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PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN TO LEADERSHIP ROLES IN MOROCCAN SPORTS FEDERATIONS

Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of career anchors shaped by organizational, individual, and societal determinants in relation to women's access to leadership positions in Moroccan sports federations. In a historically male-dominated setting, understanding these dynamics is essential for promoting more equitable and sustainable career progression. Between January and June 2024, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 female leaders from 12 federations, employing a qualitative interpretive approach and thematic analysis using NVivo 14. The findings highlight two anchors specific to the Moroccan socio-cultural context (family and social support and religious and cultural beliefs), which reveal the impact of cultural pressures and familial responsibilities that may hinder women's advancement. Additionally, six other career anchors prevail in sports: emotional and professional security, managerial competencies, resilient challenge, technical skills, transformative commitment, and global outlook. The interplay of individual, organizational, and societal factors, along with these career anchors, shows that older women seek to make a lasting impact, while younger women prioritize challenges. Family and cultural support helps balance personal life and ambitions, while the development of managerial skills and a supportive work environment proves crucial. Moreover, the economic context, religious beliefs, cultural norms, and international legal frameworks heavily influence women's career choices, prompting them to pursue stability, ethical alignment, and global opportunities. This study provides decision-makers with a clear understanding of the factors shaping women's career trajectories and suggests tangible actions (fostering inclusive governance, advancing gender equality, and shifting mindsets) that can enhance the overall performance of the Moroccan sports sector.

Keywords	gender, leadership, career anchors, sports federations, Morocco, cultural barriers, inclusive governance, professional equity
JEL Classification	D87, J71, L83

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality in leadership positions within sports organizations is increasingly recognized as a crucial element for the success and effectiveness of modern sports federations. It is directly linked to enhanced organizational performance, increased innovation, and greater member satisfaction, all of which are necessary factors to remain competitive in a constantly evolving sector (Knoppers et al., 2024; Burton, 2015; Adriaanse & Claringbould, 2016). Although significant progress has been made, such as the increased participation of women in sports competitions and the implementation of policies aimed at promoting parity, these advances remain limited in certain national contexts, including Morocco (Amara, 2012).

The Moroccan Royal Sports Federations exemplify this situation, with a notable underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles. Low female presence in leadership positions reflects structural, organizational, and societal barriers that hinder their professional ad-

vancement in this sector (Amara, 2012). This lack of diversity within governing bodies can limit innovation and organizational performance, compromising the development of inclusive governance and achieving the federations' strategic objectives (Shaw & Hoeber, 2016).

A knowledge gap exists regarding how various career anchors are embedded within organizational, individual, and societal contexts, influencing women's access to leadership roles. While numerous studies have examined general barriers to gender equality in sports leadership, few have focused on the unique cultural and economic context of Morocco (Henry & Robinson, 2010).

Furthermore, investigations conducted in other regions have demonstrated that although societal expectations and organizational culture significantly affect women's career progression, the interaction of these factors within Moroccan sports federations remains underexplored (Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Hovden, 2010). This gap is particularly evident in the lack of empirical studies investigating the effectiveness of internal support mechanisms, such as mentoring programs and targeted training, in overcoming these obstacles (Henry & Robinson, 2010).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of gender disparity in professional advancement has been the subject of extensive global literature, spanning various sectors such as business, education, technology, and, more recently, sports. The persistent problem of inequalities between men and women in accessing leadership positions has been addressed in empirical studies, doctoral theses, government reports, and academic articles, each offering perspectives on the factors that hinder women's career progression. These studies reveal that despite advances in gender equality, women continue to face structural, social, and cultural barriers that impede their advancement to leadership positions (Wirth, 2001; Glass & Cook, 2016).

Research on gender stereotypes, such as those by Heilman (2001) and Schein (2001), highlights that traditional perceptions associating men with leadership roles and women with domestic responsibilities remain widespread. These stereotypes serve as a significant barrier that fuels unconscious biases in recruitment and promotion processes, which in turn restricts women's access to positions of power. This phenomenon has been observed across many sectors and cultures, demonstrating that gender disparity is a global issue, not confined to a single national or professional context (Brière, 2006).

