



Alina Laukkanen

Climbing the Energy Ladder: The Future of Women in the Energy Industry

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Abstract

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Companies in the energy sector have difficulty attracting, promoting, and retaining women, which is resulting in few women holding top management positions. Recent studies show that success of any company is directly related to the number of women that are represented in higher levels within the organisation. An overview of the literature, the collection of data, a methodological analysis, and a conclusion form the framework for this thesis. Quantitative and qualitative data collection analysis was performed to answer the research question of how women can advance more effectively into higher positions within male dominated companies. Based on the data collected from 264 women in the energy industry, a quantitative analysis was conducted at a live event. An interview with a randomised selection process was used to collect qualitative data from the 264 women from the event. A review of the collected data indicates that mentoring and sponsorship play a crucial role in assisting women in their career advancement. By transforming policies to be more suitable for women, energy companies can promote more women into leadership positions and improve gender equality at work. When women see other women in higher positions, their willingness to apply to higher positions increases. Additionally, the thesis emphasises the need to re-evaluate caregiving and flexibility policies in addition to raising awareness of the gender bias and sexism faced by women in the workplace. To empower women employees in the post-pandemic environment, men and women at all levels must provide caring attention to women's needs at work.

Keywords: Women; Leadership; Energy Industry; Gender Bias; Equality

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Glossary

CEO	Chief executive officer.
C-suite	A company's executive-level managers.
HR	Human Resources.
KPI	Key Performance Indicator.
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal set by European Union.
STEM	Sciences, technologies, engineering, and mathematics.

1 Introduction

This thesis is structured around the following components: literature review, data collection methods, analysis, and conclusion. A literature review is collected to provide an overview of selected reports published in the past twenty years that provide an overview of the research results related to gender inequalities in top management, keeping and attracting women to climb the ladder in energy companies, particularly oil and gas. The methods section presents the data collection methods of the required data to answer the research question. Quantitative data was collected from 264 women working in the energy industry during a live event. Qualitative data was collected from randomised interview selection of the 264 women who participated in the event. Results from the data collection are analysed in the analysis section. The thesis concludes with recommendations on how energy companies can accelerate gender equality in the workplace and promote more women into leadership positions.

There is a significant gap in the representation of women in the energy sector, particularly in oil and gas (Ponton, 2019). The energy sector is a very masculine industry and therefore struggles to attract, promote, and retain the female workforce. Despite greater representation of women in parliaments and higher school enrolments, gender inequality persists (Rowling, 2015). The importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the European Union cannot be overstated as they are call to actions to everyone on the planet. According to Eurostat (2022), SDG10 Reduced Inequalities urges nations to reduce inequalities in income, based on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic or other status within a nation. The goal emphasises the facilitation of safe and orderly migration and mobility of people between countries, including inequalities related to representation (Eurostat, 2022). Throughout this thesis, powered by SDG10, investigation and research is conducted for the research question; **can energy companies that have a male dominated workforce empower and attract more female employees to climb the energy ladder by making their policies more suitable for women?**

2 Literature review

This literature review provides an overview of the research and research outcomes related to gender inequalities in top management and how energy companies, oil and gas in particular, can keep and attract women to climb the ladder. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a critical analysis of selected reports published in the past twenty years. The review starts with the underrepresentation of women in companies and introduces the possible barriers women face rising into the energy industry's top management positions. In addition to the research on the barriers women face in the energy industry to climbing the corporate ladder this research aims to investigate further the post pandemic outcomes. The literature review discusses the correlation of how education plays part in women's underrepresentation and how the culture of unpaid labour affects female workforce. The pandemic has changed how companies operate and what female workforce is looking for from an employer. Therefore, in-depth data from the female perspective about women in the energy industry is collected and analysed to provide insight on how energy companies can reformulate their practices and policies. This research aims to provide practical information on how to include equal policies and advance women further in male dominated energy industries post pandemic

The energy industry is undergoing a significant transformation as women make career choices that take them to new horizons (Ponton, 2019). There is a significant underrepresentation of women at top management levels in male dominated companies (McKinsey & Company, 2013; Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek, 2021) as one third of the 250 oil and gas companies surveyed by McKinsey & Company (2019) did not have a single woman in their top management positions in 2019. According to Foster (2017) one fifth of the world's 200 largest companies have no female directors at all and board positions are among the most influential jobs in business. Foster (2017) states that having more females on the board, could attract more young women to be part of the solution.

The McKinsey & Company report "Power of Parity" (2015) identified ten "impact zones" where effective action would bring approximately 75 percent of women affected by gender inequality closer to equality. The global impact zones include limitations on economic potential, unpaid labour, fewer legal rights, underrepresentation in politics, and violence against women which can be tackled by providing financial incentives and support, developing technology and infrastructure, providing economic opportunity, building capabilities, advocating, and shaping attitudes, and enforcing laws, regulations, and policies (McKinsey & Company, 2015). Regarding women holding higher positions, providing economic opportunities, building capabilities, advocating, and shaping attitudes plays a critical role.

2.1 Women's underrepresentation in companies

Women's share of the labour force has remained relatively stable in developed and emerging markets for the past five years, averaging approximately 35% (Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek, 2021). Despite graduating from university and professional programmes at a higher rate than men, women only make up 3.5% of Fortune 1000 CEOs and 14.6% of Fortune 500 executive officers (Buchholz, 2022). Furthermore, research in Europe indicates that many of the largest 500 companies recruit women in similar numbers to their male counterparts, but as women advance up the corporate ladder, they become increasingly underrepresented (Foster, 2017) in boardrooms (Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek, 2021).

