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Article

Advancing Gender Equality in Executive Leadership: The Role of Cultural Norms and Organizational Practices in Sustainable Development—A Case Study of Taiwan and Guatemala

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Abstract: The persistent gender gap in executive leadership remains a challenge to sustainable development. Despite evidence linking diverse leadership to enhanced organizational performance and economic growth, women still face barriers to leadership roles. This study examines cultural norms, organizational policies, and workplace practices sustaining gender inequality in executive positions in Taiwan and Guatemala. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from a cross-sectional survey of 250 women executives in private organizations. The findings highlight cultural norms and organizational policies as key factors perpetuating the gender gap. Traditional gender roles and male-dominated networks act as barriers, while inclusive practices and leadership development programs promote equality. Organizational culture also mediates the relationship between inclusivity and leadership opportunities, emphasizing the role of empathy-driven policies. This research aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), underscoring the need for gender-equal leadership to foster innovation and sustainable growth.

Keywords: gender gap; sustainable development; executive leadership; cultural norms; organizational policies; SEM; gender equality; SDGs



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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Gender equality in leadership remains an ongoing challenge worldwide, and despite increasing recognition of the benefits of leadership diversity, women are underrepresented in decision-making. Historically, social norms and organizational structures have created organizational barriers that prevent women from entering leadership positions. This gap undermines not only organizational performance but also broader economic and social development. To address the need for evidence-based strategies, this article examines the links between cultural norms, workplace practices, and organizational policies that influence gender equality and leadership. Focusing on Taiwan and Guatemala, this study aims to highlight how systemic interventions can promote sustainable development through

inclusive leadership. This study employs a quantitative research design, utilizing a cross-sectional survey of 250 women executives in private organizations across Taiwan and Guatemala to analyze the persistent gender gap in leadership. Statistical analyses validate that cultural norms, organizational policies, and male-dominated networks hinder women's advancement. The study confirms that inclusive workplace practices and leadership development programs enhance gender parity. Findings reinforce the mediating role of organizational culture, validating the effectiveness of empathy-driven policies in promoting equitable leadership opportunities.

1.2. Current Situations

The issue of gender disparity in executive positions is still a problem that exists in organizations all over the world, wherein women face enormous obstacles in securing leadership positions [1]. Although there have been strides in the direction of gender equality and new diversity and inclusion interventions, the number of women in executive and decision-making posts is still lacking in specific areas [2,3]. All these things have resulted in the continuation of the gender gap phenomenon in private companies across various cultural contexts, with this being a significant issue given the economic and organizational development benefits that accrue from such diversity in their leadership teams. The study investigates cultural and organizational elements that foster differences in executive roles between genders in selected countries in Asia and Latin America, such as Taiwan and Guatemala. In addition to their unique socio-cultural differences, these countries offer an interesting opportunity to study how cultural norms, organizational policies, and workplace practices mold gender equity in leadership.

Gender disparity is more than a question of justice in the workplace; it has also been proven to have repercussions on the performance of organizations and economic development [4]. Studies show that diverse leadership teams tend to be more innovative, more effective when making decisions, and more productive regarding financial performance [5,6]. For instance, a study carried out by McKinsey & Company [7] found that companies with executives having higher diversity are 25% more likely to outperform their competitors in terms of profitability. Despite all these factors, women in many countries, mainly Asia and Latin America, are mostly under-represented in leadership roles. The Global Gender Gap Report [8] indicates that, out of the total number of managerial positions held in the world, women represent just 27%, with even fewer women getting to the top of the executive ladder. The disparity is particularly acute in countries like Taiwan, where it is culturally conditioned that the role of women generally precludes the possibility of leadership, and in Guatemala, with systemic barriers and biases based on sex within the workplace [9].

1.3. Research Needs

Cultural norms are central to the framing and reinforcement of gender perceptions in organizations [10]. Indeed, in large measure, traditional gender role definitions in many Asian and Latin American cultures have extended to dictate the roles assumed by women in both family and workplace [11]. Those cultural factors not only undermine the personal careers of women but also shape organizational practices such as hiring, promotion, and leadership development, and all result in a cycle of gender inequality that is very difficult to disrupt [12]. There is a need for this study due to the existing gender gaps in executive positions, coupled with the absence of in-depth research focusing specifically on the intersection of cultural norms, organizational practices, and the overall context of gender equality in leadership in those geographical locations. Although gender studies on gender disparities in leadership have proliferated in Western contexts, scant

studies have investigated how cultural and organizational approaches in Asia and Latin America drive disparities. Moreover, existing studies on differences and similarities in gender equality initiatives in the private sector lack sufficient perception concerning the variance in success levels across various cultural backgrounds and contexts. Thus, there is a gap in the literature that needs to be filled with a proper understanding of how gender dynamics work in various organizational contexts across the world, especially in such countries as Taiwan and Guatemala, where culture and societal perceptions around gender differ greatly from Western contexts.

1.4. Objectives of Study

This study aims to address the ongoing issue of gender differences in organizational leadership by examining the cultural and institutional factors that contribute to this phenomenon in Taiwan and Guatemala. Specifically, it aims to achieve three objectives. First, the study examines cultural norms and societal expectations regarding gender roles in these countries to understand their impact on women's opportunities as leaders. Second, institutional factors, including policies, practices, and leadership development programs, are examined to determine their role in supporting or hindering women's entry into leadership positions. Finally, the study examines the relationship between cultural and institutional factors to see how these factors contribute to gender gaps in leadership. By adopting this multidisciplinary approach, this research aims to provide useful insights for promoting inclusive governance, outlining strategies for breaking down barriers and promoting sustainable development through gender balance in governance roles.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a review of relevant literature on gender equality in leadership and sustainable development. Section 3 discusses the theoretical framework guiding this study, along with the proposed hypothesis, while Section 4 outlines the research methodology employed. Section 5 presents a comparative case study of Taiwan and Guatemala, followed by the discussion of case study results in Section 6, and Section 7 concludes with key findings and policy recommendations for fostering gender equality in leadership within sustainable business practices.