In parallel, family responsibilities represent another major obstacle to women's professional advancement, as shown by Laufer (2014) and Bentoudja and Razafindranovona (2020). Women are often perceived as the primary managers of domestic tasks, which leads them to make career choices dictated by the need to balance work and family life. Career interruptions due to maternity or caregiving responsibilities are wrongly interpreted as a lack of professional commitment, a particularly damaging factor in sectors where constant engagement is required for upward mobility (Mandel & Semyonov, 2005). This issue is recurrent worldwide, and even in countries with family-support policies, these responsibilities continue to weigh more heavily on women than men (Blau & Kahn, 2017).

The glass ceiling phenomenon, referring to the invisible barriers preventing women from reaching senior management positions, has been widely studied. According to Wirth (2001), this glass ceiling persists in most sectors, reinforced by biases in recruitment practices and the dominance of male professional networks (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010). These closed networks limit women's access to promotion opportunities, particularly in male-dominated sectors like technology or sports. Studies show that these structural barriers are compounded by organizational practices that fail to consider women's specific needs for work-life balance support (Lorber et al., 1991).

In the sports sector, these dynamics are even more pronounced. Sports leadership has historically been perceived as a male domain, with women

facing significant challenges in attaining leadership positions in national and international sports federations. Previous studies, such as Burton (2015), highlight the significant underrepresentation of women in decision-making bodies, although some have managed to break these barriers and secure influential leadership roles. For instance, Bouchra Hajij represents a notable success in Moroccan sports. However, her appointment remains an exception in a sector where women continue to be marginalized in decision-making processes, a phenomenon observed on a global scale (ACNOA, 2020).

International comparative studies, notably by Adriaanse and Schofield (2013), show that the underrepresentation of women in sports leadership roles is not an isolated issue. In countries such as Australia, the United States, and Canada, women's participation remains limited despite the adoption of gender quotas and other equality initiatives. These efforts have often produced mixed results, suggesting that deeper and more structural measures are needed to overcome these barriers (Pape, 2020).

A review of global studies also reveals that some initiatives, such as gender quotas, may lead to formal but not substantive inclusion of women. Fernández and Valiente (2021) and Betzer-Tayar et al. (2017) have observed that these quotas, while important, are insufficient to change cultural perceptions and organizational structures that keep women in subordinate roles. Additionally, these measures can sometimes result in counterproductive effects, where women are recruited for symbolic reasons without real change in organizational culture, a phenomenon often described as tokenism (Kanter, 1977).

Despite progress in some regions, most studies indicate that women continue to face barriers at every stage of their careers, leading to the use of the concept of the "glass labyrinth" (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This concept highlights the diversity and complexity of the obstacles women encounter throughout their career paths, including the lack of female role models, persistent stereotypes, and challenges in balancing personal and professional life. This critical approach to discriminatory mechanisms goes beyond the

simple notion of the glass ceiling, illustrating that these obstacles exist at all hierarchical levels, not just at the top.

Despite an abundance of research on this topic, several challenges remain unresolved. Study results are often contradictory, particularly regarding the effectiveness of gender quotas and equality support policies. Moreover, while some countries have made significant progress in female representation in leadership positions, these advances do not always translate into changes in organizational culture or economic outcomes. This inconsistency in results underscores the need for continued research, especially in sectors where women's underrepresentation is pronounced, such as sports.

Thus, the literature review reveals that gender disparity in professional advancement remains a global problem with multifaceted causes. While progress has been made, structural, social, and cultural obstacles persist. The sports sector, in particular, mirrors the exacerbated dynamics of inequality that prevail in other sectors. Ongoing research in this field is essential to understand how to overcome these barriers and promote greater inclusion of women in leadership roles.

This situation, marked by male domination and the lack of accessible data, represents a major challenge.

This paper aims to analyze the organizational, individual, and societal dynamics, as well as career anchors, in relation to women's access to leadership positions in Moroccan sports federations, thereby contributing to an in-depth understanding of the obstacles encountered and the strategies adopted.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology to analyze the experiences of women leaders in Moroccan sports federations. The selection of participants was conducted to ensure sufficient representativeness and diversity of perspectives (Sahraoui, 2011), enabling an in-depth and nuanced exploration of their professional trajectories (Hlady Rispal, 2002).