2.1.1 Barriers of career progression

The proportion of women decreases as one moves up the corporate ladder according to International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017). Women are underrepresented in senior management in developed markets, even more so than on the board of directors. A McKinsey & Company report, "Women in the workplace 2022," interviewed more than 40,000 employees from 333 organisations in the United States. According to the research, women are

leaving leadership positions at a record-breaking rate (McKinsey & Company, 2022). The severity of the problem can be illustrated by the fact that for every woman who is promoted to the next level in a company, there are two women who decide to resign (McKinsey & Company, 2022). According to the report 43% of women who are in leadership roles are burnt out, compared to 31% of men in the same position. As a consequence of women leaving their positions, companies are challenged to look at their employee value proposition from a new perspective while trying to retain the women employees. In addition, according to Foster (2017) women are unable to advance in corporations due to a lack of mentorship, role models, and sponsors.

According to a study from Ziviani (2021) companies cannot afford to ignore the persistent barriers to women's professional advancement because it is harmful not only for women but also for corporations (Ziviani, 2021). Accordingly, the underrepresentation of women in upper management positions will continue until companies re-formulate their practices and policies to the career path of a woman, and male dominated environments lessen their presence by giving more suitable conditions to women (Ziviani, 2021).

2.1.2 STEM

The 2019 McKinsey & Company report entitled "How women can fill the oil and gas industry's talent gap" used data from 250 companies. The researchers analysed the status of women in the oil and gas industry. The study found that female participation in oil and gas declines 31 percent from entry-level to manager roles, as compared to 22 percent in other STEM industries and 20 percent across the entire corporate workforce (McKinsey & Company, 2019). Additionally, the report found that companies with top-quartile women leaders tended to achieve 15 percent higher financial returns than their industry peers. The correlation suggests that "companies that embrace diversity have a much higher chance of success" (McKinsey & Company, 2019).

While women in the corporate world are generally underrepresented, the talent pipeline varies by industry (McKinsey & Company, 2022). The technology,

hardware, IT and telecom and engineering and Industrial Manufacturing industries struggle to attract women to enter, while others have difficulties advancing women to middle management (Energy, Utilities, and Basic Materials) or senior management (Oil and Gas) (McKinsey & Company, 2022). In addition, several factors contribute to gender differences, according to Isaac, Carnes, and Kaatz (2012) as the study presents a feminist perspective on leadership, highlighting complex issues such as the fact that women with more masculine traits tend to face opposition (Isaac et al 2012). Moreover, promotions and hiring practices that unwittingly favour men are problematic. A classic example is Google, where women were not nominating themselves for promotions at the same rate as men. Considering the gender norm that women are conditioned to be modest, this is unsurprising. Google attempted to fix the problem by encouraging women to nominate themselves by senior Google women organising workshops encouraging to behave more like men (Bowles, Babcock and Lei, 2007).

An analysis from Alawi and Mubarak (2019) discusses the barriers women face in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields in professional life age 22 and older. The primary findings were "bias against women in the workplace, discouraged work environments for women, and barriers related to childbirth and maternity" (Alawi and Mubarak, 2019). The researchers suggest that the problems can be addressed by eliminating stereotypes, allowing women to retain their rights and status in the workplace, and changing society's perception of women by telling successful women's stories.

In addition, the number of female applicants in STEM is higher only in the Arab States. Over the past decade, the number of women enrolled in engineering programmes in the Gulf Cooperation Council has increased dramatically, according to research by Ainane, Bouabud, and El Sökkary (2019). The study found that nearly half of female respondents reported serving their country as the top reason for enrolling in college in the Arab States (Ainane, Bouabud, El Sökkary, 2019). The study states, that women remain underrepresented in

engineering education in most Western countries despite the efforts of governments, industries, and academic institutions. This indicates that women in the Western countries might not have the same sense of serving their country. However, the idea of women being empowered through belonging and having meaningful work by the study increasing the number of women in STEM related positions in the Western countries could be considered. However, as the Western countries are very egocentric and individualistic it can be problematic.

2.1.3 Culture of paid work

Compared to men, women face a variety of obstacles throughout their careers as corporations still lag in terms of policies and standards (Ponton, 2019; Alawi and Mubarak, 2019; ILO, 2017). The International Labour Organization (2017) emphasises the importance of understanding to what extent and how female workers are discriminated against at work. The UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) released a report in 2017 on stress in the workplace, revealing that work-related stress, anxiety, and depression were higher for women in all age groups. Overall, women were 53% more stressed than men, but dramatic differences were observed among those aged 35-44 (HSE, 2017). According to Criado Perez (2020), there is a need to revolutionise the culture of paid work in general. She states that while most men fit the workplace ideal, fewer and fewer women do, and the traditional workplace has not been designed to accommodate them. Women's invisible, unpaid work is essential to everyone, including businesses. Instead of penalising them for doing so, businesses need to start recognising, valuing, and designing paid work in consideration (Criado Perez, 2020).

Due to overwork and under recognition, women are more likely to seek out new work cultures than men according to a study conducted by McKinsey & Company in 2022. Overworked women perform the majority of free labour at home, and most companies are not aware of the need for flexibility on their part. The report emphasises the importance of flexible working arrangements and remote work. According to McKinsey & Company (2022), women who have a high degree of flexibility are less likely to leave their jobs. According to the

Global Gender Gap Report 2018, women spend on average twice as much time doing domestic work and other unpaid work as men. According to McKinsey & Company Global Institute (2015) report on The Power of Parity, the average woman spends 3-6 hours a day on unpaid work, compared to a man who spends an average of 0.5-2 hours. The Global Gender Gap Report also highlights the importance of gender equality in developing a country's human capital for countries that want to remain competitive and inclusive (World Economic Forum, 2018).

