Utrecht University

Master Thesis U.S.E.

Title: "Exploring organizational and societal culture: A comparative analysis of Gender Equality Strategies in Multinational Context"

Abstract

This paper explores the interplay between organizational and societal culture and its effect on the implementation of gender equality strategies within multinational organizations, comparing Greece and the Netherlands. The research question addresses how these cultural dynamics affect the implementation and outcomes of these strategies, considering diverse geographical contexts. Specifically, it investigates internal stakeholders' perceptions from a particular multinational consulting organization operating in the two countries. Utilizing theories on organizational culture by Schein and Quinn & Rohrbaugh, and on societal culture by Hofstede, this research seeks to address cultural factors that impede or facilitate the proper implementation of gender equality practices. Using a qualitative method, including semi-structured interviews and secondary data, the findings of this research reveal that traditional gender roles and perspectives hinder gender equality initiatives in Greece, while the Dutch egalitarian and progressive culture promotes their implementation. A significant difference between the two contexts lies in workforce cultural diversity, with Greece demonstrating homogeneity and the Netherlands heterogeneity, suggesting a strong influence on the implementation of gender equality strategies. By integrating this factor, this research aims to enhance applicability of gender equality strategies in multicultural teams.

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I would like to thank both my supervisors for their invaluable support and guidance during this research process. The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. The author is responsible for its contents and opinions expressed in the thesis. U.S.E. is only responsible for the academic coaching and supervision and cannot be held liable for the content.

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1. Introduction

Gender discrimination remains a prevalent societal issue integrated within societies, preventing development, and limiting female's potential due to disparities present in the socio-economic and political context (United Nations, 2022). Despite the fact that the highest gender equality score was reported in Europe reaching the percentage of 76.3% in 2023, it is anticipated that it will take 67 years more to achieve parity in the region, highlighting the pervasiveness and importance of the issue (World Economic Forum, 2023). Especially in the work field, females are discriminated against both in the public and private sector, leading to negative implications affecting mental and physical health, job performance, and colleague relationships (Del Carmen Triana et al., 2018 ; Channar et al., 2011). Disparities have emerged in different forms and patterns, such as in promotion procedure (Olson & Becker, 1983), in recruitment (González et al., 2019; Bertogg et al., 2020 ; Kübler et al., 2018), in salaries (Kunze, 2017), in evaluation and opportunity access(De La Torre-Pérez et al., 2022), as well as in the form of sexual abuse (McDonald, 2011). Factors including stereotypes (Heilman et al., 2023), implicit bias (Régner et al., 2019), parental responsibilities (Verniers & Vala, 2018), lack of policies (Heilman & Caleo, 2018), and organizational culture (Kartolo & Kwantes, 2019) play a significant role in perpetuating the issue.

Addressing gender discrimination within the workplace of multinational organizations, poses significant obstacles due to their global presence (Newburry et al., 2022). While adopting strategies to foster gender equality, their implementation appears to be quite challenging (Gartzia, 2021), and limited to conventional practices (O'Neill & Boyle, 2011). As they transfer not only finances but also knowledge, values, and notions, influencing diverse stakeholders, they are a major topic in discussions related to the pros and cons of globalization (Meyer, 2004). Therefore, multinationals need to consider both cultural differences and the intensity of societal norms in their decision-making process for their foreign subsidiaries (Shin et al., 2017). For instance, Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980), indicate that some cultures may accept hierarchical organizational structures, while others may engage in participative decision-making processes, fostering an egalitarian workplace.

The case of two European countries, Greece and the Netherlands, is relevant to demonstrate the importance of these cultural differences. According to Scholtens and Dam (2007), significant variations are detected among these countries regarding the implementation of ethics and human rights strategies. The Netherlands has higher firm scores compared to Greece, implying a more efficient approach towards these policies. These differences reflect the impact of societal norms on corporate behavior and policy implementation. Given these diverse cultural structures, a comparative study between Greece and the Netherlands provides a great opportunity to explore how these differences affect the implementation of organizational strategies.

This thesis focuses on investigating the impact of the interplay between organizational and societal culture on the implementation of gender equality strategies within the workplace of multinational organizations. By delving into internal stakeholders' perceptions operating in two European countries, Greece, and the Netherlands, this study seeks to offer an enhanced understanding of both societal and organizational culture's power on the application and outcomes of these practices. It is crucial to clarify that this research, while acknowledging the existence of diverse gender identities, refers to gender as females and males, due to the prevailing discourse in current literature that emphasizes the marginalization of females in discussions of gender parity.

Organizational culture significantly impacts gender dynamics within multinational contexts, with their relationship being reciprocal, underscoring their uninterrupted influence on each other (Mills, 1988). Diverse roles are expected for each gender in different geographical contexts and cultures, often impeding development and progress of females and perpetuating inequalities (Eden & Gupta, 2017). Notably, norms and values distinguishing organizational culture are directly affected by personal beliefs established within societal cultures (Kartolo & Kwantes, 2019). Examining this interplay between organizational and societal culture is crucial for comprehending the implementation and outcomes of gender equality strategies within multinational organizations. Understanding is essential for the promotion of equality, societal welfare, and organizational success. To enhance better comprehension and decrease uncertainty, this study employed a qualitative approach, incorporating diverse internal stakeholder perspectives based on their geographical context (Sofaer, 1999). It is significant to note that stakeholders hold different perspectives based on their geographical context and

their personal interests, and thus evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies differently (Jones et al., 2007 ; Hofstede, 2011).

1.1 Gap in Literature and Research Question

Even though current literature offers valuable insights into key concepts and theories related to organizational and societal culture, a critical gap remains. As investigated by Hofstede (1980) and Brodbeck et al. (2004), societal culture directly impacts workplace dynamics, while based on Schein's theory (1983), organizational culture and individuals' behaviors are significantly shaped by unconscious ingrained beliefs. The relationship between gender dynamics and organizational culture has been studied by Mills (1988). However, the literature does lack a thorough investigation of the interplay between organizational and societal culture on the implementation of gender equality strategies applied within multinational contexts. To fill this gap, this study answers the following research question:

"How does the interplay between societal and organizational culture influence the implementation of gender equality strategies within multinational organizations?"

To address this research question, it is significant to outline other emerging questions which offer valuable insights into the study.
These questions are the following:
1. How does organizational culture affect the implementation of policies within multinational organizations?
2. How does societal culture affect the outcomes of the implementation of organizational policies within multinational organizations?
3. To what extent does societal culture influence organizational culture of multinational organizations?

1.2   Structure of Thesis

Building upon the introductory section, the remainder of this paper is structured to delve into a detailed exploration of the existing literature on organizational and societal culture and gender equality strategies within multinational contexts. Following this review, an in-depth analysis of the theoretical framework is developed in Chapter 3, incorporating key concepts and theories by Schein, Quinn and Rohrbaugh, and Hofstede. Proceeding to Chapter 4 of methodology, the suitability of qualitative research and multi case study is emphasized, while elaborating on the data collection and data analysis methods and procedures, including also potential limitations and ethical considerations. In Chapter 5 the main results of the research are presented, while Chapter 6 focuses on the discussion of the findings. This thesis is complemented by the conclusion section, where the main arguments are summarized.

2. Literature Review

2.1   Importance of diversity & inclusion

The existing literature underscores the importance of inclusive and diverse workplaces to enhance organization's performance. Specifically, it addresses that leadership's role in empowering employees, fosters an inclusive working environment through including them in the decision-making process, instead of adopting plain structures (Sabharwal, 2014). Transformational leadership, involving leaders promoting diversity and equality, can foster more inclusive working environments where everyone feels valued (Turesky & Warner, 2020). Moreover, focusing on positive aspects within the workplace, such as ethical performance and diversity and inclusion can offer new insights into fostering gender equality within organizations (Warren et al., 2019). Forming an inclusive organization is beneficial both for the employees and the organization itself, contributing to better performance, financial profits, innovation, and engagement (Atcheson, 2019). Deciding among established and new practices, centralizing or decentralizing management, and balancing global and local

approaches pose significant challenges in the field of global diversity and inclusion management (Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007).

2.2   Gender Equality Strategies

Organizations, pursuing to foster gender equality, adopt strategies and mechanisms in order to reinforce this effort, while meeting gendered goals (Gartzia, 2021). They focus on diversity and inclusion initiatives, but the overall improvement can pose great challenges, particularly if leadership remains satisfied and the pressure for change is limited (Winfield, 2020).

One of these practices include training programs oriented towards females, employed by organizations in order to mitigate gender disparities in the workplace. These programs are not biased against males, but aim to help females exploit their full potential, by offering a safe and supportive space to boost their self-assurance, abilities, and development for future opportunities (Chuang, 2019). Moreover, leadership programs provide network building, mentoring, and enhance confidence, aiming at promoting females in leadership roles (Ely et al., 2011). Another strategic avenue for achieving gender parity within organizations is through their collaboration with global institutions like the United Nations. United Nations Development Programme agency (UNDP) aims at engaging with private firms as allies to endorse practices that develop inclusive workspaces, secure equal wages, and foster leadership and equal representation (UNDP, 2022). Flexible working hours for females with family responsibilities are also utilized by organizations to promote gender equality, enabling them to balance their roles as mothers and workers (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). Paid parental leave policies are implemented in many countries but vary dependening on the context of global industries (Heymann et al., 2017).