Theoretical saturation was reached by the 28th interview, as information redundancy became evident from the 27th. Data collection was subsequently discontinued after confirming that no additional theoretical insights could emerge from the new interviews. This observation was further validated through an empirical assessment using NVivo 14 software. A Pearson correlation test measured the similarity of terms used across the interviews, yielding results ranging from 0.933 to 0.701. These findings indicated a high repetition of concepts, confirming that semantic saturation had also been achieved (Miles & Huberman, 2004).

For data collection, semi-structured interviews were employed, offering a balance between structure and flexibility (Sem & Cornet, 2018). The interview guide was organized around four key themes, professional progression, individual determinants, organizational determinants, and societal determinants, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the factors influencing the career paths of women in Moroccan sports federations. However, as the study progressed, it became evident that these dimensions were insufficient to fully capture the dynamics of their professional trajectories. To address this, Schein's (1996) career anchor framework was incorporated to investigate the participants' deeper motivations. The interview guide was revised to include questions to identify these motivations. Additionally, a complementary questionnaire was introduced to clarify the concept of career anchors and gather further data, enabling a comparison between the participants' implicit and explicit motivations.

Most interviews were conducted in person, while some were held remotely due to participants' constraints. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and validated by the participants to ensure data accuracy. The average interview duration was 54 minutes.

After transcribing the 28 interviews (37,825 words), the data were organized into main themes through a preliminary content analysis. A hybrid coding approach, combining deductive and inductive methods (Huberman & Miles, 1991), was employed to explore emerging concepts while grounding the analysis in established theoretical frameworks. Coding reliability was ensured through inter-coder reliability assessment, with Cohen's Kappa coefficient indicating agreement levels ranging from good to excellent (0.41 to 0.75) (McDonald et al., 2019; Xie, 2013).

A cross-analysis of individual, organizational, and societal determinants, along with career anchors, revealed the interactions between these factors and their influence on the career trajectories of female leaders in Moroccan sports. The use of NVivo 14 facilitated the generation of conceptual maps and diagrams, providing a clear visualization of these complex relationships.

3. RESULTS

The analysis of women's career progression in Moroccan sports federations reveals a complex set of motivations and choices influenced by various personal, cultural, and contextual factors. To better understand the dynamics in their professional development, it is essential to examine career anchors, a foundational concept developed by Schein (2001, 1996). These anchors provide a theoretical framework for understanding how specific values, skills, and psychological needs guide the career decisions of these women within an environment often characterized by individual, organizational, and societal challenges.

3.1. Exploration of career anchors

The results reveal a notable diversity of career anchors, with a total of 1,324 references (Figure 1). These references are divided into three main subcategories: traditional anchors, anchors adapted to the Moroccan context, and emerging anchors. The first subcategory, corresponding to "traditional" anchors, includes 82 references, representing 6.19% of the total. These anchors are characterized by stable values and deep motivations, as defined by Schein (1996), and encompass concepts such as managerial and technical competencies.

The second subcategory consists of anchors adapted to the specific context of Moroccan sports, with 681 references, or 51.43% of the total. This category shows an evolution from what is proposed in the existing literature, incorporating elements such as security and stability, pure challenge, and dedication to a cause.

Traditional anchors		Anchors adapted to the specific Moroccan sports context	
Management skills **NR** = 291 **NF** = 28	Technical skills **NR** = 178 **NF** = 21	Emotional security Professional stability **NR**=145 **NF**=26	Resilient challenge **NR** = 156 **NF** = 22
Creativity **NR** = 93 **NF** = 22	Autonomy and independence **NR** = 76 **NF** = 16	Transformer dedication **NR** = 173 **NF** = 23	Global reach **NR** = 87 **NF** = 19
	Quality of life **NR** = 42 **NF** = 11	Emerging anchors Religious and ethnic beliefs **NR** = 54 **NF** = 20	Family and cultural support **NR** = 28 **NF** = 8

Note: A darker color indicates a higher number of coded elements, NF = number of files, NR = number of references.

Figure 1. Hierarchical diagram – Distribution of career anchors by number of references

Finally, the third subcategory comprises emerging anchors that are not mentioned in the initial theories but were identified in the participants' narratives. These anchors account for 561 references, or 42.37% of the total, and include concepts like family and social support, as well as religious and cultural beliefs, which reflect contextual realities specific to the Moroccan sports sector. The hierarchical diagram clearly illustrates the diversity and richness of motivations and values that shape the career development of women within Moroccan sports federations.