2. Literature Review

The existing literature on gender equality and the empowerment of women depicts a different perspective and findings across different regions and contexts. Mahdi Abaker et al. [13] studied empirically the managerial barriers related to gender in UAE private organizations. The study included informal barriers and less collaboration among female leaders, even though there was substantial improvement in the trends of gender equality. Female participants, holding considerable experience in important economic sectors, indicated diminishing cultural stereotypes. Similarly, Kaftandzieva and Nakov [14] examined barriers to women's advancement in the finance sector of North Macedonia, which is a highly masculine culture by tradition. They found significant organizational, cultural, and individual barriers to women's progress into leadership, whereas age and work experience had no significant impact. Employing mixed methods, Lewellyn et al. [15] assessed the interplay of female empowerment, national culture, and gender diversity on corporate boards worldwide. The results indicated that both complementary and substitutive interdependences between these factors shaped board gender diversity, thus promising useful insights for policymakers and corporate decision-makers. Halliday et al. [16] undertook a cross-national meta-analytic study across 36 countries examining whether or not the national contexts for gender equality moderated the relationships between organizational leadership characteristics and female board representation. The article emphasized the significance of gender-equality-responsive policies as the key boundary conditions to en-

sure more female participation in the boardroom. Attah-Boakye et al. [17] drew data from 472 multinationals spread across 21 emerging economies over nine years, employing a multi-theoretical framework. Evidence was presented on the positive relationship between gender diversity and corporate innovation, stressing how the country-specific norms, cultural values, and institutional quality affect the involvement of the two genders in boardrooms concerning investment in R&D. Bonet et al. [18] studied Fortune 100 companies with regards to the gender dynamic. They revealed that women tended to move up more quickly to higher executive positions than men under pressures of the institutions, but the difference in advancement disappeared for companies with several high-ranked female executives, which indicates a limited effectiveness of such pressures for the long-term preservation of gender parity.

Liao and Luo [19] examined relevant data from the World Value Survey to see how gender and education have affected the public perspective toward women and leadership in East Asia. The particular finding that education was more negatively associated with traditional gender attitudes among women than among their male counterparts was especially found in Japan and highlighted the interaction of context between national environments. Moreno et al. [20] built models to test how the external relations of family dependency and caregiving impacted women's career advancement into public relations across 18 Latin American countries. Thus, it was concluded that the responsibilities of this order tend to restrain advancement opportunities, especially for women, while men remain immune to such disabilities, thus worsening systemic inequality. Shim [21] looked at conditions under which female legislators from South Korea and Taiwan would pursue women's issues, finding that a high number of female seats in legislatures and legislators from civil society increased the chances of such issues passing through bill sponsorship. These studies thus contribute to understanding how cultural, organizational, and external factors interact globally in producing different contexts for gender equality and women's leadership opportunities by considering the specific dimensions of their interplay.

While existing studies explore gender equality in leadership across different regions, gaps remain in understanding the combined effects of cultural norms, organizational policies, and workplace practices on women's executive advancement. Prior research [13–15] identifies structural and cultural barriers but lacks cross-country comparisons integrating these dimensions. The influence of traditional gender roles [20], male-dominated networks [18], and national policies [16] on leadership remains underexplored. Our study addresses this by assessing gender norms, organizational culture, workplace inclusivity, leadership development programs, and executive opportunities in Taiwan and Guatemala. We analyze how organizational culture mediates inclusivity and leadership opportunities, emphasizing empathy-driven policies for sustainable gender parity.

3. Theoretical Framework

To understand the continuing gender disparities in executive roles found all over the different regions from Taiwan to Guatemala, it is necessary to design a nuanced framework that would integrate culture and organization as dimensions of analysis. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory [22], along with organizational concepts such as the Gendered Division of Labor and the Glass Ceiling Effect [23], provide the framework for analyzing the sociocultural and structural barriers to women's upward mobility into leadership. The framework offers a comprehensive exploration of how societal norms and organizational practices interact to effect changes in gender roles in leadership and reveal both the apparent and hidden forces that shape such disparities.

3.1. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory elaborates on how societal norms play a significant role in workplace dynamics and attitudes toward gender roles [24]. Among the six cultural dimensions postulated by Hofstede, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Power Distance, and Individualism vs. Collectivism are crucial for understanding gender disparities in executive positions [25]. Masculinity vs. Femininity refers to the extent to which stereotypically masculine attributes such as competitiveness and aggressiveness are prioritized over attributes perceived as feminine, such as encouragement and understanding [26]. In cultures that exhibit high masculinity, leadership is closely associated with masculine traits, reinforcing the stereotype that executive positions are less accessible to women [27]. Conversely, in more feminine-oriented cultures that emphasize egalitarianism and quality of life, the likelihood of women ascending to leadership positions increases.

Power Distance, another important dimension, indicates the extent to which a society accepts and institutionalizes power inequalities [28]. In high power distance societies, leadership structures are hierarchical, limiting women's access to executive roles due to exclusion from informal networks and decision-making circles dominated by men [29]. This institutionalized power imbalance reinforces traditional gender roles and systemic biases that hinder women's professional advancement. On the other hand, societies with lower power distance tend to have flatter organizational structures, providing greater opportunities for women to reach executive positions.

Individualism vs. Collectivism further influences workplace gender equality [30]. In individualist societies, personal achievement and merit are emphasized, allowing women to rise to leadership roles based on their competencies. In contrast, collectivist cultures prioritize societal and familial roles, often positioning women as caregivers rather than executives. These cultural norms shape organizational structures, influencing key concepts such as the gendered division of labor and the glass ceiling effect [31].