Even if strategies such as supporting systems, evaluation of personal biases, and training, are implemented, prejudices and discrimination, including tokenism, which refers to a symbolic effort towards gender equality, are deeply entrenched within societies, posing obstacles in accomplishing gender parity and inclusion (Camargo, 2023).

2.3   Organizational & Societal Culture Dynamics

Organizational culture significantly influences both the advancement of diversity and the formulation of an inclusive workspace. The term "organizational culture" includes common values, norms, and structures shared among the employees within an organization, which are distinctive and affect the decision-making process by managers (Sun, 2009). Research suggests that it is affected by the societal culture where the organization operates, directly influencing its mechanisms, (Brodbeck et al., 2004). Specifically, organizations are perceived as social systems where cultural dimensions are anticipated to align with their social and structural elements (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984). Although societal culture dynamics involve both objective and subjective perspectives, determining organizational culture is inherently inconclusive (Hatch, 1993). Understanding its impact on the organizational gender dynamics is crucial for ensuring employee's wellbeing and organization's effectiveness, emphasizing the significance of managers' role in promoting values like trust, empowerment, and guidance (Kane-Urrabazo, 2006). Societal culture can be defined as the shared traits that affect a community's response to its external environment (Hofstede, 1980). Cultural values, societal norms, policies, and practices interactively influence each other and shape critical societal dynamics (Schwartz, 2015). Multinational organizations operating in different geographical contexts need to adjust based on the diverse cultural dimensions their regional subsidiaries encounter, dealing with conflicting value systems (Sagiv et al., 2010).

2.4   Importance of Internal Stakeholders

Internal stakeholders, including managers, leaders, employees, HR officers, and diversity and inclusion specialists, are crucial in addressing gender equality within the work field (Bleijenbergh & Van Engen, 2015). However, organizations often interact with external stakeholders to communicate gender equality initiatives, without paying attention to the integral role of internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders' perceptions, shaped by personal and demographic factors, play a significant role in comprehending and influencing organizational culture (Hofstede et al., 1993). It is crucial for employees to establish an organizational culture which informs them about these initiatives to align their values with the organizations' character (Brunton et al., 2015). Therefore, organizations should treat

internal stakeholders as internal customers, utilizing tools such as training, communication, and rewards to ensure the effectiveness of the implemented practices (Chebbi et al., 2020) Organizational identity, referring to employees' shared beliefs of the organization's qualities, influences the relationship between the organization and internal stakeholders, as well as the creation of social value both externally and internally. Thus, different stakeholders' perspectives can directly impact gender equality initiatives in order to create social value (Brickson, 2007). Based on what the literature suggests, stakeholders' interests differ both from the organization but also from each other (Jones et al., 2007). Moreover, their perspectives on gender equality may differ depending on the geographical context they operate in (Hofstede, 2011), highlighting the importance of considering them in the development of moral organizations and in management practices (Simmons, 2004).

3. Theoretical Framework

To investigate how the interplay between organizational and societal culture affects the implementation of gender equality strategies within the workplace of multinational organizations, this research explores Schein's model of organizational culture, the competing values framework by Quinn and Rohrbaugh, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Each of these frameworks facilitate enhanced comprehension of cultural dynamics within multinational organizations.

3.1   Schein's Theory on Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is defined by Schein (1983) as a set of beliefs developed by a particular group to deal with challenges and are taught to newcomers. Specifically, the term includes all the shared values that shape the way of acting of the members of an organization, which are formulated by founders' prompting for adaptation and success. The model's relevance for this research lies in its structure to explore embedded factors within the organizational culture which directly affect the implementation of gender equality strategies. According to Schein, the organizational culture model encompasses unconscious problem-solving practices which are passed on to starters and they are considered right. To deeply

comprehend the culture within an organization, it is important to unravel group perspectives related to fundamental factors like mission, goals or principles. (Schein 1983) Organizational culture model is characterized for its three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions (Schein, 2010). Through these, the behaviour of the members within an organization is guided. The first level includes everything that can be seen and observed, such as the language, environment, or technology. However, artifacts are difficult to decode because of their uncountable explanations. The second level encompasses the values, goals, and visions that shape the way of acting of the organizations' members, even though people often claim different values from their actions. At the deepest level are incorporated unconscious assumptions which directly affect the perspectives, notions, and reaction of the members, and are difficult to be altered. (Schein, 2010). Investigating the power of organizational culture on gender equality strategies is pivotal to explore its influence on their implementation within multinational organizations both in Greece and in the Netherlands. By delving into each of the factors in Schein's framework, this research explores how they can affect organizational behaviors and practices that hinder or facilitate the implementation of gender equality strategies.

3.2   Competing Values Framework by Quinn & Rohrbaugh

Building on Scehin's model, the Competing Values Framework by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) determines four models of organizational effectiveness. These are human relations, open system, rational goal, and internal process. Each of these models focuses on different factors within the organizational culture, possibly affecting the outcomes of gender equality strategies. This framework is applicable as it allows for a thorough investigation of the specific cultural aspects within multinationals that influence the effectiveness of the applied policies to promote gender parity. The human relations model, highlights flexibility with an inward focus, emphasizing criteria such as morale for human capital development. The second and third approaches both have an external focus, while the open system model places its attention on adaptability, growth, and resource collection, and the rational goal model concentrates on forming goals and organizing, as a means for productiveness and effectiveness. The last model, the internal process, emphasizes control, underlining the
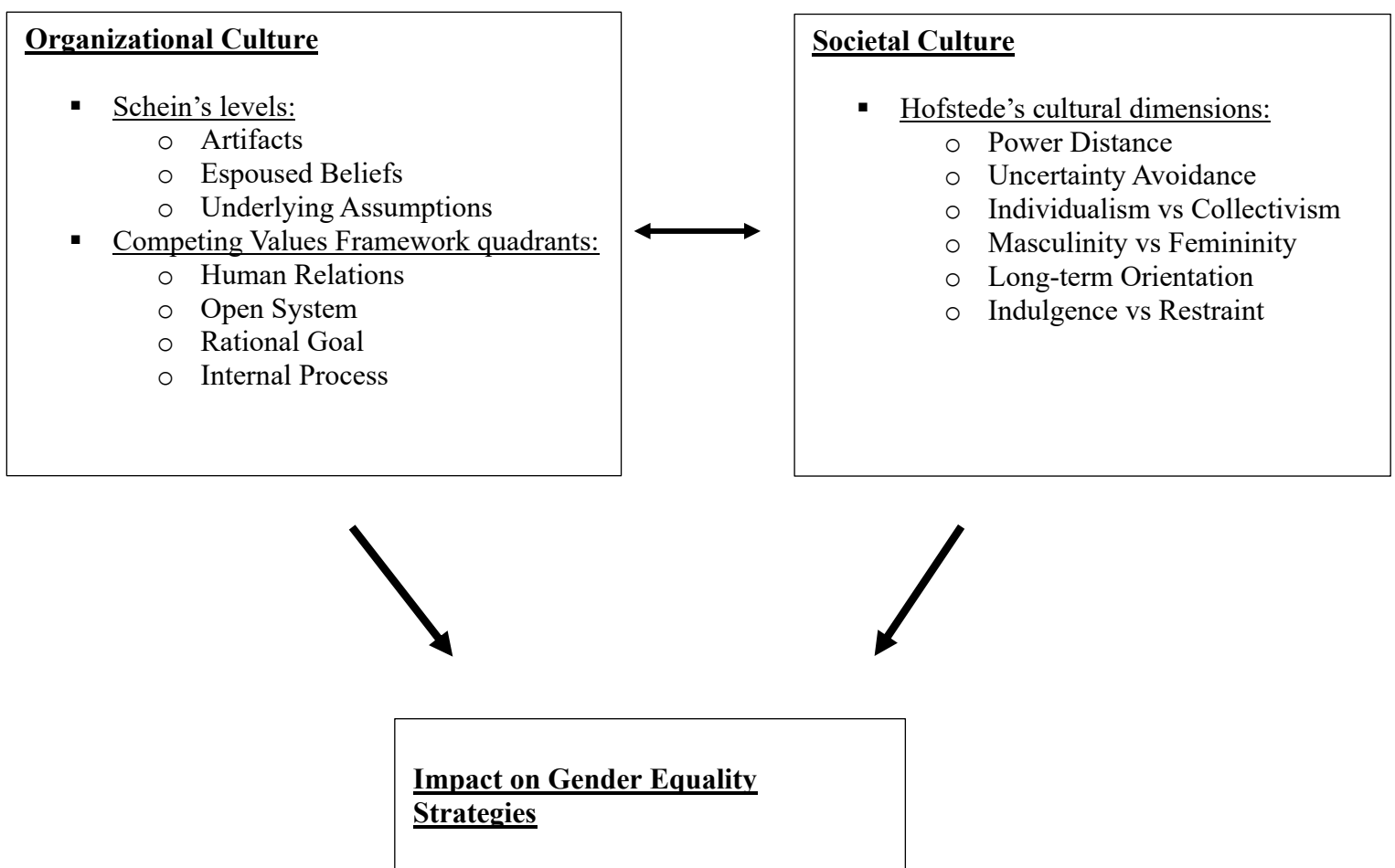
significance of managing information and communication to achieve cohesion. (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983)

This framework serves as a useful tool to identify the values, beliefs, and norms of an organization towards gender equality strategies. By categorizing the organizational culture in each of the proposed models in the two geographical contexts, this research investigates how organizational culture affects the implementation of these practices. Therefore, it can contribute to insights that will foster the implementation of targeted mechanisms within the multinational organizations both in Greece and the Netherlands to improve their outcomes.