Traditional anchors are characterized by stable values and deep motivations, as defined by Schein (1996), and include technical and managerial competencies, which are perceived as essential in strengthening the participants' leadership roles. For example, several participants emphasized the importance of their academic advancement in sports management and governance, as illustrated by one participant who pursued a Master's degree in sports management. The need for autonomy is also central to these women, who seek to liberate themselves from organizational constraints to lead their own careers. One participant even founded her own federation with this goal in mind. Creativity, linked to innovation, is another strong motivation, with leaders invested in implementing innovative sports projects, often using technological tools. For instance, one interviewee contributed to the development of her federation's website, highlighting her creative spirit. Finally, balancing professional and personal life is crucial for many of them, as highlighted by a participant who benefits from a flexible work environment, allowing her to manage her time autonomously.

The anchors adapted to the Moroccan context reflect the specific socio-cultural and economic realities of the country's sports federations, accounting for 51.43% of the total references (681 occurrences). Among these anchors, transformative dedication plays a significant role, illustrating not only the commitment to a social cause but also a desire to promote social justice, gender equality, and the creation of inclusive and equitable environments. The resilient challenge anchor stands out for its emphasis on the ability to face complex challenges with great resilience and a strong commitment to innovation. The emotional and professional security anchor underscores the need for job stability, personal well-being, and balance with family responsibilities. Lastly, global open-
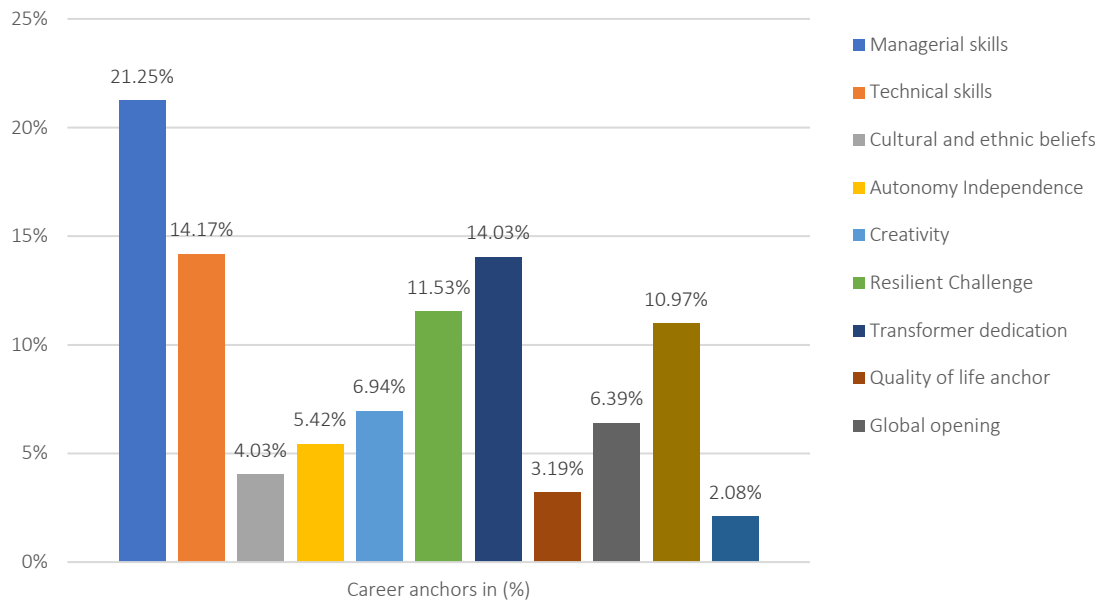
Figure 2. Percentage distribution of career anchors among women leaders in Moroccan sports

ness refers to the integration of multicultural values and the promotion of inclusive work environments with a positive social impact.

Emerging anchors, though not recognized in traditional literature, have been identified as significant determinants for Moroccan women in sports federations. They represent 42.37% of the references (561 occurrences). Among these anchors, family and social support play a crucial role, highlighting the importance of external influences such as moral and material support from family and social networks. One participant mentioned that the absence of support hindered her professional progression, illustrating the negative impact of a lack of confidence from her superiors. Religious and cultural beliefs are also crucial, reflecting attachment to traditional values. For example, one interviewee emphasized her commitment to bringing together people from diverse backgrounds within her federation, demonstrating her dedication to values of tolerance and cultural diversity.

