

“When The Crisis Becomes an Opportunity: The Role of Women in The Post-Covid Organization”

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As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, women have proven to play a crucial role in boosting family economies during post-COVID-19 economic recovery (Ge *et al.*, 2022). However, regulations supporting women’s empowerment are still minimal in many countries. This book focuses on gender equality from a diverse perspective, focusing on women’s positions in economic and sociocultural activities and directing attention toward organizational leadership structures. The role of women is explored in depth, considering the new challenges and opportunities they face after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The book consists of 28 chapters that highlight diverse innovations, ranging from the approaches and methodologies used to the main focal points. In this review, I categorize the 28 chapters into five identifiable critical thematic points in the book. The first issue addressed in the book is the discrimination challenges faced by women in entrepreneurship. The literature reviews by Arena, Catuogno, Paoloni and Pastore (Chapter 1), Paoloni and Manzo (Chapter 6) and Serafini (Chapter 7) reveal common concerns faced by women venturing into the business world during the pandemic. These issues include their ability to sustain businesses and adapt to technology, the limited access to capital, and the need for external motivation. Ricco and Bianchi (Chapter 8) delve deeper by conducting empirical research on the performance of women entrepreneurs during the 2008–2010 crisis; their study found that most women-owned businesses need help to overcome critical phases and tend to experience failure due to limited access to information, capital and government.

The discrimination immigrant women face while running businesses is the focus of de Andreis and Rusciani (Chapter 9), who report that immigrant women encounter more significant challenges, not only due to gender-related issues but also stemming from social injustice surrounding their marginalized cultural backgrounds. These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the disparities and hurdles immigrant women entrepreneurs face (Sarihasan *et al.*, 2023; Temizkan and Uslu, 2023). De Andreis (Chapter 27) also provides another perspective on discrimination of women in the male-dominated aviation industry. Despite possessing flight licenses, women still face biased perceptions among aviation professionals, who tend to place greater trust in men within this sector.

The findings reported in this book on issues of discrimination against women underscore the need for future policies and research directions to address gender equality, emphasizing



fundamental aspects of women's challenges and promoting the creation of regulation that enables women to develop businesses sustainably. Gender disparities should not hinder economic activity; therefore, there is a need for standard political constructs and regulations that view women and men as equals.

A second focal thematic issue in this book is women's access to capital. Sentuti, Chamochumbi Diaz and Cesaroni (Chapter 10), Paoloni, Mattei, Santolamazza and Elia (Chapter 15), Dello Strologo, D'Andrassi and Ventimiglia (Chapter 16), Naciti, Noto, Pulejo and Vermiglio (Chapter 19) and Bellocchio (Chapter 22) report on studies on gender equality in access to capital. Their findings show that women entrepreneurs face limitations in accessing capital from formal financial institutions and government entities, despite having had greater opportunities to obtain public grant funds than men during the pandemic. These findings are consistent with prior research emphasizing the disparities in access to capital for women-owned businesses [de Andrés *et al.* \(2021\)](#) and [Aristei and Gallo \(2022\)](#). At the same time, the public is more aware of the role of women entrepreneurs in a country's economy; various forms of digitalization during the pandemic and new public governance proved that women can actively engage and participate in business. Therefore, more intentional regulatory support and political systems could foster the creation of more inclusive and sustainable development.

The third issue discussed in this book is women's opportunities for building businesses. Paoloni, Dal Mas and Edvinsson (Chapter 21) and Modaffari and Manzo (Chapter 5) found that women have business potential utilizing online platforms due to their adeptness at managing social media, enabling them to influence consumers. The authors emphasize that women possess the power to build relational capital (RC). RC becomes increasingly vital during a pandemic as the strength of relationships serves as a defense mechanism for women to sustain their businesses amidst gender equality issues that still cast doubt on their entrepreneurial abilities. Moreover, the rise in digital users among women during the COVID-19 period has the potential to open up collaborations and capital opportunities for women building businesses. As part of this third issue, opportunities for women to hold strategic positions within companies are identified, reporting on them quantitatively (see Morrone, Tron, Colantoni and Ferri, Chapter 20) and qualitatively (see Cosentino and Venuti, Chapter 13). Their findings reveal that women in managerial roles can mitigate bankruptcy risks and enhance non-financial performance. Similarly, to enhance women's opportunities in entrepreneurship or within corporate structures, regulations on gender equality are required, thereby enabling women to hold strategic positions and ensuring the company's sustainability.