3.3   Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Furthermore, Hofstede's concept of cultural dimensions adds useful insights into enhancing understanding of societies' differences and effects on business (Hofstede, 1984). Its pertinence lies in its ability to recognize and compare cultural elements that influence the implementation of gender equality initiatives among diverse geographical contexts. The first four dimensions, introduced in 1980, included power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity. Power distance refers to the unequal distribution of power among members of a society, and the extent to which they value hierarchy. Uncertainty avoidance represents the level to which they tackle future uncertainty, while individualism explains the degree to which society members are interdependent. The last dimension, masculinity, expands on the perceived characteristics attributed to each gender role. Hofstede later added another two dimensions, the long-term orientation and indulgence. The first one focuses on the extent to which a society maintains its traditions and norms, while the last one refers to the limit members put on their desires based on their upbringing (Hofstede, 1984). Understanding cultural characteristics through their reflection in organizational culture is significantly useful for exploring how these influence gender equality strategies across different geographical contexts. Examining cultural dimensions of different countries facilitates the identification of cultural factors that ease or impede the implementation of the practices applied. In the case of Greece, the country is known for its intimate bond with religion and respect for authority figures, while the Netherlands is characterized by its cultural diversity and consensus-oriented approach to decision-making processes, highlighting major contrasts in their societal structures. Therefore, Hofstede's theory allows

for a comparative study within the two geographical contexts, emphasizing differences or similarities that affect the outcomes of the gender equality strategies. For example, in the Netherlands power is distributed among employees, and equal rights are supported, even though it is considered as an individualistic country (Country Comparison Tool, n.d.). Greece values highly hierarchy and inequalities are considered as normal, while the country does not strongly prefer societal change or efforts towards a more sustainable future. (Country Comparison Tool, n.d.). By comparing these distinct countries' characteristics, this study explores cultural differences and their interplay with the elements of organizational culture.

Organizational Culture

- Schein's levels:
    o Artifacts
    o Espoused Beliefs
    o Underlying Assumptions
- Competing Values Framework quadrants:
    o Human Relations
    o Open System
    o Rational Goal
    o Internal Process

Societal Culture

- Hofstede's cultural dimensions:
    o Power Distance
    o Uncertainty Avoidance
    o Individualism vs Collectivism
    o Masculinity vs Femininity
    o Long-term Orientation
    o Indulgence vs Restraint

Impact on Gender Equality Strategies

This research employs a conceptual model based on theories of Schein, Quinn and Rohrbaugh, and Hofstede to offer a better understanding of the complex interplay between organizational and societal culture and its effect on gender equality strategies. Specifically, it examines internal stakeholders' perspectives on how organizational and societal culture

interact affecting the implementation of the mechanisms applied within multinational organizations. By using this investigative approach, this study explores the mentioned theories to identify patterns emerging in each country. The proposed framework advocates for the consideration of both organizational and societal culture as intertwined elements affecting the implementation of gender equality strategies within multinational organizations. By synthesizing the three established theories in a novel way, this thesis advances the academic discourse and offers practical implications to promote gender parity within multinational contexts.

4. Methodology and Empirical Strategy

4.1   Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was adopted to better comprehend the interplay between societal culture, organizational dynamics, and gender equality strategies within multinational organizations in Greece and the Netherlands. Opting for a qualitative path was considered appropriate as qualitative methods are utilized to enhance understanding of different aspects of humans' lives and social contexts (Fossey et al., 2002). Using this methodology allowed for a thorough investigation of the impact of organizational and societal culture on the implementation of the gender strategies applied within the workplace of multinationals operating in the two European countries.

This study was designed as a multiple case study, enabling for a detailed comparison and the identification of differences or similarities embedded within the culture and norms of these geographical contexts. Specifically, it focused on one specific multinational consulting organization in the professional services sector, operating both in Greece and the Netherlands. These geographical contexts were selected because they represent different cultural and organizational landscapes, with Greece being more hierarchical and traditional compared to the progressive Dutch context. As multiple case study lets for an in-depth analysis of diverse contexts and circumstances, it can offer valuable insights to the literature while providing credible results (Gustafsson, 2017), making this approach the most suitable.

An inductive approach was used as it offers a useful and efficient tool to obtain results (Thomas, 2006), while its nature is observative and interpretive (Li, 2016).

4.1.1 Relevance of the Multinational Consulting Organization

The selected multinational organization was chosen as it is one of the largest and most prestigious professional services networks, influencing business practices globally. The organization operates in diverse cultural contexts, providing an empirical setting where the interplay between organizational and societal culture and its effect on gender equality strategies can be explored. The particular multinational has great influence on the business world, owning extreme power to propel advancement (Bouquet & Birkinshaw, 2008). Moreover, professions in the professional services sector such as in finance, accountancy, or IT are considered male-dominated, with females facing unrecognized and unreported discrimination within the workplace (Von Hippel et al., 2015 ; Smith, 2013 ; Loft, 1992). Finally, the organization's commitment to equality and inclusion also provides a setting to evaluate the proper implementation of these policies dependent on the different cultural contexts.

4.1.2 Case Context: Greece

Greece was selected as an empirical setting due to its traditional and patriarchal structures which highlight traditional gender roles and affect females' presence in the job market (Stamiris, 1986). Hofstede's country comparison tool gave further insights regarding the six cultural dimensions. Specifically, Greece is characterized by high power distance, reinforcing inequalities, while respect is demonstrated dependent on the social position one owns. Strong uncertainty avoidance distinguishes the country causing the implementation of strict rules to ensure a secure place to live in. Traditional gender roles are deeply integrated, while success is considered a male characteristic. Furthermore, Greece has no strong preference for societal change. (*Country Comparison Tool*, n.d.)

4.1.3 Case Context: Netherlands

The rationale for selecting the Netherlands as an empirical setting lies in its progressive and egalitarian culture which contrasts with Greece's. The country demonstrates low power distance, with managers being accessible and employees being part of the decision-making procedures. As a highly individualistic society, organizational relationships are limited only to mutual benefit while recruitment is based on the skills and not personal connections. Equality, solidarity, and work-life balance are valued while people are perceived as optimists and can easily adapt to altered conditions. (*Country Comparison Tool*, n.d.)

These contexts are relevant for this research as they represent different societal structures and cultural dimensions that influence behaviours and attitudes in the workplace, providing a rich basis to investigate the interplay between societal and organizational culture and its effect on the implementation and outcomes of gender equality initiatives.

4.2   Sampling Strategy

For shaping the empirical context, a purposive sampling strategy was employed, given that certain individuals may hold different perspectives regarding the issue at question (Mason, 2002 ; Trost, 1986). Specifically, two main units of analysis were selected for sampling and those were the same multinational organizations operating in Greece and the Netherlands. This thesis considered perspectives of internal stakeholders within the two contexts. The internal stakeholders included managers, HR officers, and employees, both females and males selected and approached through LinkedIn. This mixed-gender purposive sample secured equal representation to provide a more holistic understanding (Robinson, 2013). Engagement with the group of participants gave further insights into understanding their perspectives through discussing experiences, efforts, challenges, and cultural beliefs applied within the context of the multinational consulting organization both in Greece and the Netherlands. It is significant to note that while in Greece all the participants were Greek, in the Netherlands all the participants had different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the organization operating in Greece employed more than 2,800 people, whereas the organization in the Netherlands had a headcount of more than 8,000. These units allowed for an in-depth

exploration of the interplay between societal and organizational culture, and its influence on gender equality strategies within each geographical context, identifying cultural factors that facilitate or impede the implementation of these practices.

4.3   Data Collection and Description

The data collection approach employed for this study included semi-structured interviews and secondary data. Utilizing semi-structured interviews was the preferred method for this thesis as it allowed for thorough insights and individuals' feedback regarding a specific phenomenon they encountered (Mashuri et al., 2022 ; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Secondary data refers to existing data that was gathered in the past (Andrews et al., 2012), and so reports, records, and online information from the organization were collected to validate participants' statements. Eleven interviews were conducted and recorded online, employing a predetermined interview protocol (see appendix A for interview questions, appendix B for participants), to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Kallio et al., 2016). The procedure included several stages starting from interviewee identification, interview preparation, execution, transcription, translation of transcripts and interview interpretation using coding (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Specifically, all the interviews within the Greek context (6 in total) were conducted in Greek language, as all the interviewees were Greek, and conducting them in English could lead to potential loss of significant information. In the Dutch context, 4 out of 5 interviews were conducted in English, with 1 in Greek, due to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the participants within the organization. Transcripts in Greek were translated into English using DeepL Translator. The specific translation tool was chosen as it does not store texts, ensuring the privacy of the participants' sensitive data. Collecting perceptions from internal stakeholders contributed to the enhanced comprehension of the interplay between organizational and societal culture and its influence on the implementation of gender equality strategies.

4.4   Conceptualization

This study explored the concepts of organizational and societal culture through three different frameworks. Organizational culture was explored through Schein's (1983) model and its

three levels, including artifacts, espoused beliefs, and underlying assumptions, to understand how these shape organizational dynamics. Moreover, Quinn and Rohrbaugh's Competing Values Framework was utilized to investigate each of its four quadrants' influence on the implementation of gender equality strategies. Societal culture was examined under the lens of cultural dimensions described by Hofstede, encompassing power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, and masculinity vs. femininity to evaluate how cultural nuances affect organizational practices. Finally, gender equality strategies were explored as the initiatives and practices applied within multinational organizations aiming to foster parity within the workplace.