As in the study by Alawi and Mubarak, (2019), Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek (2021) also mention how female workers in particular have been negatively affected as women tend to be the caregivers. Women are often thought by employers to prioritise their families over their careers. This results in women not having the same career advancement and training opportunities as men (Khan, Riyaz and Gull, 2019). Another strikingly problematic issue is that the workplaces are usually designed for men. As an example, Apple announced in 2017 its US headquarters as the best office building in the world, offering medical, dental, and luxury wellness spa facilities, but no childcare (Schwedel, 2017). According to studies from Khan et al (2019) and Starnski and Son Hing (2015) the biases affect women's chances of advancing in their careers, earning equality, developing, training, and evaluating their performance, as well as their mental health and well-being.

2.2 Impacts of gender bias on societal and company policies

Work cultures that are based on the belief that male needs are universal continue to disadvantage women (Criado Perez, 2020). The Gender Equality in Workplace report by Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek (2021) suggests that investing and re-evaluating family-care policies could be explored as a means of retaining female talent and closing the gender gap (Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek, 2021). Ziviani (2021), Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek (2021) both state that despite not leaving the workplace entirely, women face considerable career

challenges and therefore, work-life balance policies should be improved by companies to ensure gender equality at work.

Many barriers prevent women from advancing into corporate leadership positions, including gender-based discrimination and unconscious gender bias (ILO, 2017). Consequently, the report suggests that companies should provide more opportunities for women with high levels of expertise to advance into leadership positions (ILO, 2017). A growing body of research on gender inequality in the workplace has shown that company policies play an important role in preventing gender bias (Khan et al 2019). According to a study conducted by Stamarski and Son Hing (2015), organisational decision makers' attitudes and roles play an important role in gender inequality. The study suggests that discrimination in organisational structures, processes, and practices plays a key role and the best way to challenge gender bias is for organisational members to engage as a group. It can involve joining a union, signing petitions, organising social movements, or recruiting others (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015).

Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek (2021) found that early investments in women talent minimise regulatory risks. Additionally, increasing the number of women in leadership positions will diminish biases and stereotypes regarding women's leadership abilities, which may help address the issue of unequal pay and gender pay gaps (Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek, 2021). A study conducted by Mönkäre and Välimäki (2021) indicates that gender stereotypes and traditional and cultural practices persist, which influence the workplace in ways that discriminate against women in workplaces around the world, denying them different opportunities from men (Mönkäre and Välimäki, 2021). Fair presentation and compensation practices promote employee engagement, talent attraction, and retention. Companies can differentiate themselves from their competitors by implementing gender equality in the workplace (Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek, 2021).

Male dominated energy companies do not attract enough female talent, since the policies are not flexible enough to meet the needs of women in a workplace (McKinsey & Company, 2022). According to a poll from Hamel, Firth and Brodie (2014) 72% of American homemakers are women, 76% would return to work if they could work from home or 74% if they had flexible working hours. The Global Gender Gap Report 2018 states that women and men must contribute equally to profound economic and social change, in order to achieve a more prosperous and human-centred future. “Companies must not risk losing the insights, ideas, and skills of half the population” (World Economic Forum, 2018). The McKinsey & Company report (2019) cites social, political, and technological factors as factors driving changes in oil and gas industry leadership over the last few years (McKinsey & Company, 2019). It notes that the workforce in 2025 will be dominated by millennials and Generation Z. According to Timewise report (2017) 50% of UK employees want to work flexibly, but only 9,8% of job advertisements mention it, and women in particular report being penalised for requesting it.

Organisational policies and practices influence socially and culturally imposed structures that challenge women's competences, capabilities, and suitability to work for organisations (Khan et al, 2019). To put it in context, to accommodate their caregiving responsibilities, most women seek part-time jobs. In the UK, 38% of women work part time compared to 14% of men according to report from Buchanan, Pratt and Francis-Devine, (2023). Problematics arise as the reason for part-time pay being lower than full-time pay is that it is uncommon for a high-level position to be offered as a job-share or with flexible hours. Most women end up working in jobs below their skill level that are flexible, however paying them too little (Fawcett, 2018).

2.2.1 Biases against women

According to studies from Khan et al (2019) and Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) the biases affect women's chances of advancing in their careers, earning equality, developing, training, and evaluating their performance, as well as their mental health and well-being. As a result of biased assessments, limited career

development opportunities, lower pay, fewer challenging tasks, and a lack of training, women face many barriers to success (Khan et al 2019).

It is difficult for women to rise to the top of the corporate hierarchy due to many stereotypes about women in the workplace. Women's equality advocates on corporate boards may need to alter their tactics and push for stronger government intervention in the private sector to accelerate change based on an analysis of the barriers to women's success (Foster 2017). Across the globe, women are severely underrepresented on corporate boards. In total, only 12% of board seats are held by women, and only 4% of companies are chaired by women (Foster 2017). However, the research does not cover the actual steps companies can take to encourage women inside the companies to aim higher and how energy companies can enhance their employee value propositions to attract more women. In other words, provide equal opportunities for women in male-dominated energy companies.

As a result of male predominance on company boards and in management positions, there is a gender imbalance and limited pool of candidates that are recruited for directors and leaders according to Løyning (2021). In corporate culture, women are systematically discriminated against, limiting their access to meaningful work due to gender biases. As a demonstration on institutional white male bias, research by Goldin and Rouse (2000) demonstrated how the number of women in orchestra statistics increased by 10% in a decade because of blind auditions, where barrier was set between the hiring committee and the candidates.

