all interviewees. Furthermore, most respondents considered that employees were interchangeable in their company. They also felt that it was a cost that was important when analyzing the company's accounts.

The issue of the correct management of matters of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is becoming increasingly important in every company. With regards to this section of our study, our research led us to the following conclusions. With regards to the company's CSR, there is still a lot of work to be done in this area, since almost 70% of the female interviewees said that environmental protection was not a priority except when it coincided with the company's financial and commercial interests. The respondents, however, did reject the notion that the environment only existed for it to be exploited to benefit the company and increase its profits.

Moreover, the interviewees agreed that there was a general lack of commitment from the company's perspective towards people and community, even though the participation and collaboration of both these stakeholders are necessary to improve and better develop the

business. However, respondents did reject the assumption that both people and community should be exploited to increase the business' profits. They did, however, recognize that shareholders were very important to the business and that concern for their satisfaction was higher than the concern for the rest of the people and the community.

All matters related to innovative leadership were found to be important. However, from the survey responses, knowledge sharing within the organization was not considered relevant, and knowledge was considered to be the domain of only a few, effectively on a "need-to-know" basis. In fact, the survey results seemed to highlight a belief among the interviewees that business decision making should be carried out mainly by the management of the company. It was observed that 83.3% of the personnel were committed to the company. Although it was not specified how, the respondents did seem to indicate that strategic innovation was important and should be encouraged at all levels of the organization.

This research took as its framework (Avery & Bergsteiner's, 2011) honeybee and locust sustainable leadership model. The female managers interviewed from the logistics sector seemed to consider that in the companies where they worked, sustainable leadership was not being implemented at its fullest. From their responses, for example, CSR did not seem to be a priority, leaving the "people" perspective in second place in the organization's strategic priority list. According to (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011), organizations that are "100" percent "pure" in nature as regards the honeybee and locust leadership elements are rare to find. According to both authors, we are most likely to find a mixture of both types of leadership elements, arguing that this trend is often historic or may reflect a personal preference of the organization's founder (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011).

The results of this study are aligned with (Kalkavan's, 2015) study, which aimed to evaluate the level of sustainable leadership in the Turkish insurance industry. Kalkavan also used Avery & Bergsteiner's sustainable leadership model as a framework for her study. Her study results showed that despite the existence of significant leadership elements among managers of the Turkish insurance industry, sustainable leadership skills fell short of expectations. This is very much aligned with the results from this study where it was shown from the perspective of the female managers from the Spanish logistics sector that the leadership that was being implemented in their sector was a mixture of the two diametrically opposed bee and locust leadership philosophies (Kalkavan, 2015).

Sustainable leadership according to (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011) goes beyond just complying with the three pillars of sustainability, which are financial, social, and environmental. Theoretically, a honeybee approach would be ideal. In honeybee organizations, the participation of stakeholders such as customers, employees, and suppliers is key. In this context, managers should act as stewards for future generations and "plan for the long term and protect the firm's reputation through implementation of ethical practices (caring for the environment and local communities)" (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). From this study's findings, in the Spanish logistics industry, there is still a long way to go, and from the authors' perspective, the status quo needs to be improved considerably.

Although over the years, the participation of women in the workforce has increased considerably, at present, women have scarce representation in management positions both in the private and public sectors. In Spain, the percentage of women in senior positions reached 20% in 2016. In the logistics sector, this figure stands at circa 8%. The profile of the female managers interviewed was very varied, ranging from the food sector to the IT sector. Even though we cannot deny that the role of women in leadership positions in the corporate world is becoming increasingly prominent over time, there remains a long way to go. The increasing presence of women in leadership has its benefits, many of which are aligned with those of the implementation of sustainable leadership strategies. Among the benefits to highlight are enhanced corporate governance, better strategies, and corporate performance through focusing more on accountability and ethical behavior (Brieger et al., 2019).

At present, there are still several obstacles that seem to hinder women's professional development, such as reconciling personal and professional obligations and the fact that many

organizations are still male-biased, making women's professional progression difficult (PWC, 2012). The pressure that women face to conform to an organization's executive leadership culture is tremendous (Dzubinski et al., 2017). Over time, the logistics sector has been seen as the domain of such stereotypically beefy activities as driving heavy trucks and heavy lifting and handling work in warehouses, but the growth of e-commerce, the automation of warehousing, and the advent of the digital transformation in recent years have created more and new opportunities for women in the logistics industry.

This study is very much aligned with the fifth Sustainable Development Goal, which is "to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations, 2021). In this respect, our study researches the situation of female managers in the logistics sector and more specifically evaluates the leadership style in which companies endeavor their activity, (1) the way in which leadership is carried out by them, and (2) the level of sustainable leadership that is aligned with the compliance of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals described above.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this research was to analyse how female managers in the logistics sector perceived leadership in the companies where they work, and how this leadership fit within Avery & Bergsteiner's honeybee and locust sustainable leadership model. The study results demonstrated that leadership in the Spanish logistics industry was a mixture of honeybee and locust leadership elements. This context is quite common as it is very difficult to find an organization that is 100 percent consistent with either honeybee or locust leadership elements.

Although the study was quite effective in data gathering, considering the limited number of middle and top female managers that exist in the Spanish logistics industry, it did have its limitations, such as:

- The fact that the logistics industry in Spain is mainly a male-dominated industry, thus limiting the study sample number.
- The pandemic situation that we are currently facing was also a limitation in this study.

To conclude, the results from this study seem to indicate that the logistics industry still has a considerable way to go regarding the implementation of sustainable leadership. The study itself is innovative in the sense that sustainable leadership and female leadership are not often combined in one article, nor is it common to apply this analysis to a sector that is male dominated, as is the case of the logistics industry. The authors understand, however, that progress is being made gradually toward a sustainable type of leadership in companies of the logistics sector in Spain. However, improvements still need to be made in the different aspects included in these conclusions. Nonetheless, there are no doubts that work will continue in this direction, given that many companies are becoming more aware of the favourable impact that the implementation of sustainable leadership practices can have on their income statement. Sustainability with time has become more than a simple trend in the corporate world. With time, it has come to be a necessity, a must-have in any company (Paz, 2021).

As has been shown in this study, public authorities have also noted the need to progress in effective equality between women and men in companies and have therefore developed regulations to promote such measures.

FUNDING

This research received no external funding. Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research work for this study was self-funded. We would like to thank the Research Department at EAE Business School for their institutional support regarding this research.

Finally, many thanks to all the female leaders in the supply chain management sector who helped us with their participation and time as regards the filling in of the questionnaire.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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