4.5   Data Analysis

For analyzing the collected data, a combination of thematic analysis and grounded theory approach was used, allowing for a detailed exploration of the organizational and societal culture's impact on the implementation of gender equality strategies in the multinational consulting organization, operating in the two countries. Thematic analysis' suitability lies in its ability to interpret key findings while offering flexibility (Kiger & Varpio, 2020), trustworthiness and reliability (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Utilization of thematic analysis was extremely useful for this thesis in order to report and analyze patterns related to the experiences, perceptions, and actions of the participants (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Moreover, grounded theory was considered appropriate due to its nature to explore newly emerging phenomena rigorously (Glaser et al., 2005), while creating and constructing theory based on the collected data (Khan, 2014). Utilizing both thematic analysis and grounded theory provided a systematic approach to analyzing participants' interviews (Chapman et al., 2015), while allowed for a methodical recognition of themes and the development of an enhanced theoretical understanding.

The first stage of analysis included transcribing, translating and reviewing collected data to save time while also getting familiar with the data in order to enhance understanding (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). To organize and categorize the collected data, coding was used through the Nvivo software tool, enabling for new and diverse perceptions of data, with each code representing a specific meaning related to the context (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

After initial coding, codes that are connected were assembled in themes based on the emerged patterns and defined theories (Kostere & Kostere, 2015).

Open coding was utilized to separate and organize data using labels, while axial coding was helpful in linking open codes to formulate broader categories to enhance understanding. Lastly, selective coding was used to connect crucial categories related to the core theme of gender equality within multinational organizations (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). (see appendix C for coding scheme)

The analysis incorporated reflexivity as a means to critically manage the influence of personal biases and to provide accurate interpretations of the results, while ensuring trustworthiness (Berger, 2013). Reflexivity was secured by seeking peer feedback while also keeping record of thoughts and feelings at different times throughout the whole analysis process so as to ensure critical self assessment (Berger, 2013). This thesis strived to secure trustworthiness and validity by fulfilling Guba's criteria, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). Credibility was secured through participant checking to confirm that the interpretation of their perspectives was valid, while transferability was achieved through a thorough investigation into each working and cultural context, to examine the applicability of findings to other contexts. Finally, both dependability and confirmability were ensured through keeping records of the whole procedure, to enhance validity and ensure that the outcomes will not be affected by personal values.

4.6   Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are significant in qualitative research to secure the integrity of this study and the protection of vulnerable participants (Arifin, 2018). To ensure participants were aware of the collection procedure, this research obtained consent, while it clarified the confidentiality and anonymity in the findings of this thesis. Participants' permission was asked for using their quotes, as well as for referring to the name of the organization in the final results. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, and the discomfort it may arise, participants were ensured that they are not at risk and were treated with care and respect.

5. Results

This section provides a presentation of the main findings from the interviews conducted with managers, employees, and HR personnel from the multinational consulting organization. The analysis of the data focuses on the interplay between societal and organizational culture and the gender equality strategies that are implemented within the workplace in each of the explored countries.

5.1   Greece:

5.1.1 Gender Distribution

Gender ratios within the organization varied across different departments and teams as stated from the respondents. According to the Greek organization's Impact Report (2022), the percentage of males was 56%, while females' was 44%. While both countries represented almost equal gender distribution, females were underrepresented in technical roles but dominated in HR positions in Greece. As one respondent noted (male, HR), females were 25 of 29 people in the HR department, with him finding it "a huge example of diversity". However, high-level positions such as partners, directors, and CEOs were occupied by older males.

5.1.2 Commitment to Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion

The multinational consulting organization depicted a strong engagement in promoting values such as inclusion, diversity, equality, and respect based on the Greek respondents. According to the organization's Global Impact Report (2023), through the implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, it seeks to promote a workplace based on mutual respect and inclusive behaviors. Through the implementation of policies and initiatives, it aimed to foster an inclusive environment where there was zero tolerance towards abusive or problematic behaviors. In Greece, while most of the interviewees validated the organization's strong

commitment to these values, it was noted by 3 respondents (2 female managers, 1 female employee) that despite this commitment, gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes persisted, restricting females from advancing in their career due to traditional gender roles. Specifically, the female employee found the working schedule "prohibitive" for parents and especially for mothers, because in Greece "the female will take the most active role". Moreover, the manager emphasized the existence of cronyism, which refers to powerful people favoring friends or trusted colleagues, further affecting females' tendency to express concerns as they did not feel safe regarding the level of confidentiality. When asked about the penalties of non-compliance, she responded "To the best man's best man?", implying the persistence of cronyism.

5.1.3 Confidentiality & Integrity

According to the interviews, personnel were encouraged to raise concerns and issues through various ways, including HR, Ethics Office, Mental Health Lines, Coaching Sessions or directly to managers. The Global Impact Report (2023) of the organization highlighted the various channels for addressing ethics concerns, emphasizing confidentiality. Respondents in the Greek context claimed that there were some specific procedures to report an issue, accompanied by a few concerns. Specifically, 1 female employee stated that HR did not show the requisite attention to a bad treatment of one of her female colleagues, stating that "HR apparently couldn't do anything", while others pointed out that there was often fear of speaking up because they thought that their issue would go unreported. In contrast, the male participant and representative of HR policies stated that everyone can openly discuss any concern.

5.1.4 Gender Roles & Career Concerns

The findings displayed concerns related to traditional gender roles and responsibilities, especially in balancing childcare and career development. In Greece, there was a strong assumption that females were mainly responsible for childcare. Specifically, the only male Greek respondent from HR highlighted the traditional view that children need their mother more compared to their father. Most females reported that they would reconsider the

possibility of getting pregnant and giving birth, as it would pose question marks regarding their career progress afterwards. Specifically, a female manager reported the perception of her colleagues that "when a woman will want to have a family that she slackens". The fear of remaining overlooked for promotions and career opportunities after maternity prevailed among females within the organization.

5.1.5 Barriers to Gender Equality

In the Greek context, one of the barriers included the fast-paced working environment which did not allow neither the space nor the time to open gender equality conversations. Patriarchal attitudes and traditional gender roles, such as the female being mainly responsible for childcare, were also perceived as obstacles. Specifically, participants emphasized that older generations tend to have more traditional views regarding the role of females, highlighting the deeply embedded societal norms. Additionally, based on participants' claims, these integrated beliefs were possibly brought into the working environment subconsciously and often went unrecognized. Apart from the workforce, clients were reported to have different expectations, such as contacting only male employees. Specifically, one female manager commented that she "can't call it bias, but it's that social thing you know". Interviewees stated that the patriarchal structures of Greek society favored frequent sexist comments and jokes such as calling females "hysterical" or "broody hens", with females trying to have masculine traits to lead. In contrast, according to the Greek male from HR, comments were prohibited, even though females stated the opposite. Stereotypes and biases are significant obstacles in achieving gender parity, with the interviewees reporting misconceptions related to terms like "feminism" or "femicide". The male respondent from HR stated, "they're not femicides, they're homicides", validating the misconceptions of definitions. Despite the fact that the organization conducts seminars and workshops related to gender equality, males were reported to have limited interest in attending, posing another barrier. Maternity career concerns were also shared among females, as they were afraid that maternity would impact their career progress and be perceived negatively by colleagues, causing inappropriate comments.

5.1.6 Gender Equality Strategies

The findings revealed several gender equality strategies implemented by the consulting organization to promote an inclusive working environment. In Greece, participants observed several initiatives such as coaching sessions, mental health lines, wellness surveys, and training to ensure the proper behavior and mental health of the personnel. Moreover, participants highlighted equal payments, neutral recruitment and promotion procedures, gynecological screening license, and empowerment campaigns for females in leadership positions. Especially for mothers, policies included maternity and paternity leave, with maternity being longer, rehabilitation programs to get back to their previous responsibilities progressively, and flexible working. However, their effectiveness remained questionable, as some female participants claimed concerns for getting promoted after maternity leave and for flexible working in such a demanding organization which required hour availability. Specifically, a female manager acknowledged the occurrence of inappropriate comments on maternity leave from the personnel, such as "she can't get a promotion because since she's on maternity leave, she's not actually considered to have a year of working here, since she's rocking babies".

5.1.7 Suggestions for Improvements

Based on the findings, in Greece all the interviewees suggested improvements with all the females claiming that they would like to see maternity and paternity have the same duration in order to share equally the parental responsibilities. The male Greek from HR proposed that paternity leave could be slightly extended for fathers to help mothers especially in the early days of birth. Female participants encouraged male participation in female empowerment and gender equality events, while recommending the increase and maintenance of gender equality strategies to enhance awareness. Flexible hours especially for mothers was another suggestion made by a female employee together with equal representation of females in each sector. Finally, as reported by all the female managers, there is a need for an incremental societal change in patriarchal structures of the Greek society, to raise and address gender equality issues and promote inclusion and recognition. Specifically, one female manager claimed that "It's society that creates the barriers".

5.1.8 Policy Compliance & Motivation

Participants reported different reasons for complying with the policies. In Greece, the male respondent from HR noted the fear of facing repercussions, while the female managers highlighted the genuine belief in gender equality especially of the younger generation, Gen Z. Furthermore, one respondent (female, manager) emphasized that even though some people from the workforce may had traditional views, they either left the organization or were forced to acclimatize to the values of the multinational. Most of the participants reported that several employees demonstrate superficial compliance to gender equality policies as perceived as a role obligation.