H1: *The cultural norms and gender roles in an organization positively correlate with the prevalence of women in executive roles.*

The gendered division of labor is the distribution of positions based on the societal expectations of men and women [32]. Women are often assigned nurturing or administrative roles, whereas men dominate strategic and decision-making positions. This segregation is reinforced by cultural beliefs that associate competencies with gender [33]. Consequently, organizational policies and workplace structures often reflect these deep-seated cultural norms, either hindering or facilitating women's advancement to executive roles.

3.2. Glass Ceiling Effect

The glass ceiling effect represents the invisible barriers that prevent women from reaching top leadership positions despite their qualifications and achievements [34]. This phenomenon is sustained by both formal and informal factors, including biased promotion criteria, male-dominated mentorship networks, and the scarcity of female role models in leadership [35]. Women are systematically excluded from high-level decision-making circles, reinforcing gender disparities in executive roles. The persistence of these barriers suggests that organizational structures and cultural norms interact to maintain leadership inequality.

H2: *Diversity and inclusion policies within an organization positively influence employee perceptions of gender equality in organizational leadership.*

Diversity and inclusion policies play a crucial role in shaping employee perceptions of gender equality in leadership. Organizations that actively promote gender diversity through policies such as equitable recruitment and leadership training programs foster a culture of inclusion [36]. These policies challenge traditional norms and contribute to the dismantling of systemic biases, allowing women greater access to executive roles.

H3: *Workplace practices such as flexible working time and parental leave mediate the relationship between gender equality in leadership and women's advancement in executive roles.*

Workplace practices, including flexible working arrangements and parental leave policies, serve as crucial mediators in advancing gender equality in leadership. The absence of such policies reinforces traditional gender roles, limiting women's professional growth. In contrast, organizations that implement supportive workplace practices create an environment conducive to female career progression [37].

H4: *Leadership development opportunity has a positive correlation with women's representation in executive roles.*

Access to leadership development programs significantly impacts women's representation in executive roles. Organizations that provide mentorship, sponsorship, and training initiatives empower women with the necessary skills and networks to ascend to leadership positions [13]. In cultures where these opportunities are scarce, women face greater challenges in overcoming systemic barriers to executive advancement.

H5: *The male bias of the networks and sponsorship negatively affects women's representation in executive roles.*

Male-dominated sponsorship and professional networks contribute to gender disparities in leadership. Women often lack access to influential mentors and sponsors who can facilitate career advancement. This exclusion from informal power structures perpetuates the glass ceiling effect, further limiting women's representation in executive roles [14].

H6: *Organizational culture and support mediate the relationship between gender diversity policies and perceptions of gender equality in leadership roles.*

The intersection of cultural norms and organizational structures significantly influences gender disparities in leadership. While Hofstede's dimensions provide insights into societal expectations, organizational culture can either reinforce or challenge these norms. Companies that implement gender-sensitive policies and create inclusive work environments actively contribute to the promotion of women in executive roles. Moreover, urbanization and globalization continue to reshape traditional gender norms, enabling progressive organizations to adopt more inclusive policies. For instance, in Taiwan, shifting cultural values have allowed for greater female representation in leadership, whereas in Guatemala, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms continue to pose significant barriers [15]. Based on the theoretical framework, the following conceptual diagram (Figure 1) was framed.

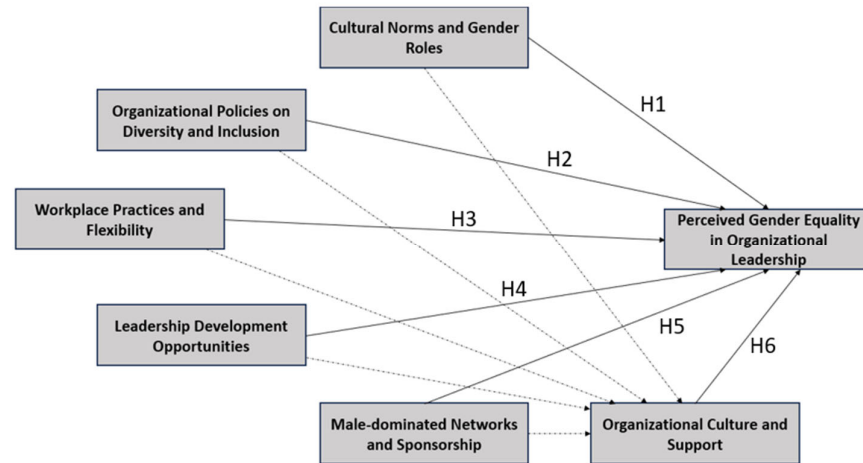


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to empirically examine the cultural and organizational factors contributing to the gender gap in executive positions within private organizations across Taiwan and Guatemala. The study aims to analyze the views, experiences, and challenges faced by women executives in these two regions, offering comparative insights into the structural and cultural barriers that hinder women’s career progression into top leadership roles. Gender disparities in executive positions remain a pressing concern globally, yet the factors influencing these gaps vary across cultural and economic contexts. This research is significant as it captures the context-specific barriers that persist in two distinct regions—Taiwan, representing Asia, and Guatemala, representing Latin America—to provide cross-cultural insights into how corporate environments shape women’s leadership trajectories. By incorporating organizational size, industry differences, and workplace practices, this study ensures a comprehensive examination of gender disparities at the executive level.

This research employs a cross-sectional survey design, allowing data collection at a single point in time to analyze the current landscape of gender disparities in executive roles. A structured questionnaire was developed to ensure standardized data collection, allowing for consistency in responses and facilitating advanced statistical analysis. The study employs a non-probability purposive sampling technique, which is particularly useful in research focusing on a specific target group with unique characteristics. In this case, the sample is composed of 250 women executives from private organizations in Taiwan and Guatemala, ensuring an equal distribution of 125 participants from each country. The study focuses on industries that have historically underrepresented women in executive roles, including technology, manufacturing, finance, and services. These industries were deliberately selected as they present significant structural challenges to gender parity in leadership, allowing the study to capture a realistic portrayal of workplace barriers and facilitators of women’s career advancement.