To have equal structural access to power, women need to be equal with men (Foster, 2017). There are numerous barriers that women face in entering corporate leadership, both from a corporate and social science perspective, and gender discrimination in business policy and procedure is institutionalised (Foster, 2017). Additionally, a study of 248 performance reviews collected from a variety of US-based tech companies, discovered that women receive more negative personality criticism than men (Snyder, 2014). Often, women are

referred to as bossy, abrasive, aggressive, emotional, and irrational. Only aggressive appeared in men's reviews twice in a damaging way.

Studies of performance-related bonuses or salary increases have shown that white men are rewarded more than equally performing women and ethnic minorities. One study conducted by a financial corporation found that women and men in the same job receive 25% less performance-based bonuses (Castilla and Benard, 2010). Researchers found that men, particularly faculty men in STEM fields, had a relative reluctance to accept evidence of gender bias. Before underrepresented groups, including women, can participate more fully in STEM, it is necessary to raise awareness about the bias, especially among the majority (Handley, Brown, Moss-Racusin and Smith, 2015).

2.2.2 Mandating gender quotas

Globally, corporate boards lack gender diversity, except for countries that mandate gender quotas. A gender quota is a law that aims to balance gender inequality by enforcing it. A quota law was enacted in 2003 by Norway which made a big impact on inequality by requiring a minimum 40% female representation on boards of directors (Foster 2017; Løyning, 2021). More female directors became central to networks of interlocking directors. Interlocking networks play a key role in gender equality. However, female directors who hold only one board position, according to the research, will remain peripheral in the network. This is an instrument for perpetuating the over-representation and dominance of men, but the valid question here is why women with only one board position remain peripheral.

Løyning (2021) suggests, that gender equality in these networks can only be achieved by having several directorships. Directors have a lot of responsibility, and they are usually very well compensated. While it is not permitted for salaried people earning much less to have other jobs, it is expected of directors, and often justified by "providing experience", "enhancing networking connections", "bringing a fresh perspective" (Løyning, 2021). It is possible that limiting such appointments might even help to advance women by opening

more director positions. As a disputable example, Barbara Judge, specialising in energy companies, had over 20 directorships in British organisations. In 2016, however, Judge stated that long maternity breaks were bad for women and that those who took a year off risked losing their jobs. When her son was born, she only took 12 days off work (Kollewe, 2018). This example demonstrates, how policies affect women who have a family but want to advance in their careers simultaneously. It seems as if there can only be one path instead of two. Perhaps the reason is not so much about the possibilities, but the juggling of the two worlds, motherhood and climbing the corporate ladder. According to a Finnish study alongside to a study from University of Michigan, single women recover from heart attacks faster than married women, suggesting that husbands add at least seven hours to women's housework per week (Vulliamy, 2016; Kilpi, Konttinen, Silventoinen and Martikainen, 2015). Therefore, women taking care of their children and husbands might prevent them from handling multiple directorships. As stated in the McKinsey & Company (2022) report the burnout rate for women in leadership roles is 43 percent, while the rate for men is 31 percent.

Perhaps it should be the state's responsibility to allow men and women to decide who stays home from nursing for how long, which many Nordic countries allow such as Finland, Norway and Denmark (Foster, 2017; Løyning, 2021). This would leave the company with little choice in the matter. However, post pandemic, women are more likely to stay home than the men (McKinsey & Company, 2022). The psychological question arises as to why women are more likely to stay at home to raise children. The question is whether companies should encourage and assist women to return to work more than they do. The policies and practices of organisations are influenced by social and cultural structures that affect women's performance evaluations, leading to biased appraisals of women's performance.

3 Quantitative data collection and analysis

This section presents an overview of the methods for collecting quantitative data of 264 women working in the energy industry and an analysis of the results. The data is collected from Company X, which has operated in the oil and gas industry for over five decades and employs approximately 5000 employees worldwide on four different continents. As presented below in Figure 1. Company X's female ratio on the organisational level in December 2022 is very low.