The collected data reveal a significant diversity of career anchors among women leaders in Moroccan sports. Figure 2 presents the distribution of career anchors as a percentage. The managerial competencies anchor dominates, followed by technical competencies and dedication to a cause (transformative dedication anchor). Other anchors, such

as resilient challenge, emotional and professional security, and global openness, also hold considerable importance. These results highlight a diversity of motivations, with some women focusing primarily on a single anchor, while others navigate between two.

3.2. Key determinants of career progression

The career progression of women within Moroccan sports federations is influenced by three major types of determinants: individual, organizational, and societal (Figure 3).

Individual determinants include age, which plays a major role in women's careers, influencing their access to advancement opportunities and their progression into leadership roles. Younger women may face obstacles due to a perceived lack of experience, while older women with more established careers are often better positioned to attain roles of responsibility. Furthermore, age also affects their aspirations to transform organizational structures. Personal and professional ambition is another key determinant of their career progression. It drives women to actively seek opportunities, take on professional challenges, and exceed expectations, thus contributing to the transformation of sports organizations, particularly in relation to the resilient
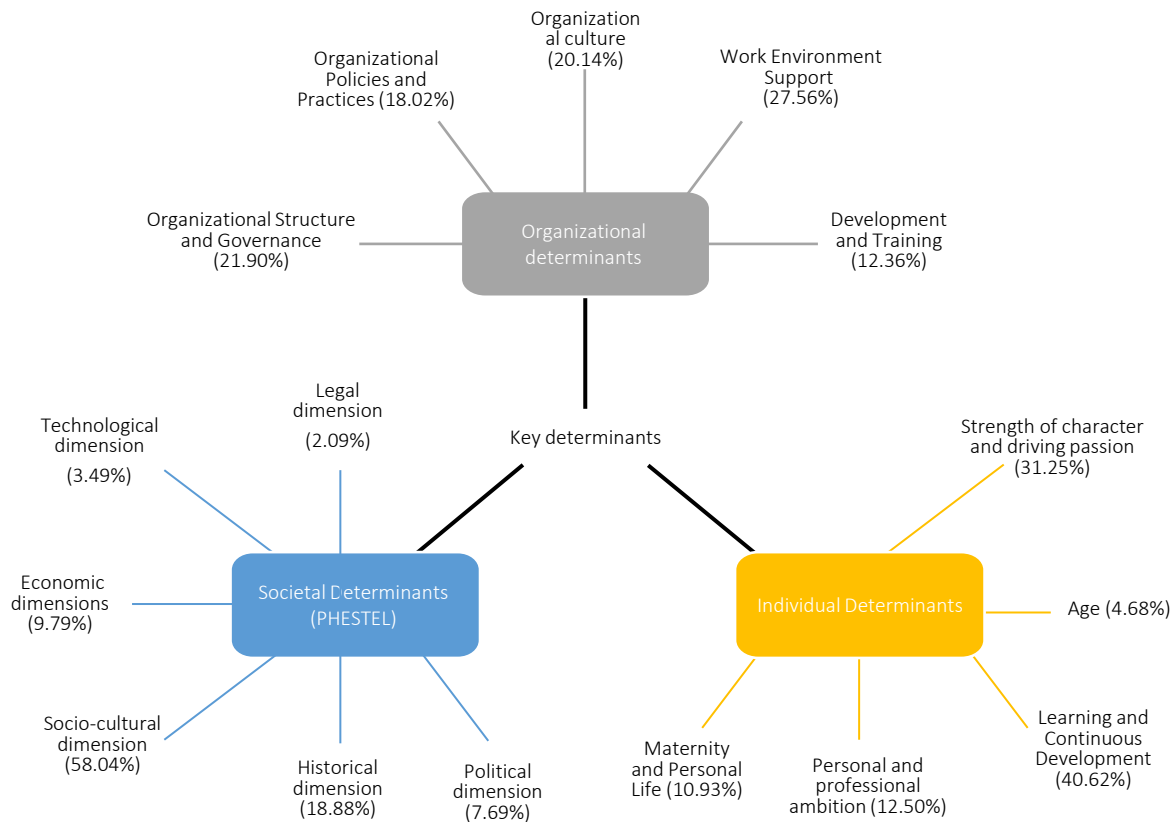
Figure 3. Mapping codes and sub-codes of key determinants derived from the coding of interviews with women