The sampling process involved identifying organizations through industry directories, professional networks, and business associations to ensure representation across a diverse range of businesses. Organizations were contacted for permission to conduct the research, and participation was voluntary to ensure ethical compliance. Eligible participants were required to hold an executive position for at least one year to guarantee that they had sufficient experience and exposure to workplace dynamics in leadership roles. The voluntary nature of participation ensured that respondents were genuinely interested in contributing to the research, thereby enhancing the reliability of responses. The inclusion

of a balanced sample from two culturally distinct regions allowed comparative analysis, offering deeper insights into how gender disparities manifest in different socio-economic and organizational contexts.

To collect data, the study employed a structured questionnaire, which was electronically administered through online survey tools. The use of electronic data collection methods ensured that participants could respond at their convenience, reducing non-response bias and increasing the participation rate across two geographically distant regions. The questionnaire was designed to capture key variables influencing gender disparities in executive positions, including cultural norms, organizational policies, workplace practices, and gendered perceptions. The survey instrument included multiple sections, each targeting a different aspect of gender disparity. Demographic questions gathered information on age, education level, years of experience, industry, and organization size, ensuring a detailed characterization of the sample population.

The core survey items were structured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, to assess participants’ perceptions of cultural and organizational factors impacting their executive career trajectories. Questions related to cultural norms examined traditional gender expectations, implicit biases, and societal perceptions of women in leadership [38]. The organizational policies [39] and workplace practices [40] section assessed how corporate policies either support or hinder gender inclusivity, particularly in terms of promotion opportunities, mentorship availability, leadership development programs, and work–life balance provisions. Questions related to perceived gender equality [41], leadership development opportunities [42], male-dominated networks and sponsorship, and organizational culture [43] were also included.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with a small subset of women executives from both Taiwan and Guatemala before full-scale data collection. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine ambiguous or complex items, ensuring clarity and ease of response. The final version of the questionnaire was then disseminated via secure online platforms, guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest and accurate responses.

For data analysis, the study employs a combination of descriptive statistics, inferential statistical tests, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS. The analysis is structured into three main components. First, descriptive statistics—including frequency distributions and cross-tabulations—are used to summarize the demographic and organizational characteristics of the participants. This step provides a comprehensive demographic profile of the sample, ensuring that key socio-economic and professional variables are accounted for.

Second, independent sample *t*-tests are conducted to compare the experiences and perceptions of women executives in Taiwan and Guatemala. The purpose of this analysis is to identify statistically significant differences between the two groups concerning cultural and organizational barriers to gender parity in leadership roles. The use of *t*-tests enables the study to highlight regional variations in workplace experiences, shedding light on how distinct cultural and institutional factors influence women’s leadership journeys.

Third, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS is employed to examine the relationships between key variables, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the structural barriers affecting women’s executive representation. SEM is particularly useful in this study because it allows for the simultaneous examination of multiple relationships, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of both direct and indirect effects of cultural and organizational factors on the executive gender gap. The model includes key latent constructs, such as organizational policies, workplace inclusivity, cultural biases, and leadership opportunities, and assesses their impact on the overall gender disparity in executive roles. Model

fit indicators, including Chi-square, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), and TLI (Tucker–Lewis Index), are examined to ensure the robustness and validity of the analytical model.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) examines relationships such as that between independent variables and dependent variables. SEM allows testing complex relationships while accounting for measurement errors. The AMOS software (<https://www.ibm.com/products/structural-equation-modeling-sem>, accessed on 28 January 2025) serves to estimate models, test hypotheses on the conceptual framework, and visually present the outcomes. Indices such as Chi-square, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA measure the adequacy of the proposed model. The outcome of SEM analysis sheds light on direct and indirect cultural and organizational effects on gender disparities, thus giving evidence-based recommendations and implications for policymakers and organizational leaders. This study is strictly ethical. The intent of the study, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses are all told to participants. Informed consent is collected before survey completion, while anonymizing data hides the participant’s identity. Ethical approval was acquired from the relevant institutional review board before starting the study.

5. Findings

5.1. Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 and Figure 2 shows the demographic breakdown and experiences of the female managers who participated in this study, which aimed to understand the factors that contribute to gender equality in leadership in Taiwan and Guatemala. The table shows key factors such as age distribution, industry overview, years of work experience, and familiarity with each workplace’s policies and culture. These changes provide a basis for studying how organizational processes and practices create opportunities for women in key positions. These include statistical methods such as variance, skewness, kurtosis, and t-value to understand the variability and distribution within the sample, thereby enhancing the relevance of this study to sustainable development and gender equality in leadership (Table 1).

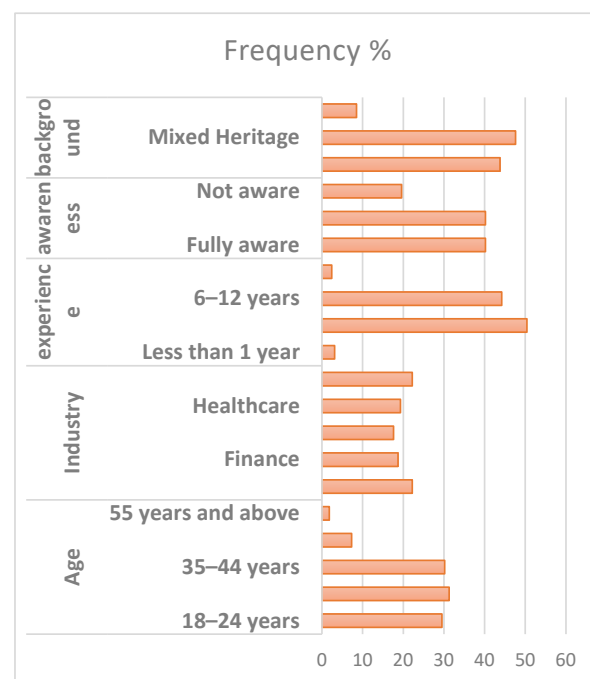


Figure 2. Demographic features.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics.