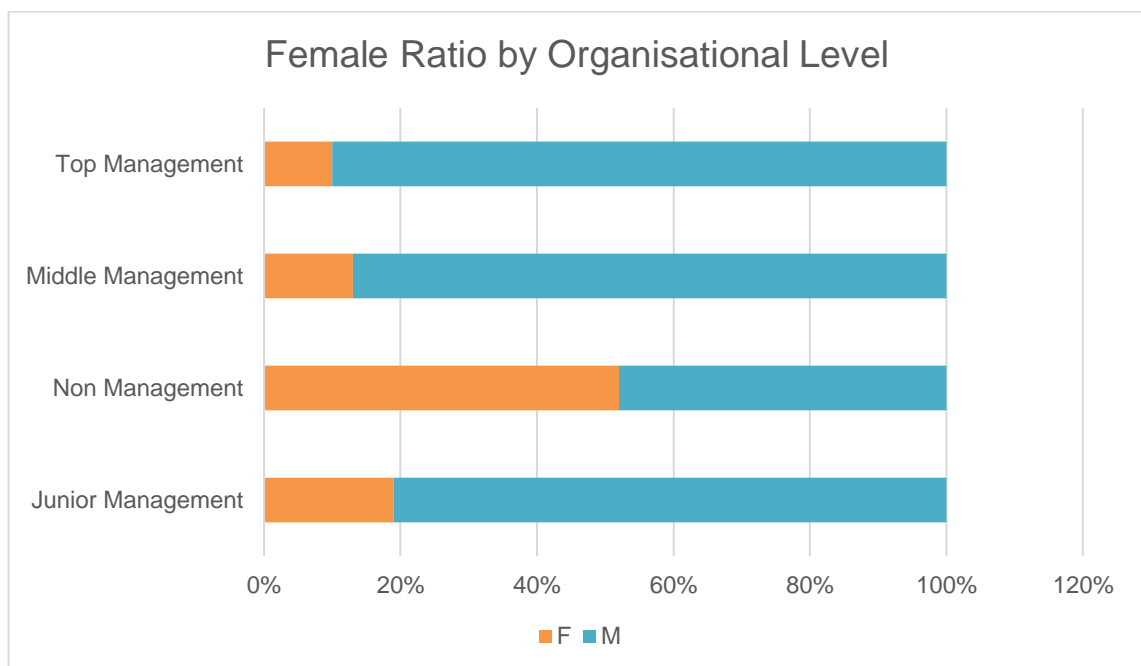


Figure 1. Company X Female Ratio by Organisational Level in December 2022

As demonstrated in the Figure 1. the company's headcount by gender on the organisation level in December 2022 is low, showcasing only 10% in top management. Therefore, it is clear that the company X has difficulty recruiting, promoting, and retaining female employees into higher positions. As one third of the 250 oil and gas companies surveyed by McKinsey & Company (2019) did not have a single woman in their top management positions in 2019. According to Foster (2017) having more female directors could attract more young women to the organisation.

3.1 Women's Network Event

Company X organised a local Women's Networking Event for its 264 female employees to promote diversity and inclusion, considering SDG10, Reduced Inequalities. In addition to bringing women together for networking purposes, the event was also designed to empower and inform them about career opportunities. Quantitative secondary data was collected along the Women's Network event attendees: number of attendees and average age. The event was held in one location. However, the invitees represent the company's diverse representation of women. The 264 women represent 43 different nationalities and the average age of women in the company is 38,4 years.

For the primary quantitative data collection, a survey through a live polling platform was created for the attendees to answer questions. As the polling was executed live in the event, the attendees' used their own phones to answer, and therefore the questions needed to be accessible and easy to understand. A disadvantage was that all the event attendees did not have access to the poll from their phones for different reasons such as an old phone model or internet connection. The live survey consisted of 3 multiple choice questions and 1 open ended question. In total, there were 1615 votes and 152 active participants/votes during the event.

3.1.1 Work-life balance

To find out the percentage of how many women experience a good work-life balance at their workplace, the poll started with a question Q1. Do you feel Company X nurtures a healthy work/life balance for you? Absolutely, Somewhat, Not at all. In total 146 women answered this question.



Figure 2. Live poll question “Do you feel Company X nurtures a healthy work/life balance for you?” at the Women’s Networking Event

In the survey, 57 women answered yes, indicating that 40% of the women felt the company nurtured a healthy work/life balance. Among the 80 women, with the highest percentage, 55% answered Somewhat, which indicates that the company X has room for improvement. Ziviani (2021) and Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek (2021) both stated, women face considerable career challenges compared to men and therefore, companies should prioritise improving their work-life balance policies to be more suitable for women to achieve equality in the workplace. In addition, 9 women, or 6%, responded Not at all, which is an alarming issue despite its low percentage. There is a potential loss of nine people in the company. In accordance with the McKinsey & Company report (2022) and the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2018), women are overworked and undervalued as they tend to perform most of the free labour at home, in addition to their workload at work. This may cause them to look for new employment opportunities which means costs for the company.

3.1.2 Career progression

The aim of the second question is to gather an understanding of how the women in the energy sector have experienced their gender affecting in their career progression. Q2. Do you believe your gender has negatively impacted your own career progression? Absolutely, Somewhat, Not at all. In total 153 women answered this question.

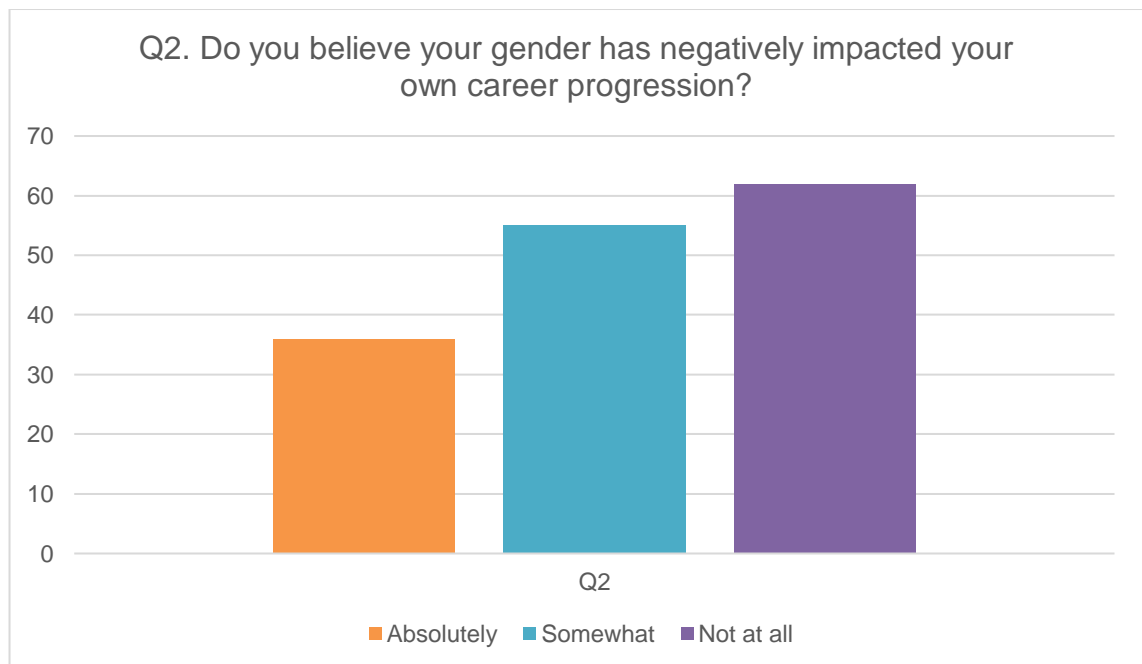


Figure 3. Live poll question “Do you believe your gender has negatively impacted your own career progression?” at the Women’s Networking Event

