

RE-IMAGINING BUSINESS Feminist Values for Organisational Change

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Introduction

Feminist principles like empathy are vital yet underutilised in today's corporate landscape. Despite policies and initiatives, the persistent gender disparities such as female underrepresentation in high-level roles expose systemic inequalities. This project explores the transformative potential of feminist values for fostering gender equality in the labour market. Examining historical contexts, traditional business management influences, and the role of new feminist methodologies, the research aims to underscore the importance of integrating feminist values into corporate structures to support equal workplaces.

The Problem

In Ireland, despite efforts of various policies and initiatives, a lacuna exists with women facing persisting inequalities in the Irish labour market and beyond. Gender inequalities exist across multiple facets of Irish life. These inequalities manifest glaringly within the labour market noticeable by issues such as the gender pay gap, gendered occupations, and an evident underrepresentation of women in senior, partner, board, and C-suite positions both in the corporate world and in political leadership. Despite the proliferation of Equal Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives in modern corporate structures, these persistent gender issues underscore systemic inequalities. By examining the historical context and the current landscape of gender inequality, considering the influence of traditional business management theories, and exploring the potential role of new feminist-based methodologies, this research aims to highlight the significance of integrating feminist values into corporate structures for fostering gender equality.

Methodologies

The research methodology employed a combination of primary and secondary data. Secondary data defined the problem, focusing on gender inequalities in the Irish labour market and the lack of new business methodologies. Primary data involved interviews with individuals from various positions and industries, particularly within the corporate world, along with a survey to gather employee perspectives. Timeline research provided insights into women and work throughout history, while a charrette with business management students facilitated a deeper understanding of prevailing values perpetuated in current business methodologies.

Key Findings

The key findings underscore the systemic nature of gender inequalities in corporate structures. The interviews and survey revealed an outdated approach to business, with a belief that an organisation 'thinks that it has authority over nature. So it creates policies and procedures that it suits the company, but actually are not consistent with how the world actually works.' The charrette with business management students revealed an alignment of their studies with outdated business methodologies aligning with values such as efficiency and profit maximisation and less with values related to feminism such as empathy and equality, raising questions about the importance attributed to inequalities in the workplace. These findings serve as a foundation for proposing a framework for change within organisations.

Looking Forward

Looking forward, the research suggests that reimagining business practices is crucial within the current capitalistic system. Recognising the disparities caused by the ideals and values of the patriarchy, the thesis encourages envisioning different futures that align with feminist values, ultimately aiming for a more equitable and inclusive labour market. For long lasting change organisations must shift their perspective. This involves moving beyond employee wellbeing programs and addressing root systemic causes. For business educators, there's a call to transition from outdated curriculums rooted in traditional capitalist ideologies, fostering a mindset that acknowledges the interconnectedness of business decisions with societal happiness. Organisations are encouraged to guide their policies and practices with a perspective that respects the authority of nature. Shifting focus from measuring progress to assessing impact on humanity and nature, and evaluating business ventures as part of an ecosystem, is essential. Frameworks that prioritise feelings, emotions, and the health of earth and humanity are vital in the world we inhabit today.