5.1.9 Internal Stakeholders' Perspectives

Participants, based on their position in the organization, demonstrated different perspectives regarding gender equality within the Greek organizational context. Employees, highlighted the importance of equality and confidentiality in the workplace, emphasizing the organization's commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive working environment despite the persistence of traditional norms. They reported that they are individually responsible in how they behave and cooperate with colleagues, and they conceive gender equality through daily informal interactions and personal experiences. Managers emphasized their crucial role to lead by example within their teams. Despite challenges, they claimed that they try to impact their team members to act appropriately and promote equality. The HR employee focused on the practical implementation of HR policies regarding gender equality, highlighting HR's role in protecting organization's values.

5.2 The Netherlands:

5.2.1 Gender Distribution

In the Netherlands, even though most respondents demonstrated a balanced gender representation, it was claimed that there was a lack of female presence in the sectors of IT

and accountancy. As stated from a manager in IT (male, manager), efforts were being made by the organization to increase the representation of females in IT. These claims were validated by the Dutch Organization's Integrated Annual Report (2022/2023), where it was noted that sectors like technology face challenges in finding females, therefore implementing strategies such as diversifying the recruitment team, investing in new partnerships, promoting new recruitment methodologies, and improving vacancy texts.

Overall, gender distribution within the organization varied in relation to the department, with males dominating in high level positions.

5.2.2 Commitment to Diversity, Equality & Inclusion

In the Dutch context, the organization demonstrated the same commitment to equality and inclusion, especially because of the different backgrounds of people working together. Specifically, according to the Integrated Annual Report (2022/2023), the organization has Employee Resource Groups, including networks for females, LGBTQ+, neurodiversity, and cultural diversity in order to ensure an equal system. However, as reported by the only female employee, the organization showed strong dedication on paper but practically, there were still some concerning behaviors towards females, highlighting mansplaining as one of them.

5.2.3 Confidentiality & Integrity

In the Netherlands, while similar processes to Greece were valid, interviewees highlighted their feeling of safety to open conversations and raise their issues, emphasizing the transparency and integrity. The Dutch respondent, talking about his freedom to talk with his coach for any issue, found the coaching sessions "more than enough", while the South African female employee claimed that "you're always told that if someone's doing something wrong or something, you can report it with no repercussions".

5.2.4 Gender Roles & Career Concerns

Referring to parental obligations, it was anticipated that both males and females were equally responsible for childcare. Policies such as four-day working, flexible hours, and parental support reinforced balancing work-life with parental responsibilities. These policies are validated by the Integrated Annual Report (2022/2023) which states that for pregnancy, maternity, and paid parental leave, there is an entitlement of 100% of the last-earned salary. However, all male participants reported that maternity should be longer than paternity leave, with the female preferring the same duration for each (16 weeks based on Integrated Annual Report). The Dutch employee claimed that he had no issue of who will have the longer leave, unless someone will be at home to take care of the newborn.

5.2.5 Barriers to Gender Equality

In the Netherlands, challenges were identified particularly from participants with different cultural backgrounds. As stated by most interviewees, personnel coming from traditional cultures often faced difficulties implementing the organization's policies and beliefs and faced the repercussions. Specifically, the participants reported cases where a male could not accept that a female was in authority, cases of mansplaining, comments, jokes, and known stories for sexual harassment. The female employee pointed out that sometimes male groups excluded unintentionally female colleagues. Another barrier to gender equality was claimed to be the limited interest of females in specific sectors such as IT. Moreover, participants noted that people living in suburbs with little education tend to have an orthodox thinking, posing significant barriers to gender equality. Yet, the Dutch employee stated that most Dutch people were highly educated and therefore acknowledged how to behave properly and respectfully.

5.2.6 Gender Equality Strategies

Strategies in the Netherlands included coaching sessions, diversity and inclusion forums for discussions, mental health lines, and training, fostering an inclusive and equal workplace.

These strategies are validated by the Global Impact Report (2023), which emphasizes prevention's significance and highlights use of resources such as well-being articles, videos, and educational material to support the mental health of the workforce. Moreover, participants acknowledged the existence of an HR and ethics department, equal payments, efforts for equal gender distribution, flexible working hours and neutral hiring and promotion processes. In addition, for those who presented problematic behaviors towards colleagues, there was a personal development plan which provided training to handle inappropriate attitudes. Regarding mothers, participants reported maternity and paternity leave and parental support with a four day working per week for both parents. Interviewees confirmed female empowerment campaigns and networks, aiming at promoting females in leadership roles and male dominated sectors.

5.2.7 Suggestions for Improvements

In the Netherlands, 1 male employee and 1 male manager stated that the organization is doing great regarding gender equality, while the rest male participants suggested equal gender distribution and increase of maternity leave. The female employee recommended the involvement of males in female empowerment events and discussions and the need for societal change to minimize microaggressions both in the professional and personal life. However, she acknowledged that males despite the training and learnings "tend to still have those, like microaggressions, like the mansplaining".

5.2.8 Policy Compliance & Motivation

In the Netherlands, the Dutch respondent noted that Dutch people's beliefs aligned with the organizational policies, claiming that it is a "Dutch thing". Yet, other participants stated that there were also employees who were intimidated by getting cancelled if not complying with the existing strategies, while others viewed it as a role they need to perform within their working environment.

5.2.9 Internal Stakeholders' Perspectives

In the multicultural Dutch context, employees reported a strong organizational commitment to gender equality initiatives, characterizing the organization as "fairly loyal" and with "a very good, standardized rewards model and system". Despite potential micro aggressions, they emphasized individual responsibility to promote inclusion, while they perceived gender equality through daily interactions with colleagues. Managers highlighted their significant role in promoting respectful workspaces through leading by example. Moreover, they emphasized efforts for gender balance within teams along with evaluation based only on skills and performance. Due to the absence of HR employees, their perspectives could not be provided.

5.3 Summary of Findings

Before moving to the discussion part, it is essential to summarize the findings from the results for both Greece and the Netherlands. Overall, in both countries, the organization demonstrated a strong commitment to gender equality through several strategies and initiatives such as training, female empowerment campaigns, coaching sessions, and neutral hiring and promotion procedures. However, females were underrepresented in high-level positions, and in sectors such as IT and accountancy in both contexts. Moreover, there were some significant barriers identified, especially in Greece where traditional gender roles, patriarchal attitudes, and cronyism prevailed and affected organizational behaviors. Specifically, inappropriate comments on females' promotion after maternity leave and their ability to establish their authority have occurred within the workplace, hindering females' career progress. In the Netherlands, challenges included micro aggressions such as mansplaining or sexist jokes. Nevertheless, participants noted a high level of transparency and safety to report concerns and incidents. A significant difference between the two countries was the cultural diversity within the working environment. In Greece, there was homogeneity in the personnel, as all the workforce was Greek. In contrast, in the Netherlands, there was diversity in cultural backgrounds, influencing the implementation of gender equality initiatives. Employees in both countries emphasized individual responsibility in promoting gender equality, while managers highlighted their significant role in leading by

example and treating their team's members equally. The HR employee in Greece focused on the practical implementation of gender equality strategies through following specific procedures, even though some participants noted ineffectiveness.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

Although this research provided significant insights into the perspectives, experiences, and challenges of internal stakeholders regarding gender equality within the explored multinational consulting organization, it is important to interpret the results with caution due to existing limitations. This section provides an interpretation of the findings based on previous research and theories, followed by a reflection on the implications for practitioners and the limitations of the study. Subsequently, the conclusions are drawn.

The findings from this study validate previous theories and expand them regarding the interplay between societal and organizational culture and its effect on the implementation of gender equality strategies within multinationals. Previous studies have emphasized the reciprocal relationship between gender dynamics and organizational culture, with the latter being influenced by the societal culture where the organization operates (Mills, 1988 ; Brodbeck et al., 2004). Based on this research's results, it is demonstrated that both Greece and the Netherlands are characterized by distinguishing cultural elements that directly influence gender equality initiatives. Specifically, the traditional gender roles and high-power distance in Greece, fostered a workplace where females' career progress is impeded by societal norms. This aligns with Eden and Gupta (2017) who supported that societal expectations perpetuate inequalities within organizations. In contrast, the Netherlands' egalitarian culture promoted a more inclusive environment despite the microaggressions and unconscious biases.

6.1 Discussion

6.1.1 Schein's Theory on Organizational Culture

This research utilizes three structured frameworks – Schein's, Quinn & Rohrbaugh's, Hofstede's – to interpret its findings. Schein's model with its three levels of artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions is validated in both Greece and the Netherlands. Specifically, artifacts include the gender distribution within the organization and the visible behaviour of the personnel in both contexts. In Greece, artifacts are affected by the underlying assumptions, which integrate traditional gender roles and patriarchal views, often leading to biased behaviours and hindering the implementation of gender equality strategies. In the Netherlands, the espoused beliefs of the organization strongly promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, reflecting organization's commitment and supporting Schein's model. The findings on the underlying assumptions within the Dutch context demonstrate freedom to open gender-related discussion and report concerns, along with equal parental responsibilities and proper behaviour. These unconscious beliefs foster a respectful workplace where equitable policies for both females and males are implemented. According to Schein's theory, it is evident from the data that all elements are validated. Specifically, in Greece, the underlying assumptions directly affect organizational behaviours and practices, influencing the implementation of gender equality strategies. Underlying assumptions are also reflected in artifacts, where males dominate both in high-level positions and specific sectors, confirming Schein's notion that this element is the deepest and it cannot be easily altered despite the presence of organizational values. In the Netherlands, Schein's theory is confirmed by the organization's emphasis on espoused beliefs, underlying assumptions, and its efforts to bring gender balance reflected in artifacts. According to Schein, these levels shape organizational behaviours and the implementation of organizational policies.

