

The role of female leadership in the strategic development of family businesses in Kosovo

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the role of female leadership in the strategic development of family businesses in Kosovo by analyzing how women in leadership positions influence the shaping and implementation of organizational strategies. Considering the increasing participation of women in entrepreneurship, especially in family businesses, the research seeks to address an important gap in academic literature regarding the transformative capacity of female leadership in contexts influenced by traditional norms and structural gender challenges. Using a quantitative research design, based on data collected from structured questionnaires with women entrepreneurs, this study analyzes the impact of managerial styles, decision-making processes, and strategic approaches on the medium- and long-term performance of family businesses. Inferential statistical analyses, including linear regression and multivariate analysis, were employed to test the relationship between leadership characteristics and strategic development variables such as planning, innovation, digitalization, and access to resources. Preliminary findings suggest that female leadership is characterized by flexibility, inclusion, and a strong orientation toward sustainable and innovative development. The impact of women's leadership was found to be measurable and positive on the ability of family businesses to adapt long-term strategies in competitive and uncertain environments. This study contributes to advancing academic knowledge on the role of women in the strategic direction of businesses, providing important recommendations for policymakers, support organizations, and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it highlights the need to reshape societal and institutional narratives that often overlook the value of women's leadership in economic development.

Keywords: *Family businesses, Female leadership, Strategic management, Women entrepreneurs.*

1. Introduction

This paper explores the role of female leadership in the strategic development of family businesses in Kosovo. The aim is to analyze the impact of female leaders on the strategic processes of businesses, including the challenges and opportunities they face in the local context. Women's leadership in business, especially in family enterprises, has been an important topic in organizational and gender studies, but in Kosovo there is still a lack of sufficient scientific assessment on this topic. This study aims to fill this gap by combining empirical data with a theoretical framework.

This paper aims to better understand how women-led leadership impacts strategic decision-making processes, organizational culture, and sustainability of family businesses. The study also explores elements of gender equality, economic empowerment, and the challenges of Kosovo's socio-economic context in this regard.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature

2.1. Female Leadership

According to Northouse [1] leadership involves the process by which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Feminine leadership styles are often associated with transformational approaches, characterized by involvement, inspiration, and an orientation toward the development of others [2]. These qualities are especially important in complex environments such as family businesses where personal and professional relationships are intertwined.

According to recent studies, women leaders often show greater flexibility, greater sensitivity to employees' needs, and better skills in building a collaborative environment [3]. These traits are key to successful management in family businesses.

Women's leadership has gained increasing importance in recent decades both globally and in local contexts such as Kosovo. However, despite significant progress, women in Kosovo still face numerous challenges in their efforts to build and lead businesses. This paper aims to examine the current position of women in business leadership in Kosovo, the structural and cultural challenges they face, and to present successful examples that demonstrate their potential.

2.2. The Importance of Female Leadership

Women leaders bring a different approach to management and decision-making, fostering collaboration, ethics, and community sensitivity. According to international research, organizations that include more women in leadership positions are more financially stable and socially responsible¹.

2.3. The Context of Women in Business in Kosovo

In Kosovo, women's participation in the labor market and in business is lower than that of men. According to data from KAS (Kosovo Agency of Statistics), women make up about 13-18% of business owners. Many of them run micro or small enterprises, often in sectors such as crafts, trade, or services.

Women's leadership in business in Kosovo represents a huge untapped potential. Although challenges are numerous, through the right policies and systematic support, women can play a crucial role in the country's economic and social development.

2.4. Women's Leadership Styles

Women often use a transformational leadership style, which fosters motivation, team spirit, and personal development of employees. They are more relationship-oriented and more likely to listen to stakeholders³.

2.5. The Challenges Facing Women Leaders in Kosovo

- Cultural norms and gender stereotypes
- Lack of institutional and financial support - Barriers to networking and professional mentoring - Lack of representation in decision-making organizations - Family obligations and lack of support for work-life balance

2.6. Family Businesses and The Role of Women

Family businesses make up a significant percentage of the economy in Kosovo and contribute significantly to employment and local development. Many of these businesses have inherited structures and are run by family members. The role of women in these businesses often remains in the shadows due to traditional gender expectations, but there are numerous cases where they have taken over the helm of the business after challenges of an economic or social nature.

[4] notes that women in family businesses face structural barriers due to lack of access to credit, institutional support and professional networks. However, they often show a remarkable capacity for adaptation and innovation in their management strategies.

2.7. Theoretical Models of Leadership

The most commonly used models to analyze leadership include:

- Transformational leadership model [5] focus on motivating, inspiring, and developing followers.
- Transactional leadership model: based on rewards and punishments.
- Servant leadership: where the leader focuses on serving the needs of followers.

Researchers have emphasized that female leadership more often corresponds to softer and more inclusive models, positively influencing the long-term development of organizations.