Demographic Factors		Frequency %	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis	t
Age	18–24 years	29.5	1.010	0.440	−0.431	51.514
	25–34 years	31.3				
	35–44 years	30.2				
	45–54 years	7.3				
	55 years and above	1.8				
Industry	Technology	22.2	2.158	−0.009	−1.391	47.976
	Finance	18.7				
	Manufacturing	17.6				
	Healthcare	19.3				
	Education	22.2				
Years of work experience	Less than 1 year	3.1	0.358	0.059	−0.380	96.351
	1–5 years	50.4				
	6–12 years	44.2				
	Above 12 years	2.4				
Workplace diversity policies awareness	Fully aware	40.2	0.557	0.353	−1.138	56.392
	Somewhat aware	40.2				
	Not aware	19.6				
Cultural background	Indigenous	43.8	0.400	0.452	−0.671	61.087
	Mixed Heritage	47.6				
	Predominantly Western Influence	8.5				

For age distribution, the majority of the samples fall within the age brackets of 18 to 44, with 29.5% representing ages 18–24, 31.3% within 25–34, and 30.2% from 35 to 44 years. This highlights the concentration of young and mid-career professionals with lesser sharing from older age groups (7.3% being 45–54 and 1.8% being 55 and above). Variance in ages (1.010) and a slight positive skewness (0.440) suggest a balanced yet younger audience, while the negative kurtosis (−0.431) indicates a relatively flat distribution. The larger t-value (51.514) proves such observation true to reliability. The participants fall into five major industries, among which technology and education were at par contributing to the sample with 22.2%. Finance sampled 18.7%, health 19.3%, and manufacturing 17.6%, all indicative of the varying professional environments represented. The difference in industry (2.158) is negligible skewness in itself (−0.009), but negative kurtosis (−1.391) points at skewness displaying lesser extreme values. The t-value of 47.976 corroborates the statistical robustness of such findings. The most experienced participants in a work environment have between 1 and 10 years of work experience. Participants who have 15 years constituted 50.4%, while those with 6 to 10 years are 44.2%. Very few respondents have less than one year of experience, that is about 3.1%, while 0% have more than 15 years of experience. This indicates that the sample largely consisted of early to mid-career professionals. There is a variance of 0.358, which brings skewness low at 0.059, meaning the distribution is quite concentrated around the 1–10 years category, while negative kurtosis of −0.380 indicates quite flat distribution. A high t-value (96.351) proves the reliability of these data points. Awareness of workplace diversity policies was evenly split,

with 40.2 percent completely aware and an equal percentage somewhat aware; however, 19.6 percent had no awareness of such policies, thus depicting a noticeable gap in awareness. The variance (0.557) and moderately positive skewness (0.353) thus reflect this barely noticeable lean towards greater awareness, while the negative kurtosis (-1.138) indicates a distribution with a few “extreme” deviations. The significant t-value (56.392) adds further credence to these observations. Analysis of cultural background revealed that most of the participants considered themselves as mixed (47.6%) or indigenous people (43.8%), having been influenced by the predominantly Western culture (8.5%). The variance (0.400) and positive skewness (0.452) suggest that they appear to represent balance but a little on the higher end in mixed representation, while negative kurtosis -0.671 indicates moderate flat distribution. This thus gives credence to the consistency of these findings, as shown by the t-value of 61.087.

5.2. Perception Regarding Equality Factors

Critical dimensions were revealed through the mean score, Standard Deviation (SD), and t-values to have a significant impact on gender equality in organizational leadership (Table 2, Figure 3).

Table 2. Factors mean scores.

Factors	Mean \pm SD	t	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Perceived Gender Equality in Organizational Leadership	4.05 \pm 0.74	128.651	0.86	0.88	0.65
Cultural Norms and Gender Roles	4.03 \pm 0.73	129.488	0.76	0.79	0.63
Organizational Policies on Diversity and Inclusion	3.99 \pm 0.72	130.628	0.85	0.88	0.62
Workplace Practices and Flexibility	3.99 \pm 0.71	132.197	0.87	0.89	0.67
Leadership Development Opportunities	3.99 \pm 0.73	127.175	0.86	0.88	0.60
Male-dominated Networks and Sponsorship	3.87 \pm 0.74	121.920	0.79	0.82	0.58
Organizational Culture and Support	3.97 \pm 0.74	125.007	0.85	0.87	0.61

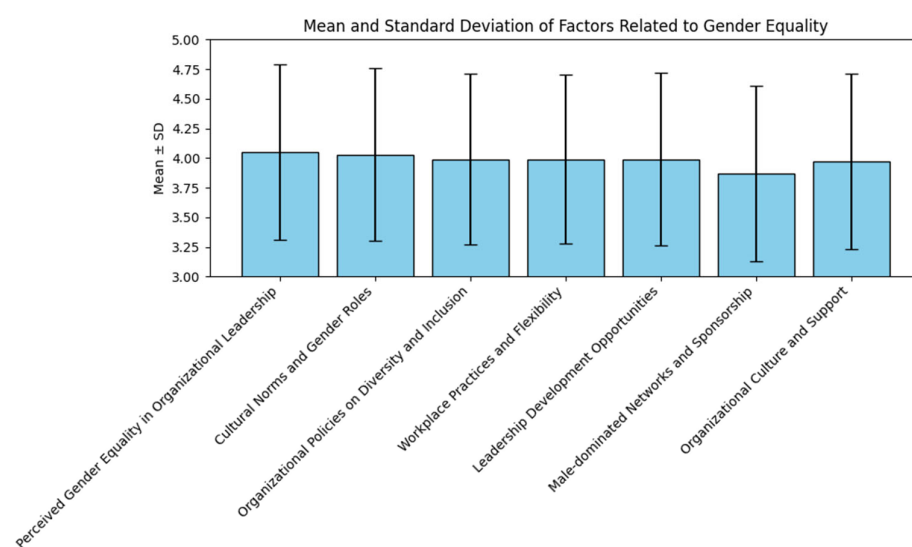


Figure 3. Bar diagram showing mean scores.