However, while this theory is extremely useful to understand how these levels of culture interact and shape organizational culture, it does not consider the cultural backgrounds of the workforce. Greece's homogeneous working environment impedes exposure to diversity, leading to perpetuation of traditional views, affecting gender equality strategies. In contrast, the heterogeneous workforce in the Dutch organization fosters a diverse, respectful, and

inclusive workspace, positively influencing the implementation of gender equality initiatives. Workforce composition should be considered as a crucial factor influencing underlying assumptions, as societal norms significantly influence organizational culture and the implementation of organizational policies.

6.1.2 Competing Values Framework by Quinn & Rohrbaugh

The Competing Values Framework's models for effectiveness are also confirmed by the research's findings, validating their influence on organizational practices. All four models - Human Relations, Open System, Internal Process, Rational Goal - play a significant role in exploring how gender equality strategies are applied within the workplace. The Human Relations Model, emphasizing teamwork and collaboration, plays a significant role in fostering diverse and inclusive workspaces. However, its effectiveness is questionable in the Greek context due to hierarchical and traditional structures which hinder the implementation of gender equality initiatives. Even though the Open System Model is evident from a formal policy perspective in Greece, the organization's homogeneous workforce in terms of cultural backgrounds impedes exposure to diverse perspectives, leading to commitment to traditional practices and the model's inefficiency regarding gender equality strategies. Underscoring effectiveness and planning, the Rational Goal Model is an important element affecting the implementation of gender equality strategies. Using metrics to ensure progress in gender equality initiatives, its effectiveness is debatable due to the unspoken fear of communicating issues and concerns. The same applies also for the Internal Process Model which even though emphasizes clear communication of policies from the appropriate departments, hierarchical structures hinder individuals from reporting concerns, further impacting the implementation of gender equality strategies. Therefore, the effectiveness of the gender equality policies based on the four models is questionable in Greece, confirming the framework's strong effect on organizational culture and organizational practices.

In contrast, in the Netherlands, the Human Relations Model demonstrates better organizational effectiveness regarding gender equality initiatives, as the organization prioritizes the implementation of several initiatives to ensure mutual respect and foster an inclusive and diverse workplace. Moreover, the diversity of the workforce's cultural backgrounds promotes an organizational culture of respect and collaboration, aligning

perfectly with the Human Relations Model's focus on morale. The Open System Model is also evident through the organization's adapting and innovative culture which aims to address social needs and foster an inclusive and diverse working environment. The Rational Goal Model aligns with the organization's goals to effectively implement gender equality strategies, while using metrics and setting measurable goals. As the Internal Process Model emphasizes the importance of information management, communication, stability, and control, its effect on the implementation of gender equality strategies is clearly validated by the research's findings.

Overall, Greece's traditional norms and homogeneity in cultural backgrounds of the workforce pose significant barriers in the effectiveness of the four models regarding the implementation of gender equality strategies. In contrast, the Dutch organization's commitment to diversity and inclusivity, along with its heterogeneous workforce positively affects the implementation of these initiatives. The effectiveness of these models depends on the cultural context where the organization operates. Therefore, the Competing Values Framework should also consider the geographical and cultural context of the organization to improve performance.

6.1.3 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework provides a rich basis to explore society's impact on the implementation and outcomes of gender equality initiatives through three of its six dimensions. In Greece, there is a medium level power distance workplace, where everyone is treated equally and has the freedom to communicate needs and concerns with the upper management. However, high-power distance exists in the management of sensitive issues, confirming Hofstede's assertion that hierarchical structures perpetuate inequalities and negatively affect the organizational culture and the implementation of its mechanisms. Masculine values including competitiveness, power, and success prevail within the culture. Participants reported dissatisfaction of colleagues regarding promotions of females after maternity leave, along with efforts to present others' work as their own. This confirms Hofstede's notion about masculine societies which emphasize competitiveness and assertiveness, while affecting the implementation of gender equality initiatives.

Greece has a short-term orientation which is reflected through the country's commitment to its traditional gender roles and practices, that further impact the organizational attitudes. Even though the organization is committed to long-term gender equality initiatives, the country has not a strong preference in achieving societal change regarding gender equality, affecting the outcomes of the gender equality strategies.

On the contrary, the low power distance culture in the Dutch organization facilitates the proper implementation of gender equality initiatives, through the establishment of an inclusive and respectful working environment where all voices are heard, validating Hofstede. Feminine values such as inclusion, respect, and support distinguish the Netherlands according to research's findings. The culture puts emphasis on high-quality of life and work-life balance, promoting gender equality and facilitating the implementation of initiatives. The Dutch culture shows strong long-term orientation, which is revealed through the organization's commitment to long-term gender equality strategies, such as constant trainings, female campaigns, and initiatives to foster an equal and inclusive working environment, while securing sustainable change.

The findings of the research align with Hofstede's theory, demonstrating the effects of society's culture on human values and behaviours. Based on the results, these three dimensions – power distance, masculinity vs femininity, short vs long term orientation, significantly impact organizational attitudes and affect the implementation of gender equality strategies. However, Hofstede's cultural dimensions do not consider the cultural diversity of the workforce. Diversity within the workplace can significantly reinforce the proper implementation of gender equality strategies, suggesting that cultural diversity should be taken into consideration as an additional dimension.

6.1.4 Interconnection of Theories

It is evident that there is a strong relation between the three theories that affect the implementation of gender equality strategies within the multinational organizations in Greece and the Netherlands. Schein's first level, artifacts, which includes gender distribution and attitudes, are clearly affected by Hofstede's masculine culture and high-power distance, promoting traditional hierarchies in the Greek context. Masculine culture also influences

Schein's underlying assumptions, fostering a competitive working environment, while hindering Rational Goal Model's focus on efficiency through perpetuating traditional gender roles. In the Netherlands, Schein's espoused beliefs and values align with Hofstede's low masculine values, promoting inclusive behaviours and a respectful workplace. Moreover, Hofstede's low power distance affects the Human Relations Model, which focuses on collaboration, while long-term orientation supports the Open System Model which promotes sustainable change. The interconnection of these theories extends each theory while offering an enhanced understanding of the interplay between organizational and societal culture and its effect on the implementation of gender equality strategies.

Table 1: Summary Table of Theoretical Confirmations, Novel Contributions, and Potential Research Questions

Theory	Confirmations	Novel Contributions	Potential Research Questions
Schein's Model	1. All levels of organizational culture influence organizational behaviours and practices. 2. Underlying assumptions→ deepest level, difficult to be altered 3. Underlying Assumptions most useful element.	Workforce composition (homogeneous vs heterogeneous) significantly impacts organizational culture.	How does workforce cultural diversity influence the organizational culture in multinational organizations? How can organizations leverage culturally diverse workforces to change traditional perspectives?
Quinn & Rohrbaugh's Framework	1. All four models critical in shaping organizational effectiveness regarding gender equality initiatives. 2. All four models influence organizational culture.	Workforce composition significantly influences the effectiveness of the four models. The effectiveness of these models depends on the cultural context and	How can organizations adapt their gender equality strategies to align with local cultural nuances in diverse geographical contexts?

	3. Most useful models for gender equality: Human Relations, Open System	requires adaptation to align with local cultural nuances.	What is the role of a diverse workforce in enhancing the effectiveness of gender equality strategies?
Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions	1. Most useful dimensions to explore societal culture's effect on gender equality policies: Masculinity vs Femininity, Short vs Long-term Orientation, Power Distance	Workforce cultural diversity affects the implementation of gender equality strategies. → potential novel cultural dimension	How does cultural diversity within the workforce impact the effectiveness of gender equality strategies in different cultural contexts?