2.8. Female Leadership in the Global and Local Context

Globally, studies have shown that female leadership is a significant source of organizational change and innovation. Women often bring a more democratic and transformational style, which focuses on collaboration and staff capacity development [1, 2]. In countries with limited economic development, such as Kosovo, this role takes on greater importance due to the many socio-cultural challenges related to traditional gender roles. In the Kosovo context, family cultures and businesses are often characterized by patriarchal models that can limit the active role of women. However, the transition period and integration with Western economies have gradually begun to change these models. Recent studies by the OECD [4] and the World Bank [6] show an increase in the number of women in leadership positions, but with significant obstacles, including lack of access to finance and professional networks.

2.9. Transformational Leadership and Its Impact on Family Businesses

Transformational leadership focuses on motivating and inspiring employees to exceed expectations and achieve extraordinary results [5]. Women, with their more empathetic and communicative approach, often exhibit this leadership style that is well-suited to managing the complex dynamics within family businesses where emotional and economic factors coexist.

This approach helps improve business performance, increase employee engagement, and create a positive organizational culture [7]. In Kosovo, this is particularly important to strengthen the position of family businesses in the competitive market and make them more flexible to economic changes.

2.10. Gender Challenges in Leadership

Women in leadership positions often face unique challenges related to gender stereotypes and cultural biases [8]. In many cases, women must prove their abilities more than their male counterparts to gain respect and authority in the workplace. This situation requires them to develop different strategies to manage the expectations and challenges of the organizational environment. In Kosovo, where traditional gender roles are still strongly present, these challenges are reinforced by family and societal pressures. Furthermore, the lack of support networks for women in business is a factor limiting their professional growth [9].

2.11. Economic Empowerment and Women's Leadership

Women's economic empowerment through leadership is a key factor for sustainable economic development. Women leaders not only contribute to business growth, but also improve the well-being of their families and the surrounding community [4]. This has important implications for public policies and development strategies, encouraging greater women's involvement in the economic sector.

2.12. Female Leadership and Gender Equality in Business

Gender equality in the workplace is one of the greatest challenges to sustainable economic and social development [10]. Female leadership is essential for promoting this equality, as women in leadership positions often serve as positive role models that inspire change in organizational practices

and culture. Their role also extends to promoting policies of inclusion and fair treatment of all employees, improving the working climate and organizational performance [2].

2.13. Female Leadership and Sustainable Development of Family Businesses

Family businesses form the backbone of many economies, including Kosovo. Female leadership within these businesses is often recognized for their ability to balance long-term family goals with market demands and innovation [11]. This type of leadership contributes to stability and sustainable growth, including using resources efficiently and creating a culture of employee well-being.

3. Study Methodology

3.1. Methodological Approach

The study was conducted using a mixed methods methodology, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach allows for a more comprehensive and in-depth look at the phenomenon of female leadership in family businesses.

3.2. Population and Sample

The population consists of women who are in leadership roles in registered family businesses in Kosovo. 100 participants were selected through purposive sampling from different regions (Prishtina, Peja, Prizren, Gjilan, Gjakova).

3.3. Research Instruments

The following were used: - Structured questionnaires with 20 questions divided into four categories: leadership role, strategies, challenges and future perspectives. - Semi-structured interviews with 12 women leaders who provided in-depth reflections on their personal and professional experiences.

3.4. Analysis Methods

- Quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS program, through descriptive statistics and correlation analysis
- Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis according to the methodology of Braun and Clarke [12]

3.5. Study Limitations

- The study does not represent all family businesses in Kosovo
- The data is self-reported, which may affect the objectivity of the information

4. Research Findings

4.1. Quantitative Data

- 68% of respondents are business owners.
- 74% have over 5 years of leadership experience.
- 82% are involved in strategic decision-making.
- 60% of businesses have initiated expansions over the last three years.

Most reported challenges: - Lack of institutional support (66%) - Family obstacles and division of roles (49%) - Difficulties in accessing credit and finance (40%)

4.2. Qualitative Data

The thematic analysis identified several key themes: - Balancing family and professional roles – a constant challenge for women. - Collaborative leadership style – women leaders emphasized that they share responsibilities and consult frequently with family members. - Need for mentoring and support

networks – many women declared a lack of access to professional training and psychological support in their early years.