The highest mean score was for Perceived Gender Equality in Organizational Leadership (4.05 \pm 0.74, $t = 128.651$), suggesting that participants tend to believe there is gender

equity along the lines of their perceptions but with considerable variance. Similarly, Cultural Norms and Gender Roles (4.03 ± 0.73 , $t = 129.488$) emerged as an important dimension of the notion that such societal and cultural expectations continue to play a crucial role in gender dynamics in leadership. Organization Policies on Diversity Inclusion (3.99 ± 0.72 , $t = 130.628$) and Practices and Flexibility at Work (3.99 ± 0.71 , $t = 132.197$) were equally rated high, indicating that they play an important role in terms of structural and policy approaches towards enabling work–life balance for women executives. The above two factors all point to the role organizations have in institutionalizing gender equality measures. Another high mean score was also achieved by Leadership Development Opportunities (3.99 ± 0.73 , $t = 127.175$), which emphasizes the importance participants place on targeted initiatives for improving women’s leadership capabilities. Nevertheless, Male-dominated Networks and Sponsorship (3.87 ± 0.74 , $t = 121.920$) received slightly lowered scores, suggesting that there might be interference from traditional male-dominated power structures in the matters of achieving gender parity. Organizational Culture and Support (3.97 ± 0.74 , $t = 125.007$), therefore, seems to be a major challenge in the sense of having a workplace where one enjoys fair treatment and support. The continuous t-values among all dimensions reflect the reliability as well as the statistical significance, which highlights that these are dimensions that play a very crucial role in shaping the experience of women executives in leadership positions.

5.3. Impact Study

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis will furnish grounds for understanding the variables leading to gender equality, with a special mention of women’s representation in executive roles (Table 3 and Figure 4).

Table 3. Pathway analysis through SEM.

	Pathway	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	<i>p</i>	Hypothesis
Organizational Culture and Support	<--- Cultural Norms and Gender Roles	0.113	0.051	2.201	0.028	H6 supported (Partial mediation effect)
	<--- Organizational Policies on Diversity and Inclusion	0.195	0.054	3.639	***	
	<--- Male-dominated Networks and Sponsorship	0.365	0.036	10.171	***	
	<--- Leadership Development Opportunities	0.181	0.049	3.708	***	
	<--- Workplace Practices and Flexibility	0.08	0.05	1.619	0.105	
Perceived Gender Equality in Organizational Leadership	<--- Cultural Norms and Gender Roles	0.153	0.043	3.516	***	H1 supported
	<--- Organizational Culture and Support	0.227	0.036	6.306	***	H6 supported
	<--- Organizational Policies on Diversity and Inclusion	0.206	0.046	4.5	***	H2 supported
	<--- Workplace Practices and Flexibility	0.133	0.042	3.191	0.001	H3 supported
	<--- Leadership Development Opportunities	0.198	0.042	4.773	***	H4 supported
	<--- Male-dominated Networks and Sponsorship	0.074	0.033	2.257	0.024	H5 supported

“***—significant at 0.001 level; <--- pathway indication”.

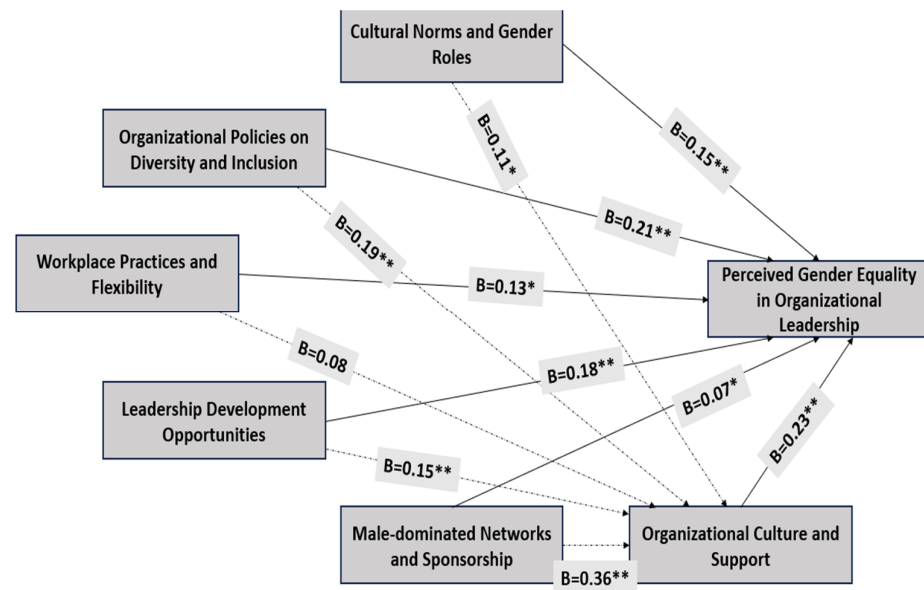


Figure 4. Pathway diagram with standardized coefficients of decomposed constructs (*—significant at 0.05 level; **—significant at 0.001 level).