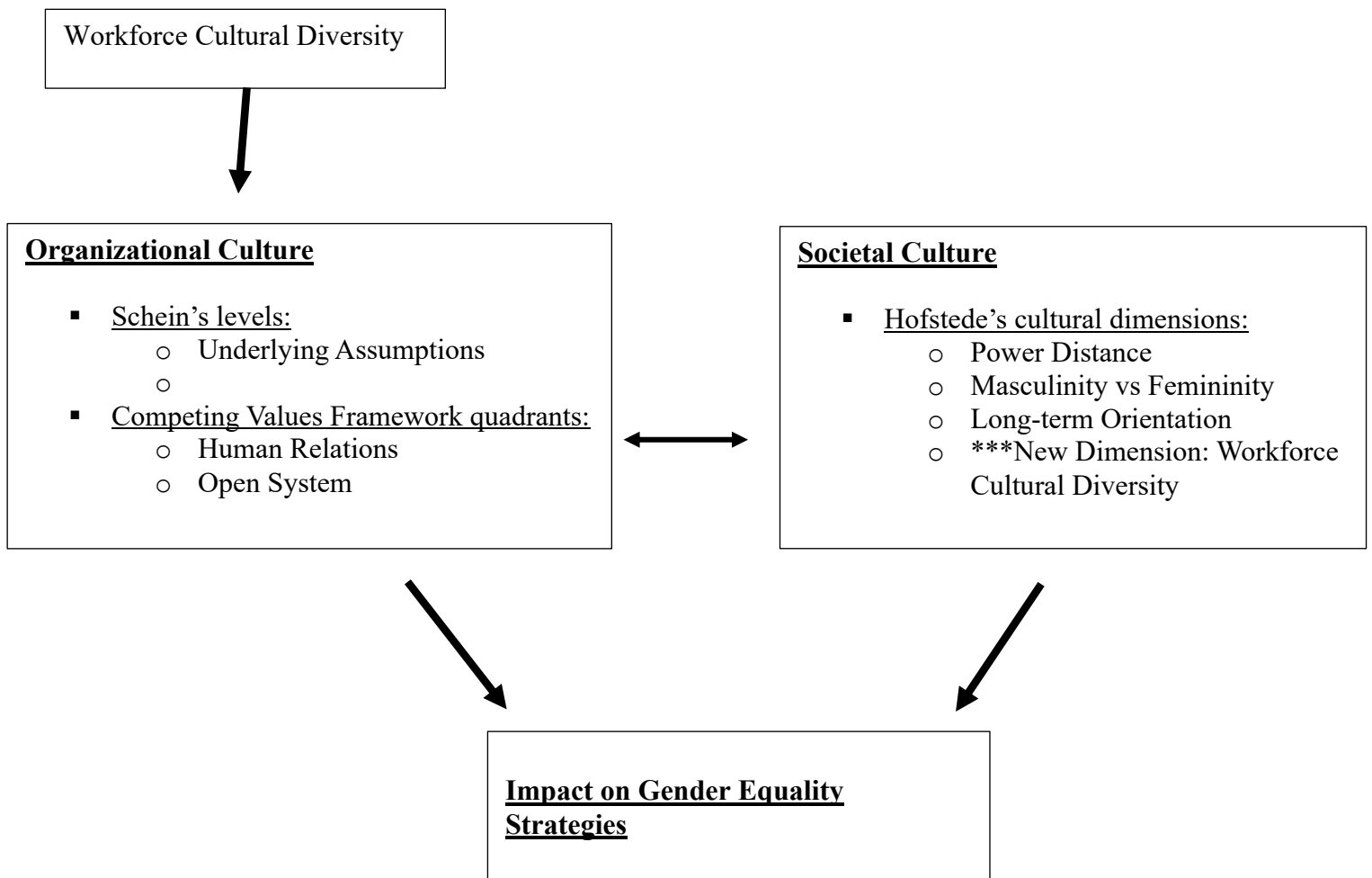## 6.1.5 Recommendations & Suggestions for Future Research

The current research provides insights regarding the interplay between societal and organizational culture and its effect on gender equality strategies within multinational organizations. However, the results of this study should be treated with caution due to limitations that are made clear in the next sections.

Future research could further explore more countries and extend comparative analyses to investigate how different cultural dimensions affect the implementation of gender equality initiatives. Moreover, research could expand to diverse professional industries to address challenges, barriers, efforts, and opportunities in different sectors. As this study focuses mainly on the binary genders (female/male), future research could benefit from exploring perspectives and experiences on diverse genders beyond the binary ones, so as to provide a holistic understanding of gender equality in the workplace. Factors such as race, ethnicity, age, and status also play a significant role in perpetuating gender discrimination within professional environments. Therefore, researchers should consider their importance in gender equality initiatives, to enhance understanding and suggest targeted inclusive strategies.

6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This thesis contributes to the academic literature by offering valuable insights into the interplay between organizational and societal culture and its effect on the implementation of gender equality strategies within multinational corporations. Building on previous theories by Schein (1983), Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983), and Hofstede (1984), it provides a multifaceted analysis which suggests that the interplay between organizational and societal culture can influence the gender parity practices applied within organizations. Moreover, it identifies barriers stemming from cultural nuances that characterize each country, despite the existence of formal policies. Connecting the three theories, provides a novel framework which utilizes their interactions to explore their effect on gender equality initiatives. Specifically, it places emphasis on elements such as Schein's underlying assumptions which directly affect organizational behaviors and attitudes, further influencing initiatives. However, underlying assumptions are influenced by workforce cultural diversity, an element which is not emphasized in Schein's model. This research suggests that workforce composition should be considered as a crucial factor influencing the deepest level of this theory, as it significantly affects the implementation of organizational policies. The Competing Values Framework by Quinn and Rohrbaugh proves that all four models are critical in shaping organizational effectiveness regarding gender equality, with the most useful being the Human Relations and Open System Models. Their effectiveness is influenced by workforce composition, and depends on the cultural context, requiring adaptation to align with local cultural nuances. Moreover, Hofstede's power distance, masculine and feminine values, as well as long term orientation evidently influence organizational dynamics. Despite the importance of these three dimensions, Hofstede's framework is not relevant for heterogeneous workforces within multinational organizations, as it does not account for internal cultural diversity. Therefore, in order to address this impact, it is appropriate to consider an additional dimension of cultural diversity. Focusing on the Greek and Dutch context, offers specific insights into the local societal norms that affect attitudes and outcomes of gender equality strategies. This research suggests considering cultural diversity as an additional component to all these frameworks to enhance understanding of the interplay between societal and organizational culture and its effect on gender equality strategies within multinationals. Contributing to the literature of organizational culture, gender equality, societal culture and multinational management, this thesis also offers practical insights. Especially, for managers and leaders, it emphasizes the

need for the implementation of more targeted gender equality strategies that comply with the local cultural nuances. For policymakers, this research suggests the implementation of policies that consider underlying assumptions. Moreover, it suggests engaging with stakeholders, considering their expectations, values, and rights. Overall, this thesis not only contributes to the advancement of current bibliography on gender equality within multinational contexts, but also offers practical implications for managers, leaders, and policymakers.

Workforce Cultural Diversity

Organizational Culture

- Schein's levels:
    - Underlying Assumptions
    -
- Competing Values Framework quadrants:
    - Human Relations
    - Open System

Societal Culture

- Hofstede's cultural dimensions:
    - Power Distance
    - Masculinity vs Femininity
    - Long-term Orientation
    - ***New Dimension: Workforce Cultural Diversity

Impact on Gender Equality Strategies

6.3   Limitations

Identifying limitations was crucial in order to ensure the credibility and transparency of this research (Ioannidis, 2007). Limitations included limited generalizability of findings, biased responses, cultural sensitivity, and the evolving nature of multinational organizations. Specifically, as this study focuses on a multinational consulting organization operating in

Greece and the Netherlands, although it offered significant insights, its findings may not apply to different multinational organizations or countries. As multinational organizations' nature is primarily dynamic, both the organizational culture and the implemented strategies evolve dependent on internal and external phenomena. Moreover, small sample size was another weakness identified, as it can give unreliable and ungeneralizable findings (Rahman, 2016). Even though 100 individuals were sent a formal invitation to participate in this research through LinkedIn, only 21 responded, with 11 of them participating. Employees from the HR department in the Netherlands could not be reached, limiting the insights of this research. Moreover, given the sensitivity of the topic, there was a potential for biased responses (Tourangeau et al., 2007), while the geographical contexts may foster misunderstandings of the diverse cultural nuances. Furthermore, the gender-sensitive nature of the topic along with the researcher's personal role as a female researcher may led to biased responses both for female and male participants, which might did not have occurred if the researcher was male. Interviewing respondents in the Greek context as a Greek researcher might also influenced the responses due to common cultural background, leading to cultural bias. Moreover, interviewing participants in the Netherlands from diverse cultural backgrounds, might also led to limited understanding of their perspectives due to cultural differences ingrained in the researcher's background. Difficulties were also identified in conveying nuanced meanings from Greek to English, due to linguistic differences. Furthermore, the theoretical approach was characterized by weaknesses. Despite that Schein's, Quinn and Rohrbaugh's, and Hofstede's frameworks offered a rich basis for analysis, it is possible that they did not capture the complex and sensitive nature of gender equality within multinationals. Finally, the research did not include all genders, but only binary ones, which might have resulted in limited understanding of the findings regarding gender diversity.

To address these limitations, future researchers could include an increased and diverse sample, while ensuring that all stakeholder groups are approached. They could also use anonymous surveys along with interviews to allow participants share their honest views and to reduce biased responses. Moreover, including diverse gender identities could provide significant insights into gender diversity within organizations. Cultural bias could be mitigated by employing a team of researchers from different cultural backgrounds who are familiar with the local cultural nuances of the explored contexts.

6.4   Conclusion

This thesis has explored the interplay between societal and organizational culture and its effect on the implementation of gender equality strategies within multinational organizations operating in Greece and the Netherlands. By investigating internal stakeholders' perspectives, both female and male, this research provided a multifaceted analysis of how organizational practices and behaviours are influenced by the cultural context they operate in, regarding gender equality initiatives. The findings reveal that the interplay between societal and organizational culture impacts both the implementation and the outcomes of gender equality strategies. The two explored countries present different societal structures, with Greece bearing traditional gender roles and hierarchical values that affect organization's initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion. On the contrary, the Netherlands demonstrate a more progressive and egalitarian culture facilitating the implementation of gender equality initiatives. However, barriers such as microaggressions are present. Differences are depicted also in the cultural backgrounds of the workforce between the two countries, with Greece employing only Greek individuals, while in the Netherlands personnel have diverse origins. The research shows the relevance of Schein's theory on organizational culture, Quinn and Rohrbaugh's Competing Values Framework , and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions in understanding gender dynamics within multinational organizations. Schein's three-level model indicates how embedded societal norms and unconscious biases shape organizational attitudes and behaviors, while the Competing Values Framework emphasizes the significance of flexibility and innovation in fostering an equal and respectful workspace. Hofstede's cultural dimensions are critical in understanding how hierarchy, masculine and feminine values, and long-term planning affect organizational mechanisms. However, none of these theories consider workforce cultural diversity as an influencing factor. Diversity in workforce composition can significantly affect the implementation of gender equality strategies within multinational teams. Therefore, it is important for future research to incorporate this component in exploring the interplay between societal and organizational culture and its effect on the implementation of gender equality initiatives. These findings suggest the implementation of targeted gender equality strategies within multinationals, which align with the local cultural nuances, in order to promote gender parity.