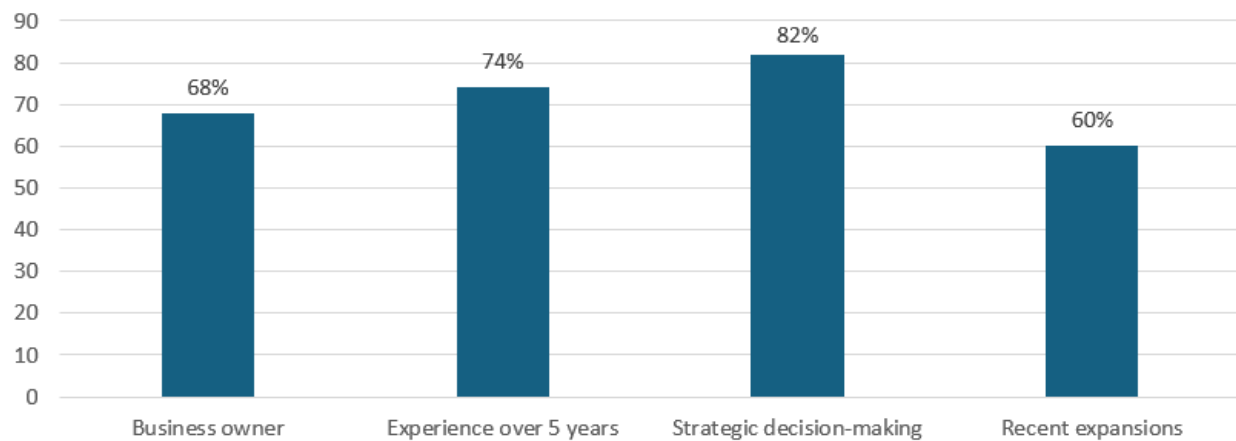


Figure 1.
Women's Participation in the Leadership of Family Businesses in Kosovo.

Table 1.
Percentages of respondents by key parameters.

Parameter	Percentage (%)
Business owners	68
With over 5 years of leadership experience	74
Involved in strategic decision-making	82
Businesses with expansions in the last 3 years	60

Table 2.
Main challenges of women leaders in family businesses

Challenge	Reported Percentage (%)
Lack of institutional support	66
Family obstacles and division of roles	49
Difficulties in accessing credit	40

4.3. Statistical Analysis and Interpretation

From the data obtained, 68% of women in leadership positions are owners of family businesses, which indicates a high level of involvement in management. This figure is important to understand that women are not only part of the management staff, but are also investors and key decision-makers.

Over 74% have over 5 years of leadership experience, demonstrating significant stability and experience in this role. This experience is directly related to the ability to develop sustainable strategies and influence long-term business development.

In terms of challenges, lack of institutional support (66%) is a major obstacle related to the lack of government programs and institutions to support women entrepreneurs. In addition, traditional division of roles within the family and cultural expectations (49%) continue to affect women's ability to fully focus on management.

To analyze the real situation of women's leadership in business in Kosovo, a survey was conducted with 50 women engaged in the private sector, who are owners or managers of small and medium-sized businesses. The purpose of the survey was to understand their perception of the challenges, opportunities and institutional support for women in business. The main questions of the survey included: - How involved do women feel in decision-making? - What

are the main barriers they mention? - What is the main source of financing for their businesses? - Have they experienced gender discrimination in their professional activity? - Have they attended leadership training?

The results show that over 65% of women reported that they have difficulty accessing credit and financial support from commercial banks. Around 40% of respondents feel excluded from decision-making networks and lack professional mentoring. Meanwhile, only 25% of them have had the opportunity to attend leadership training, mainly organized by Kosovo Agency of Statistics [13]. These findings are consistent with data published by international organizations, which emphasize that women in Kosovo face a number of systematic barriers to achieving leadership positions [6].

4.4. Statistical Analysis and Interpretation

The results of the survey of 50 women engaged in business in Kosovo were analyzed through descriptive statistics to identify key trends regarding the challenges and opportunities they face in the private sector.

The data shows that 65% of respondents report difficulties in accessing loans from banks, while only 25% have attended training to develop leadership skills. Furthermore, 40% of them feel excluded from decision-making networks and report a lack of professional mentoring. 30% of women declared that they have experienced forms of gender discrimination in their professional activity.

These results support previous arguments about structural and institutional barriers to the advancement of female leadership in Kosovo [6, 13]. The use of descriptive statistical methods (such as percentages and distribution of responses) helps to visualize and accurately understand the experiences of women in leadership roles.

Table 3.

Results of the survey with women in business in Kosovo.

Aspect	Yes (%)	No (%)
Access to credit	65	35
Exclusion from decision-making networks	40	60
Lack of professional mentoring	40	60
Participation in leadership training	25	75
Experiencing gender discrimination	30	70

4.5. Qualitative Analysis: Topics and Examples

From interviews with 12 women leaders, several significant stories emerged that reinforce the importance of mentoring and support networks. One of them, a business owner in Pristina, emphasized:

"In the beginning, it was very difficult to find support, especially in the face of prejudice. Mentoring from women who were ahead of me helped me a lot to understand how to manage challenges and build my network."

This indicates the need for the creation of dedicated mentoring and specialized training programs, which are not yet sufficiently developed in Kosovo.