challenge anchor. Strength of character and motivational passion also play an essential role. In a male-dominated environment, women need to demonstrate resilience and tenacity to overcome cultural and organizational barriers. Their passion for sports motivates them not only to advance in their careers but also to push the sector forward as a whole. Continuous learning and skill development are equally crucial for their professional growth. The ability to continuously train throughout their careers, whether formally or informally, enables them to remain competitive and adapt their skills to the evolving demands of the sector, particularly in relation to technical and managerial competency anchors. Lastly, motherhood and family responsibilities can hinder women's career progression if not addressed by organizational policies. However, some women successfully balance personal life and career through family support or professional accommodations, which prove decisive in accessing leadership roles.

Regarding organizational determinants, values, norms, and organizational practices strongly in-

fluence how women progress in Moroccan sports federations. In a culture that values gender equality, women have easier access to leadership roles, whereas more conservative cultures may hinder their advancement. A stable organizational environment, linked to emotional and professional security, is essential for their development. Development and training policies are crucial for acquiring necessary skills, building resilience, and fostering women's career progression, especially in developing managerial competencies. Additionally, transparent promotion, internal mobility, and performance evaluation policies promote the inclusion of women in leadership positions, while discriminatory practices can hinder their progress. Support for a diverse work environment that encourages work-life balance is also fundamental in enabling women to overcome obstacles related to gender or family responsibilities. Lastly, the structure and governance of federations influence women's advancement: rigid hierarchies limit opportunities, whereas inclusive governance encourages their participation at higher decision-making levels.

Finally, societal determinants (i.e., political, historical, economic, and cultural contexts) profoundly shape women's career trajectories. The Moroccan political climate heavily influences careers in public sectors, including sports federations. Political initiatives in favor of gender equality depend on government priorities, sometimes creating a favorable environment for women's leadership progression, while conservative political structures complicate access to decision-making roles. Morocco's historical legacy, marked by a limited female presence in positions of power, continues to influence the sports sector, where women's progression remains constrained, particularly in certain regions. Economic fluctuations affect job stability within federations, and during periods of uncertainty, advancement opportunities decrease. The limited resources allocated to the sports sector also impact the ability to support women's career paths. On the socio-cultural level, traditional norms and perceptions, especially in conservative regions, hinder women's access to leadership positions. Social stereotypes and expectations create additional obstacles to their ambitions. From a technological perspective, Moroccan sports federations exhibit uneven adoption of modern tools, limiting women's visibility on social networks and

hindering the development of their professional skills. Finally, although the Moroccan legal framework promotes equal opportunities, its implementation within sports federations remains a critical factor.

3.3. Intersection of career anchors and key determinants of career progression

The analysis of the cross-tabulations from the coding matrix shows a strong coherence between key determinants (individual, organizational, and societal) and career anchors in the professional advancement of women sports leaders in Morocco. The data reveal an interconnection between theoretical frameworks, suggesting that individual, organizational, and societal factors are interconnected and collectively influence the career development of women in sports leadership roles.

The matrix analysis reveals significant interactions between individual determinants and certain career anchors. The resilient challenge anchor (formerly pure challenge) is closely linked to personal and professional ambition (41.82%), strength of character (30.62%), and continuous learning (27.56%). This

Table 1. Matrix cross-referencing key determinants and dominant career anchors in the Moroccan federal sports sector

Individual determinants					
Anchors	Age	Personal and professional ambitions	Strength of character and driving passion	Continuous learning and skills development	Motherhood and personal life
Pure challenge	0%	41.52%	30.62%	27.56%	9.71%
Dedication to a cause	35.24%	0%	13.88%	9.15%	0%
Family and cultural support	0%	0%	0%	0%	36%
Organizational determinants					
Anchors	Organizational culture	Development and training	Organizational policies and practices	Work environment support	Organizational structure and governance
Pure challenge	19.22%	4.95%	7.91%	27.34%	17.91%
Dedication to a cause	14.21%	18.02%	15.02%	10.21%	32.85%
Safety/Stability	37.05%	0%	22.53%	24.22%	9.67%
Managerial skills	10.86%	26.93%	29.64%	8.13%	25.86%
Social determinants					
Anchors	Political context	Historical and historical context	Economic context	Socio-cultural context	Legal context
International aspect	0%	21.75%	2.51%	4.54%	100%
Safety/Stability	58.82%	36.34%	70.29%	20.03%	0%
Religious belief and ethics	0%	0%	3.35%	22.86%	0%

indicates that women who seek to overcome challenges are often driven by personal ambition, a desire for excellence, and a commitment to ongoing development. The transformative dedication anchor (formerly dedication to a cause) is moderately associated with age (35.24%), suggesting that experience and maturity influence their desire to contribute to the transformation of sports structures. Lastly, the family and cultural support anchor (36%) primarily affects maternity and personal life, emphasizing its importance in contexts where family responsibilities are central to career progression.