From Table 3 and Figure 3, it appears that culturalism and gender roles affect both organizational culture and perceived gender equality in leadership. The organizations have an estimated pathway coefficient (Estimate = 0.113, $p = 0.028$) for organizational culture and (Estimate = 0.153, $p < 0.001$) for perceived gender equality, confirming that traditional gender roles affect workplace dynamics as well as even perceptions of leadership. This supports H1, which states that societal norms as either impeding or enabling mechanisms for women’s representation in leadership roles depend on the fit of these norms with workplace inclusivity practices. Organizational policies on diversity and inclusion were associated positively with both organizational culture (Estimate = 0.195, $p < 0.001$) and perceived gender equality in leadership (Estimate = 0.206, $p < 0.001$). Such a highlight confirms the H2 results, indicating that well-implemented diversity and inclusion policies serve as key means for equitable perceptions of leadership with supportive surrounding conditions. Though the estimates do not significantly affect organizational culture (Estimate = 0.08, $p = 0.105$), there was a positive effect, creating perceived gender equality in leadership (Estimate = 0.133, $p = 0.001$). These findings could partially support H3, meaning workplace practices by themselves may not be directly responsible for creating a supportive culture, but they may act as mediating influences toward women’s promotion when coupled with other inclusive measures. The study indicated a strong positive relationship between the development opportunities of leadership and both organizational culture (Estimate = 0.181, $p < 0.001$) and perceived gender equality in leadership (Estimate = 0.198, $p < 0.001$). Thus, these results validated H4, which indicates that structured leadership programs for women have to break barriers to entry into executive roles. On the other hand, male-dominated networks and sponsorship practices significantly impacted organizational culture (Estimate = 0.365, $p < 0.001$) and perceived gender equality in leadership (Estimate = 0.074, $p = 0.024$). The results proved H5, which emphasizes the exclusionary character of these sorts of male-centric networks, making it difficult for women to access critical mentorship and career advancement opportunities. Emerging as a key aspect was the mediation role of organizational culture and support. Organizational culture acted as a significant mediator between independent variables, including cultural norms (Estimate = 0.227, $p < 0.001$), diversity policies, and leadership development opportunities, with perceived gender equality in leadership. Thus, this provides support for H6, which emphasizes that an organization’s

more supportive culture will reinforce the positive effect that inclusivity-related policies and programs grant toward leadership equality.

The model fit indices indicate a well-fitting structural equation model (Table 4), validating the appropriateness of the hypothesized relationships between the studied constructs. The Chi-Square (χ^2) value of 345.62 with 156 degrees of freedom results in a normed Chi-Square (χ^2/df) of 2.21, which falls within the acceptable range (<3), suggesting a reasonable model fit. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.951 and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.942 both exceed the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating strong incremental fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value of 0.051 is within the acceptable limit (≤ 0.08), demonstrating a close fit to the data, while the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) of 0.042 further supports the model’s good fit, as it is well below the acceptable threshold of 0.08. This evaluation ensures that the structural equation model effectively captures the underlying theoretical framework and accurately represents the relationships between key constructs. A well-fitting model provides confidence in the validity and reliability of the hypothesized associations, reinforcing the robustness of the study’s findings and their implications for theoretical and practical applications.

Table 4. Model fit indices.

Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Threshold
Chi-Square (χ^2)	345.62	$p > 0.05$ (desired, but sensitive to sample size)
Degrees of Freedom (df)	156	-
χ^2/df (Normed Chi-Square)	2.21	<3 (acceptable), <2 (good)
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.951	≥ 0.90 (acceptable), ≥ 0.95 (good)
Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI)	0.942	≥ 0.90 (acceptable), ≥ 0.95 (good)
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.051	≤ 0.08 (acceptable), ≤ 0.05 (good)
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.042	≤ 0.08 (acceptable), ≤ 0.05 (good)

6. Discussion

6.1. Contribution Regarding Relevant Theories

Research investigating cultural and organizational influences contributing to the gender gap in executive positions among private companies in Taiwan and Guatemala reveals a complex interplay between cultural norms, organizational policies, and individual opportunities. These findings reinforce and extend existing research on gender disparities in leadership roles. While prior studies have explored gender equality in leadership across various regions, gaps remain in understanding the combined effects of cultural expectations, workplace structures, and policy-driven inclusivity on women’s executive advancement. Existing research identifies structural and cultural barriers but lacks comprehensive cross-country comparisons that integrate these dimensions. The influence of traditional gender roles, male-dominated networks, and national policies on leadership progression remains underexplored. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory provides a critical framework for analyzing how these factors shape workplace attitudes and gender-based leadership opportunities. Among the six dimensions proposed by Hofstede, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Power Distance, and Individualism vs. Collectivism are particularly relevant in examining leadership gender disparities. In masculine cultures, where competitiveness and assertiveness are valued over traditionally feminine traits such as nurturing and collaboration, leadership is often stereotypically associated with men. This study addresses existing gaps by evaluating how gender norms, organizational culture, workplace inclusivity, leadership development programs, and executive opportunities shape women’s advancement in Taiwan and Guatemala. We specifically assess the mediating role of organizational culture in fostering inclusive leadership environments and explore how empathy-driven policies contribute to sustainable gender parity. By integrating cross-national perspectives, this

research provides deeper insights into the structural and cultural enablers and barriers to gender equality in executive leadership.