Out of 153 women, 36 answered Absolutely, indicating that 24% believe that their gender, being a woman, has negatively affected their career progression. The 24% is significant as several barriers exist for women, both from a corporate and social perspective, and gender bias is institutionalised in business policy and procedure as women are systematically discriminated against at work (Foster, 2017). Women and men need to be treated equally in companies to have equal structural access in the workplace and in order for companies to succeed in the long term. This percentage supports the previous question of the crucial need for Company X to re-evaluate its business policies. As Foster (2017) stated, employees can become unmotivated by unequal

treatment and responsibility, for example. If a woman is given fewer challenging tasks compared to men, this might result in resignations from women who are looking for more challenging working environments.

A total of 55 women answered Somewhat, representing 36%, and 62 women answered Not at all, representing 41%. Moreover, it should be noted that not all women are aware of how the policies affect them. This limits the analysis of the answer Somewhat. It is important to note, however, that answering Somewhat is also significant because even small inconveniences can undermine motivation. The McKinsey & Company report “Women in the Workplace” (2022) stated that the discrimination women face is often more than just gender, but also sexuality, race, disability, or other part of their identity. This indicates that woman being additionally other than “the norm”, white heterosexual can result in experiences of discrimination in the workplace that cannot be straight linked to gender. Therefore, it is a challenge to analyse the answers “Somewhat” and “Not at all” comprehently.

3.1.3 Mentoring

The third question aims to find out how many women have had an experience with mentors. Q3. Have you benefitted from having a mentor during your career Yes, No. Mentoring is an effective method of assisting women in developing their professional career. The mentor and mentee work together to facilitate the learning process where the mentor serves as a role model and the mentee serves as a learner (Pandya, 2019). Company X has had its own Mentorship programme since 2015 but struggles to find mentors and mentees due to lack of recognition of the programme. The programme is voluntary and non-compensated which might have a straight correlation to the low participation rates. Q3 was answered by 144 women in total.

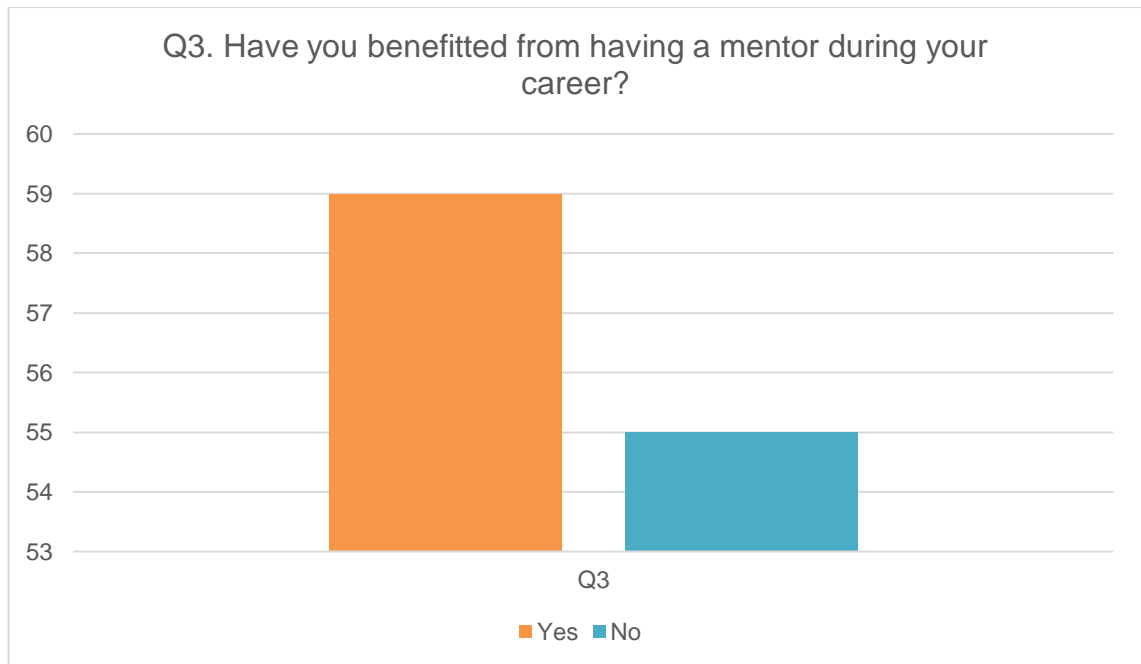


Figure 4. Live poll question “Have you benefitted from having a mentor during your career?” at the Women’s Networking Event

As a result, 59 women responded Yes, indicating 40%. This answer indicates that mentoring has happened mostly elsewhere than through the official mentoring programme. The importance of mentors for women’s career advancement is vital as successful mentoring increases retention and promotion of women (Pandya, 2019). 85 women responded No, indicating 60%. As Foster (2017) stated, to advance women in corporations, they need mentorships, role models and sponsors.

A more detailed analysis of the mentoring experience will be presented in the Qualitative Data section of the report where one of the interview questions focuses on the mentoring programme. In addition to empowering women, successful mentoring results in increased self-confidence and work engagement and minimises burnout (Pandya, 2019). Additionally, this question enabled the monitoring of how many women signed up after the event for the programme. A total of 20 women signed up, indicating a 65% rise in the participation of the programme. The programme has now 31 active pairings and according to the head of the programme, awareness sessions were held for the 20 new women signing up for the programme successfully after the event.