Regarding organizational determinants, the correlations highlight the importance of organizational structure. The dedication to a cause anchor is moderately correlated with structure and governance (32.85%), showing that women leaders are motivated by long-term goals deemed significant for the greater good. The managerial competencies anchor influences organizational policies (26.93% and 29.64%), indicating the necessity of leadership skills for advancement. The resilient challenge anchor (27.34%) also shows a significant link with environmental support. In comparison, the emotional and professional security anchor (37.05%) has a strong interaction with organizational culture, emphasizing the need for a structured environment to ensure stability and growth.

Finally, interactions with societal determinants show a specific impact. The emotional and professional security anchor is strongly influenced by the economic context (70.29%), followed by the political (58.82%) and historical contexts (36.34%). This indicates that in uncertain environments, women seek increased security to advance their careers. The global openness anchor, linked to the legal context (100%), highlights that international laws shape opportunities for women leaders, offering protection and equity. Lastly, the religious and ethical belief anchor (22.86%) emerges in contexts where socio-cultural dimensions are prominent, playing a crucial role in the career development of women, especially in conservative regions.

4. DISCUSSION

The results reveal that the managerial competencies and transformational dedication of women leaders in the Moroccan sports sector are strongly oriented toward the collective, highlighting causes such as gender equality and social inclusion. This collective orientation aligns with Maningo (2023), who describes these leaders as catalysts for change that integrate human and social values. Furthermore, the age of the participants plays a crucial role in their motivational priorities: women over 55 are more devoted to causes aimed at leaving a legacy, thereby confirming the findings of Milanović (2019). In the specific context of Moroccan sports, these leaders transform sports structures by positively influencing governance and sectoral development. Organizationally, nearly 26.93% of the leaders value managerial competencies, underscoring the necessity for leadership training programs. Management workshops, strategic seminars, and mentoring not only enhance their skills but also increase their job satisfaction, thereby fostering organizational loyalty, as noted by Yusuf and Abiddin (2018). These findings confirm the importance for organizations to continuously invest in the development of women's managerial skills, enabling them to fully access leadership roles and realize their potential.

Moreover, the study highlights complex dynamics regarding the emotional and professional security of women leaders. Some participants prioritize stability to meet family obligations, reflecting a pragmatic necessity in an uncertain professional environment. In contrast, others strive to overcome these constraints to pursue their personal ambitions, demonstrating an aspiration for autonomy and self-fulfillment. This duality underscores the existing tensions in a sector characterized by organizational instability and intense competition, as emphasized by Frost and Singh (2023). At the organizational level, 37.05% of the interviews highlight the need for a secure and stable framework, confirming the crucial importance of developing inclusive policies and enhancing job security, in line with Baum et al. (2015), who show that an organizational culture focused on inclusion and security facilitates the advancement of women despite structural challenges. Additionally, societal determinants play a predominant role, with 70.29% of responses highlighting the impact of economic, cultural, and legal dynamics. The lack of funding in women's sports limits career opportunities and exacerbates inequalities between men's and women's sports, compelling women to seek more secure positions (Frost & Singh, 2023).

The study also reveals that the anchor of family and cultural support in Morocco differs from the sense of duty towards family identified by Maningo (2023). While the latter implies strict cultural obligations limiting professional autonomy, Moroccan family support is more subtle yet consistent, influencing women's career choices toward roles that meet family needs rather than their personal aspirations. At an individual level, 36% of participants emphasize the importance of this support, highlighting the necessity to balance personal and professional life. This finding is consistent with Nowak and Bonner (2013), who demonstrate that women seek flexible solutions and family support to manage their multiple responsibilities. In Moroccan sports federations, family support becomes an essential lever to mitigate constraints and enable women to pursue their professional ambitions.