To ensure validity and reliability of the findings, the research incorporated reflexivity to manage personal biases, and sought peer feedback to secure trustworthiness. Specifically, it considered Guba's criteria, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). Criteria were fulfilled by keeping records and participant checking, along with noting down personal thoughts and feelings to avoid biases.

It is essential to note that the findings of the research should be treated with caution due to the identified limitations. The conclusions refer to specific contexts and might not be applicable to other regions or multinationals. Future research could expand geographical contexts, by comparing more countries and industries, while exploring perspectives of non-binary genders, considering complex factors such as ethnicity, age, or status. Practitioners should consider workforce composition and cultural nuances in the implementation of gender equality initiatives, while engaging with internal stakeholders to foster an inclusive working environment.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes both to the academic world and to practitioners. Specifically, it offers a multifaceted analysis of the interplay between organizational and societal culture and its effect on gender equality strategies within multinationals, considering a novel factor of workforce cultural diversity. Practical implications include the need for targeted strategies that align with cultural nuances, in order to foster equitable workplaces.

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8. Appendix A: Semi - Structured Interview Guide

This interview guide was formed to give insights into the interplay between organizational dynamics, gender equality initiatives, and power of culture. The collected information aimed to further enhance understanding of factors impeding or facilitating the efficiency of gender equality strategies within multinational organizations, based on the experiences and perspectives of internal stakeholders. Below is the interview guide with the interview questions which lasted an average of 45 minutes and were designed to elaborate on the intricate relationship between organizational dynamics and culture.

Date of Interview: ....

Participant Name: ....

Participant Position: ....

Gender: ....

Interview Duration: ....

Step 1: Introduce myself, thank participant for taking part in the interview

Step 2: Read the consent form, ask permission to record interview

Step 3: Conduct the interview with the following questions for each participant

Step 4: Thank again the participant

Question	Employees	HR Officers	Managers
1.	What values are important to you in life?	What values are important to you in both life and workplace?	What kind of gender equality initiatives have you shared with other employees within your team or department?
2.	How do you apply these values within the workplace?	How do you incorporate them into HR policies when it comes to gender equality?	How do you define success regarding gender equality initiatives within your team and area of responsibility?

3.	Based on your experience, what values characterize the work environment at the multinational consulting organization?	How does organizational culture of the organization impact the implementation of HR policies related to gender equality?	How do your personal values affect your approach to leadership and management when it comes to gender equality?
4.	How do you perceive the organization's commitment to gender equality within its workplace?	What challenges have you faced in implementing gender equality policies within the organization, as part of the HR?	How does organizational culture of the organization facilitate or impede the implementation of gender equality strategies?
5.	Have you ever faced or observed gender discrimination at work? Please elaborate.	How do you evaluate the success of gender equality initiatives, as part of HR?	Have you ever observed gender discrimination within your team? What was your approach?
6.	How does the organization handle issues of gender discrimination? Are there specific strategies or policies?	Have you ever faced or observed gender discrimination at work at any form? Please elaborate	What challenges do you encounter while promoting gender equality within your team?
7.	How comfortable do you feel discussing gender equality issues within your workplace?	In your perspective, what is the role of HR in making organizational culture more inclusive?	How do you perceive the role of managers in shaping organizational culture which supports gender equality within the workplace?
8.	What role do you think employees play in promoting gender equality at work?	How do you perceive the effectiveness of the current gender equality strategies?	How do you balance gender equality initiatives with local cultural considerations in your approach?
9.	How do you think the organization could further	What is the role of training and development in supporting	What are the key factors that facilitate or impede the

	improve its approach to gender equality?	gender equality and how is their effectiveness evaluated?	success of gender equality strategies?
10.	What changes or strategies would you like to see implemented regarding gender equality within the organization's workplace?	What are your aspirations for the future regarding gender equality within the workplace the organization?	What areas do you think that need to be improved in terms of gender equality?

9. Appendix B: List of Interviewees

The following table demonstrates a detailed list of the interviewees who participated in this research. The participants, included internal stakeholders from the multinational consulting organization operating in Greece and the Netherlands, using purposive sampling strategy. The table presents demographic data, such as gender, country of organization, nationality, and position, which are essential for comprehending the insights from each of the geographical contexts. By exploring the below factors for each participant, this thesis provides a holistic understanding of how cultural dynamics affect gender equality strategies within multinationals.

Participant	Gender	Country	Nationality	Role	Interview Duration
1	Female	Greece	Greek	Employee	40 minutes
2	Female	Greece	Greek	Employee	45 minutes
3	Male	Greece	Greek	HR	45 minutes
4	Female	Greece	Greek	Manager	1 hour
5	Female	Greece	Greek	Manager	20 minutes
6	Female	Greece	Greek	Manager	23 minutes
7	Male	Netherlands	Dutch	Employee	35 minutes
8	Female	Netherlands	South African	Employee	37 minutes
9	Male	Netherlands	Indian	Manager	30 minutes
10	Male	Netherlands	Indonesian	Manager	45 minutes
11	Male	Netherlands	Half Greek – Half Cypriot	Manager	1 hour

10. Appendix C: Coding Scheme

For analysing the data, a combination of thematic analysis and grounded theory was utilized, to develop a coding scheme. The specific scheme was essential to analyse the data of this thesis on the interplay between organizational and societal culture and its effect on gender equality strategies within multinationals. Below is the coding scheme table.

Themes	Sub-Themes	Definitions
Schein's Organizational Culture	Artifacts	Observable elements within the organization such as gender distribution, and visible behavior.
	Espoused Beliefs & Values	Organizational values such as equality, diversity, inclusion.
	Underlying Assumptions	Unconscious assumptions that shape behaviors within the organization
Competing Values Framework	Human Relations Model	Focus on teamwork, and human capital development.
	Open System Model	Emphasis on innovation, flexibility, adaptability.
	Rational Goal Model	Efficiency, planning, using metrics.
	Internal Process Model	Focus on control, stability, information management, and communication.
Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions	Power Distance	Level of hierarchy and equality within the workplace.
	Uncertainty Avoidance	Preference for structured policies to reduce uncertainty.
	Individualism vs Collectivism	Personal development vs Group cohesion/teamwork.
	Masculinity vs Femininity	Prevalence of Masculine Values (competitiveness) vs Feminine Values (respect/support).
	Long-term vs Short-term orientation	Commitment to traditional practices vs sustainable change.
	Indulgence vs Restraint	Balance between professional and personal life.

Barriers to Gender Equality	Educational Influence	Impact of educational background on gender equality.
	Fast-paced working environment	Influence of a demanding work environmnet on gender equality.
	Generational Influence	Impact of older generations perspective.
	Informal Interactions	Effect of inappropriate comments or jokes on gender parity.
	Limited Male Interest on Gender Equality	Gender-specific lack of interest on gender equality.
	Maternity Career Concerns	Career implications for females because of maternity.
	Misconceptions around gender equality	Effect of misconceptions and stereotypes on gender equality.
	Normalization of Patriarchal Structures	Normalization and perpetuation of traditional gender roles and biases.
	Societal Expectations & Gender Roles	Impact of societal norms on organizational practices.
Gender-Specific Behaviours	Female Solidarity	Support among females.
	Females as Mothers	Role of females as caregivers.
	Males as Leaders	Assumptions that males are more capable.
	Male Patriarchal Opinions	Traditional male perspectives affecting gender equality.
Role of Workforce	Role of Employees	Contribution of employees in promoting gender equality.
	Role of HR	Initiatives to foster gender parity.
	Roles of Managers	Role of leadership in implementing gender equality initiatives.

Personal Values	Adaptability, Diversity, Equality, Empathy, Family, Honesty, Integrity, Loyalty, Meritocracy, Respect, Responsibility	Individual values' impact on gender equality efforts within organization.
Gender Equality Strategies	Coaching Sessions, Female Networks, Equal Gender Distribution, Equal Pay, Flexible Working, Mental Health Lines, Trainings, Workshops, Maternity-Paternity Leave	Organizational strategies to promote gender equality within the workplace.
Suggestions for Improvement	Change in Societal Structures	Suggestions for societal change in favour of gender equality.
	Equal Duration of Paternity-Maternity Leave	Advocating for same parental leave policies for the parents.
	Equal Gender Distribution	Ensuring gender equality in sectors and high-level positions.
	Flexible Hours	Flexible working to balance personal and professional life.
	Increase Male Participation in Events	Support male involvement in gender equality initiatives.
	Increase Trainings	Additional Training and awareness programs.

	Specific Trainings for Gender Discrimination	Targeted training to reduce gender discrimination.
Motivation for Compliance	Fear of Repercussions, Genuine Belief, Role Obligation	Factors driving compliance with gender equality strategies.