The fourth issue addressed in the book is the role of women's leadership in business organizations and social organizations. Fioravante and Del Baldo (Chapter 2) and Procacci and Ammaturo (Chapter 18) report that female leadership styles, both online and offline, can enhance customer engagement. Women possess qualities of both masculinity and femininity, enabling them to build sustainable business organizations directly. As such, women's adaptability to technological advancements is a defensive mechanism for businesses amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The presence of women on boards and in corporate leadership positions can also enhance the quality of a company's business strategy. Carbone, Saggese, Sarto and Fiorillo (Chapter 23), Arduini and Beck (Chapter 24) and Ricci, Scafarto and della Corte (Chapter 28) demonstrate that women play a crucial role in the decision-making process of companies, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and increase the responsibility for corporate sustainability. In addition to profit-oriented organizational cases, the book also provides specific insight into social enterprises (SEs) led by women. For instance, Cosentino and della Corte (Chapter 11) note

that SEs, whether organized by women or men, faced more challenging situations during the pandemic. Overall, the fourth issue in this book offers insight into how female leadership will support the mandate of SDG 5, which advocates for gender equality. Nevertheless, gender inequality remains more pronounced for women. In addition, whilst female leadership is said to bring personal uniqueness characterized by cautious decision-making and conservatism in facing risks, many studies have also found that gender diversity in corporate management can enhance the quality of a company's decisions (El-Khatib and Joy, 2021; Mungai *et al.*, 2020; Nadia and Hanafi, 2022).

The fifth issue is the dual roles and solutions for women workers. Emanuela Fiata (Chapter 14) recommends implementing remote work systems to facilitate women's balancing roles within the family, as well as emphasizing the right to disconnect in the work system for women. However, despite the potential benefits of remote work, such as creating a flexible work environment and hours, it also presents ongoing challenges where women may receive more tasks, including beyond working hours. To support women's dual roles, governments must ensure that the right of workers to refuse work outside their contract hours is reinforced. Rowe, Dal Mas, Biancuzzi and Rugara (Chapter 25) offer a solution: companies can adopt a family-friendly approach, which would support women's positions not only at the regular employee level but also enable them to become business leaders, regardless of their family status.

This book clearly emphasizes the importance of addressing issues not based on gender but on individual capabilities. To achieve this, society, government and even businesses must change their perspectives on these matters; the biased views and negative stereotypes concerning women's capabilities require political constructs and regulations that promote women's participation in broader corporate leadership, a recommendation that echoes other studies (see Abuhussein, 2023; Luyen, 2022; Nadia and Hanafi, 2022).

This book provides diverse perspectives on gender equality issues and women's roles in various sectors, particularly the economy. With diverse approaches and focal points, this book can assist readers in understanding women's struggles in actualizing themselves as entrepreneurs and integral members of society, possessing diverse capabilities that are still constrained by biased views and negative stereotypes, casting doubt on their abilities to drive business development and foster sustainable enterprises. The book's content is compelling as an empirical reflection of reality and serves as valuable input for stakeholders, including business owners, investors, governments, academics and NGOs, in advocating for gender equality across economic, social and cultural activities. Whilst the book provides evidence of research findings in Europe, specifically in Italy, given that gender equality issues within business organizations and SEs is a global issue (Temizkan and Uslu, 2023), this book is highly recommended for readers wishing to enhance their understanding of contextual features of gender equality.

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Further reading

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