Furthermore, the study highlights a diversity of career anchors among women leaders in Moroccan sports federations, emphasizing a strong orientation toward self-determination and personal choice. Consistent with Schein (1996) and Milanović (2019), technical skills, autonomy, creativity, quality of life, resilient challenge, as well as global openness and cultural and ethnic beliefs reflect a quest for individual fulfillment. Individually, 41.52% of young women exhibit a resilient challenge, seeking to overcome obstacles in a traditionally male sector, supported by a sense of personal control (Dražić et al., 2018). Organizationally, 27.34% value this challenge, necessitating supportive work environments and appropriate support systems, as high-lighted by Chang (2022). Additionally, 26.93% of participants stress the importance of managerial competencies, indicating a crucial need for training and mentoring to strengthen their leadership (Yusuf & Abiddin, 2018). Religious and cultural beliefs influence 22.86% of career trajectories, compelling women to reconcile their aspirations with societal expectations (Chafai, 2017; Abousaid & Angade, 2018). Global openness, pervasive at 100%, demonstrates the impact of international norms on women's ambitions, enabling them to overcome local barriers and pursue careers aligned with standards of inclusion and parity (Chang & Wu, 2023).

This study opens several avenues for future research. Firstly, a quantitative exploration could deepen the analysis of the determinants of women's career progression in Moroccan sports federations once access to data is improved. Secondly, studying major sports management schools would allow for anticipating barriers and strengthening training programs by identifying key missing competencies. Additionally, including men in research samples would provide complementary insights into the obstacles and opportunities for female leadership. Comparative studies in other sports sectors or similar countries would enable the comparison of organizational and societal dynamics. Finally, a longitudinal approach would track the evolution of women's careers, assessing the impact of equality policies and inclusion initiatives. These perspectives would enrich the current findings and promote effective strategies to foster female leadership in Moroccan sports.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the organizational, individual, and societal dynamics shaping women's access to leadership positions in Moroccan sports federations while analyzing the role of career anchors in this process. It aims to identify the obstacles they face and the strategies that enable their advancement in a traditionally male-dominated environment. The findings indicate that managerial skills and a secure work environment significantly impact women's progression in this field. However, societal norms remain a major barrier, albeit with varying levels of influence depending on cultural and organizational contexts.

The central role of managerial skills aligns with previous research emphasizing their importance in leadership, particularly in environments where structural barriers are prominent. Similarly, the positive impact of familial and cultural support highlights the need to balance personal aspirations with societal expectations. The diversity of career anchors identified among women leaders – ranging from

autonomy to resilience – reflects varied trajectories and an ability to adapt to challenges. Conversely, the persistence of gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms remains a critical challenge, consistent with prior studies on systemic barriers to female leadership.

These findings have important implications for the governance and management of Moroccan sports federations. They highlight the need for inclusive governance structures and the development of initiatives such as mentorship programs and leadership training. Such efforts aim to actively deconstruct gender stereotypes and foster an equitable organizational culture. However, while societal norms may have less impact in some contexts, they should not be overlooked, as their influence can vary significantly across sectors.

This study, however, has certain limitations. First, its focus on a specific sector may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other professional domains. Second, the qualitative methodology used does not allow for clear causal relationships between the variables studied. Finally, the limited sample size within the Moroccan sports sector calls for further research to extend these conclusions to other contexts.

Future research could address these limitations by broadening the scope to include multiple professional sectors and regions. Longitudinal studies would provide a deeper understanding of the evolution of women leaders' career trajectories over time. Additionally, mixed methodologies could enrich the analysis by combining qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, comparative interregional studies could explore whether similar dynamics exist in other socio-cultural contexts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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Formal analysis: Chaymaa Lotfy.
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Investigation: Chaymaa Lotfy.
Methodology: Chaymaa Lotfy, Yasmina Bennani Bennis, Annie Cornet.
Project administration: Yasmina Bennani Bennis.
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Software: Yasmina Bennani Bennis.
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Validation: Yasmina Bennani Bennis, Annie Cornet.
Visualization: Yasmina Bennani Bennis, Annie Cornet.
Writing – original draft: Chaymaa Lotfy.
Writing – review & editing: Chaymaa Lotfy, Yasmina Bennani Bennis, Annie Cornet.

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