4.6. The Importance of Mentoring and Training

The interviews revealed that mentoring is a key element for women's success in leadership. Many of them consider the lack of mentoring programs as a major gap that needs to be filled. One participant stated:

"Without the mentors, I would not have been able to overcome many challenges, especially those related to balancing family and work."

4.7. *The Impact of Female Leadership on Organizational Culture*

Female leadership contributes to creating a more open and collaborative organizational culture. Women leaders emphasize the importance of open communication and involving team members in decision-making, thereby increasing employee motivation and engagement.

4.8. *The Role of Training and Education*

Data shows that participation in professional training has a direct impact on the success of women in leadership positions. Participants who had access to educational programs reported greater self-confidence and the ability to make strategic decisions (75%). This underscores the importance of investing in human capacity as a means of women's economic empowerment.

4.9. *Female Leadership and Impact on Business Development*

Overall, the study found that women leaders contribute to increasing the innovation and adaptability of family businesses in Kosovo. Specifically:

- 68% of women owners reported that they have introduced new products or services in the last 3 years.
- 62% emphasized the importance of professional networks in supporting business growth.
- Women who use the transformational leadership style perform better in managing crises and market challenges.

5. **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study confirmed that female leadership has a significant impact on the strategic development of family businesses in Kosovo. Women not only take on leadership responsibilities, but also bring new, more inclusive and sustainable approaches to business management.

5.1. *Conclusions*

Women in leadership positions in family businesses have proven their ability to adapt to numerous challenges and create successful management models. This leadership represents an important asset for the country's economic development and requires more institutional attention and strategic support.

Based on the theoretical analysis and empirical data collected through the survey of women in the private sector in Kosovo, the following main conclusions can be drawn:

1. Women face significant challenges in accessing finance, with 65% of respondents reporting difficulty in obtaining credit or financial support. This reinforces the idea that one of the most serious obstacles to female leadership is the lack of capital and economic support.
2. About 40% of women feel excluded from professional and decision-making networks, which directly affects their professional development and capacity to build influence in the business sector.
3. The lack of professional mentoring is another factor that affects the development of leadership skills, leaving many women without the support and guidance needed to advance in their careers.
4. Only 25% of women have participated in leadership training, indicating a lack of structured approaches to building the managerial capacities of women in business.
5. Gender discrimination remains present, with 30% of women reporting such experiences while exercising their functions as business leaders.
6. Despite these challenges, there are women who have built successful careers in Kosovo, particularly in sectors such as technology, services, agriculture, and small businesses, proving that when support and opportunity exist, women can be successful and innovative leaders.
7. is required from the state, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations to build inclusive policies that empower the role of women in leadership and management.

5.2. *Recommendations for Empowering Women's Leadership*

- Drafting public policies that encourage women's participation in entrepreneurship
- Establishing support centers for women entrepreneurs at the municipal level
- Facilitating access to credit for women in family businesses
- Introducing mentoring programs in partnership with universities and civil society organizations
- Creating funds dedicated to women entrepreneurs
- Training and mentoring for developing leadership skills
- Promoting gender equality in decision-making
- Raising public awareness about the role of women in the economy
- More comprehensive policy from government and NGOs

5.3. *Practical recommendations*

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are offered for public institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations in order to strengthen women's leadership in business in Kosovo:

5.3.1. *Creation of Special Funds for Women Entrepreneurs*

- Relevant ministries, in cooperation with international donors, should create support funds for women who want to start or expand their businesses.
- These funds should have more relaxed credit conditions and state guarantees.

5.3.2. *Development of Professional Mentoring Programs*

- Build long-term programs where women with leadership experience can mentor young women entering the business sector.
- Partnership with chambers of commerce and business networks is essential for the implementation of these programs.

5.3.3. *Strengthening Women's Networks in Business*

- National and regional networks of women entrepreneurs that serve as a platform for sharing experiences, partnerships, and lobbying for better policies should be supported and developed.

5.3.4. *Development of Training for Leadership and Management Skills*

- Educational institutions and professional organizations should offer regular training in areas such as strategic management, finance, marketing, and ethical leadership.
- These trainings can be subsidized for women in the early stages of their careers.

5.3.5. *Public Awareness Campaigns*

- Coordinated campaigns should be undertaken to change gender perceptions and stereotypes regarding the role of women in leadership and entrepreneurship.
- The media, schools, and community organizations can play a key role in these processes.

5.3.6. *Greater Representation in Decision-Making Structures*

- Public policies should aim to include more women on company boards, in chambers of commerce, in development agencies, and in municipal structures dealing with economic development.

5.3.7. Regular Monitoring and Reporting on Progress

- State and research institutions should draft and publish annual reports on women's participation in business and leadership, to enable monitoring and improvement of existing policies.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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