In the WordCloud, the words with word count below were most frequently used:

- dare 18
- diversity 11
- inclusion 10
- courage 10
- speak_up 9.

Based on the results, it is imperative that speaking up, being courageous, and being inclusive is ingrained into the culture of any organisation. As McKinsey & Company (2022) stated, a company can share well-being and diversity metrics with all employees and recognise managers for their efforts to foster inclusion among their team members. It is the organisation's responsibility to remind the women in the workplace to dare to aim higher, and one way to do it is to organise a Women's Networking Event where women can encounter other women and hear their stories. The method to collect data via survey has limitations as the data relies on the honesty of respondents and was only conducted in one event.

4 Qualitative data collection and analysis

Personal face-to-face interviews were conducted with people working in the energy sector to gain a more in-depth understanding of how everyone has experienced their career path. The interviewees have worked for multiple energy companies and are able to provide valuable insight into how companies can create a more welcoming work environment for women. To gain a broad understanding of their perspective and experiences, eight people working in the energy industry were interviewed from different backgrounds, countries of origin, ages, and professions. In response to the qualitative data collected, an analytical approach is used to better understand the issue and formulate recommendations.

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Position	Nationality

A	27	Female	Naval Engineer	Spanish
B	27	Male	Installation Engineer	French
C	30	Female	Installation Engineer	French
D	46	Female	Project Manager	French
E	23	Female	Operations	French
F	34	Female	Naval Architecture Engineer	French
G	45	Female	Joint Venture Manager	Lebanese
H	24	Female	Financial Analyst	Moroccan

Figure 5. Interviewee's profiles for qualitative data collection

The interview setting was informal and provided psychological safety since the topics covered in the interview may be emotionally draining. Due to the ease of both the interviewer and the interviewee, this type of interview allows for accurate data collection, as neither is threatened by anything that might influence their responses. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. It is acknowledged that the research has limitations. Since the interview candidate selection was randomised, only four countries are represented, Spain, France, Lebanon and Morocco. Five of the interviewees share the same nationality. As an additional measure of diversity and representation of the opposite sex, one male was also selected for the interview.

An open coding approach was used to identify recurring ideas, themes, and the relation to repeated issues during the qualitative data collection. Lastly, theory is constructed in accordance with the results of the analysis around the themes

that occurred. Due to sensitivity of the information and privacy of the interviewees, the participants of the interviews will be introduced by letters from A-H as demonstrated above in the Figure 5. The interview dataset cannot be published due to information that can identify interviewees.

4.1 Attraction and empowerment

According to McKinsey & Company (2022) women want to work for companies that prioritise diversity, equity, and inclusion, therefore a company that responds to the demand of women is more likely to attract women and gain more diverse representation in the company. The lack of female representation in high levels makes reaching high positions seem impossible, therefore, having more females on the board, could attract more young women to be part of the solution (Foster, 2017). In addition, diversity is associated with a much higher chance of success for companies as the McKinsey & Company (2019) report states that companies with top-quartile women leaders tended to achieve 15 percent higher financial returns than their industry peers.

4.1.1 Attracting women into oil and gas

How could companies empower and attract women? Do you have examples of real situations or policies that have affected you positively? These questions allow the interviewees to present ideas about actions that companies can take to empower and attract more women. This question seeks confirmation on the importance of feminist, gender neutral company policies.

“... I feel like maybe you cannot achieve these high positions in a huge company maybe it's that feeling ... for a man you have like lots of examples of directors in huge companies CEO's or whatever you have those examples but you don't have like female examples so maybe that's why you are scared about not achieving these positions ... seeing other women in higher positions it can help or if you don't see any women in higher positions you basically cannot imagine yourself there either.” (A)

Four out of eight interviewees, indicating 50% confirmed that the energy industry, particularly oil and gas is not attractive to women because of its

reputation. Many of the interviewees confirmed how the male dominated oil and gas industry needs a cultural change shift.

“... these companies were very high at that time ... now oil and gas is a bit frowned upon but at that time it was like really hype ... attracting women requires change of culture change of values ... I believe that we need to work really fundamentally on also changing the values that we celebrate ...” (G)

The McKinsey & Company (2019) study stated that female participation in oil and gas declines 31 percent from entry-level to manager roles, as compared to 22 percent in other STEM industries and 20 percent across the entire corporate workforce. This indicates that companies with a low female headcount should invest in changing their corporate cultures more inviting for women since now more than ever, women are making their way into positions they have never held before (Ponton, 2019).

“I don't think that companies are taking care of these kind of situations and it's because I think that more women are trying to get these job positions that they never had before so now it has to be changed for sure and try to adapt the female situations to these job positions and I think as a female who's able to produce children I should have the same rights as a male and same opportunities.”(A)

Oil and gas companies are inherently male dominated and according to the interviewees, the existing female representation has a tremendous effect on the attractiveness. Low female headcount plays a key role repelling women from applying.

“... our numbers could and should be higher because how every other company does it and we don't. Every time this question is asked in a town hall the answer is always the same “well because we don't get any resume back” come on it's not possible that every other company has that works in the same field gets resumes and hires ... the higher the position the less woman ...” (E)

Energy companies dominated by men do not attract enough female talent because women realize that low percentages of women in the company indicate that the policies are not flexible enough to support their needs (McKinsey & Company, 2022). This showcases the need for companies to demonstrate their gender representation publicly in their websites. Publicly diverse companies are more likely to attract and retain female talent since women want to work for

companies that offer flexibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion (McKinsey & Company, 2022). It seems that oil and gas is waking up to the diversity problem too late and struggles to attract women due to the low representation.