6.2. Main Findings

This study brings into focus the collective importance of cultural norms and gender roles regarding organizational culture, leading to perceptions toward gender equality in leadership. Most of these findings agree with those of Morris et al. [24] and Naghavi et al. [25], who underscore the role of societal stereotypes on deeper levels shaping status for gender dynamics in the workplace. Similarly, Dorfman et al. [27] found that the association of leadership through aggressive and competitive traits contributes further to women's exclusion from their executive positions in masculine-oriented cultures. The gendered division of labor as defined by Acker [33] also emerges in this study; that is, women are assigned generally motherly or supportive positions, for example, in human resources or administration, whereas all strategic and decision-making positions are occupied mainly by men. This further operationalized differential creates organizational policies and practices that are sustained covertly, and therefore significant gender inequity. From the results of this study, it is clear that the organization-wide policies on diversity and inclusion have a much-needed positive impact on perceived gender equality in leadership. The result of this survey is indicative of what Halliday et al. [16] argued, stressing that policies sensitive to gender equality are mandatory for increasing women's participation on boards. In addition, Kaftandzieva and Nakov [14] noted that, even if there are still considerable barriers for organizations and cultures, specific policies could minimize some of those challenges in masculine cultures. The results of this study confirm that effective implementation of diversity initiatives and inclusionary policies would serve to create the equivalent perception of leadership environments and supportive settings.

Yet, as stated by Higgins [34], these policies would have to be supplemented by other practices at the organizational level to create positive and significant change. Further, the study has included the impacts of policies related to flexible work at the workplace on career advancement for women. Though these did not significantly affect the patterns of the organization, they had a very high positive impact on perceived equity in the leadership in terms of gender. This bears inference to the partial support of the original hypothesis that workplace practices combined with inclusive measures have contained mediation in women's career progression. Bonet et al. [18] found that such has been seen; that is, institutional pressures speeded up women's careers to higher executive posts temporarily but did not have a long-lasting strength in contributing to gender equality. This further drives home the point that an integrated holistic approach must include flexibility in workplace practices as well as cultural and structural change perceptions to solve the gender problem holistically. Opportunities in leadership development were associated with major alterations that improved organizational cultures and their interpretations of gender equality in leadership. This corroborates the work of Mahdi Abaker et al. [13] and highlights the significance of specific leadership programs in breaking barriers women face on their way to a place in executive roles. Such organized initiatives that are directed towards mentorship, skill development, and sponsorship would be very important in removing the 'glass ceilings' so that women can cross over and into the traditionally male-dominated networks. This idea is further supported by research conducted by Attah-Boakye et al. [17], which shows that gender diversity in leadership promotes innovation and growth in organizations, thus indicating the necessity of strategic investments in leadership development.

6.3. Barriers

Significant barriers to gender equality included male-dominated networks and sponsorship practices. These findings find resonance in Purcell et al. [32], with whom male-centric networks are cited as a key mechanism reinforcing gender disparities by virtue of their exclusionary character. In this sense, the study of Moreno et al. [20] has shown that social constructions, together with the caregiving system, can exacerbate systemic inequality because they impose specific responsibilities and expectations on women, thus diminishing their access to necessary mentoring and sponsorship opportunities. These barriers indicate the necessity of dismantling historical power structures with a view to ensuring fair access to leadership networks. Another experimental variable was the organizational culture and support that emerged. An enabling culture propelled the effectiveness of inclusive policies, leadership opportunities, and workplace practices in promoting gender equality in leadership. This is consistent with the findings of Lewellyn et al. [15], who found that national culture and organizational support systems interacted to generate different gender diversity outcomes. The explanatory power of organizational culture thus demands an organization's constant effort to develop environments with a focus on equity, inclusion, and support geared toward women's leadership aspirations. For further regional differences, comparative diversity was found between findings from Taiwan and findings from Guatemala. In East Asia, Liao and Luo [19] gave an example within their argument that education negatively associated with traditional gender attitudes, especially for women, has changed in younger generations. On the other hand, the presence of deep-rooted and mutual dependency and caregiving responsibilities described by Moreno et al. [20] in Latin America continues to restrain women's career advancement in the region. Thus, these disparities reflect the need for specific strategies in addressing gender differences regarding leadership. Men's relationships and caregiving responsibilities limit women's leadership opportunities. However, inclusive policies, leadership development programs, and flexible workplace practices that support the ideals of equality create an environment that supports women's advancement. Regional differences show that educational progress in Taiwan is eroding traditional attitudes among the younger generation, while deep-rooted conservative traditions in Latin America are hindering the advancement of women. These findings are consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDGs 5 (Gender Equality) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which emphasize the need for cultural, organizational, and behavioral changes to address systemic barriers, encourage innovation, and improve governance. manage.

7. Conclusions

The study explores the cultural and organizational factors that contribute to gender inequality in management positions, with a particular focus on private companies in these areas. The findings highlight the important role of cultural norms, organizational policies, workplace practices, and leadership development opportunities in shaping gender equality in leadership. Cultural norms, including strict gender roles, are often significant barriers to women taking on leadership roles. However, implementing good diversity and inclusion policies can positively impact organizational culture and strengthen perceptions of gender equality. Leadership development programs are also becoming an important way to break down systemic barriers, while male-dominated networks continue to limit women's access to important advice and opportunities. By linking these findings to sustainable business practices, this study shows how promoting gender equality is consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Specifically, it advances Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (Gender Equality) by focusing on effective strategies to remove systemic barriers and create inclusive workplaces where women can thrive. It also supports SDG 10

(Reduced Inequality) as addressing organizational and cultural barriers can help to ensure equitable access to leadership roles and enhance diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organization.

The implications for sustainable business practices are profound. Gender-equal leadership strengthens decision-making, innovation, and overall performance, which are key components of sustainable economic development. Recommendations include promoting a culture, designing inclusive policies, and establishing accountability mechanisms to promote gender equality. Although limited to Taiwan and Guatemala and the design of cross-sectional studies, the study provides valuable insights for future research to examine long-term change and determine whether or not interventions are feasible. Ultimately, this research lays the foundation for using inclusive leadership as a driver of sustainable development and the development of equitable institutions.

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