“... maybe some mentality but it's also the industry that is maybe not attracting so much women and the company also maybe as there was no special need...will to change this and looking into it you also go into this trap that this industry is not attracting woman also engineering in the same in the engineering school you are not attracting the women ...” (D)

The McKinsey & Company report (2019) cites social, political, and technological factors as factors driving changes in oil and gas industry leadership over the last few years. The report notes that the workforce in 2025 will be dominated by millennials and Generation Z. To attract the future generations, change in culture and mentality needs to be installed.

“... the change should start from the education level as the education level needs to encourage more women into STEM related fields ...” (H)

On the contrary, while Arab States enjoy the high percentages of women enrolling for engineering (Ainane et al 2019) in the individualistic Western cultures serving your own country is not a strong motivator to increase the number of female applicants into engineering. Therefore, raising awareness and encouraging women to apply for STEM related fields is necessary.

“I am working on compensation plans that are not pyramidal since in general women tend to cherish equality ... here are so many levels companies could work on ...” (G)

Companies can stand out by presenting fair compensation practices which promote employee engagement, talent attraction, and retention. Investments in women talent can minimise regulatory risks, as stated by Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek (2021). Additionally, increasing the number of women in leadership positions can diminish the biases and stereotypes regarding women's leadership abilities, which may help companies to address the issue of unequal pay and gender pay gaps (Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek, 2021). To summarize it all, oil and gas companies need to work on the industry attractiveness

and female representation in higher positions. Female friendly compensation plans could be included to attract more women.

4.1.2 Empowerment by mentorship or sponsorship

How important is mentoring in career advancement? Have you experienced mentoring yourself? These questions about mentoring seek confirmation for the preliminary conclusion on how important role mentors play supporting women to feel braver and more confident to feel empowered and advance in their careers. In company X, a mentoring programme was implemented as a restructuring plan in 2015 to develop and retain talent. Currently it has 31 pairings, as stated earlier in Quantitative data collection section 3.1.3 Mentoring page 17. A lack of high-stakes assignments is preventing many women from reaching the C-suite in their organisations as powerful sponsors are not demanding and securing these stepping-stone jobs (Ibarra 2019).

All the interviewees stated that mentoring is highly beneficial and necessary in their career advancement, but finding a mentor is not always easy to find. As demonstrated earlier, only 40% of the Women attending the event had experienced mentoring. Mentoring can play a key role for woman's career advancement.

“I was very lucky to have had a boss who also naturally became my mentor ... I think he is the one who to whom I own most of my growth because he believed in me, he encouraged me ... after having that very short but kind of disappointing experience with the “harasser” I was in a kind of a vulnerable place and it's not that he actually fed me pride or something but he helped me grow, he helped me learn and I think it was a turning point in my in my career ... (G)

However, the challenges with men mentoring or sponsoring women can be demonstrated by an article written by Hewlett, Peraino, Sherbin, Sumberg (2011) where generally women avoid engaging with senior men to avoid being misconstrued as having a sexual interest. As women rise up the ladder, they are judged about their personal lives and the mentors and sponsors might assume that women are less accessible and less dedicated if they are married with children. Yet senior-level men often view single women without children as

oddities or threats according to the article. Therefore, a woman's personal choices, whatever they may be, brand her as unfit for leadership which might have an effect on the mentoring/sponsoring relationship. As stated by White (1995) in her mentoring research, the importance of demonstrating abilities in the workplace is completely subject to mentors having faith in their mentees. Therefore, mentoring is a vital tool to bring value and guide women in their career advancement.

“... I love the return of experience that she gives me. She is like an empowered woman. She is so natural in her job she has so much wisdom and experience to share, and I mean I love connecting with her. She always has a lot of smart things and smart ideas. When I speak with her about stuff, she has the vision and I want to push it. I raised a couple of points which are worrying me really, I mean really big strategic points for Company X on the long term and I don't know if whether it's because she's a woman or not but raising these same things to some of the male leaders did not work. But with her she was like oh okay got it. So I do enjoy the mentoring ... of course it all depends on the mentor and I was lucky to have all these people in my professional life and so from my perspective it is extremely important to have a mentor or actually to have people who share constructively who give you constructive criticism who are examples also to you by the way you want to live, the way you want to manage and who can be inspiring for actually stuff which you actually had never thought about.” (G)

Having mentors whom women are able to trust and identify with can have a major impact on how they advance in their career. As stated, mentoring can be an inspiring and comforting experience where an individual gets to develop themselves and raise their concerns. According to White (1995), women follow a completely different career development model than men because of the bias they face compared to men. Additionally, women and men have different relationships with executives that can provide access to critical jobs, according to Ibarra (2019).

According to research, it is common for people to gravitate toward others who share similar dimensions with them, such as gender. As a result, powerful men are more likely to sponsor and advocate for other men when leadership opportunities arise. Through sponsorship, senior, powerful people promote,

advocate and place more junior people into key positions. Harmful situations arise, where women are over mentored but under-sponsored (Ibarra, 2019).

Therefore, sponsoring women should be as prioritised as mentoring in oil and gas companies to create gender equality. According to Valerio and Sawyer (2016) men play a key role in creating gender equality by using their authority in workplace to push these agendas and to support women. According to the study from Valerio and Sawyer (2016) men mentoring women could lead women faster into higher positions. However, this requires the men to be aware of the issues women tend to face. Women, however, seem to tend to ask for women mentors as they are more identifiable.

“It's nice to have the correct mentor and it's not easy to find at all actually I don't know how to find a mentor...it would be awesome to have someone that is experienced in this sector...and maybe for me that I am a woman ... I think the correct one would be a woman or maybe a man that is aware about these kind of situations ... actually no matter if it's a man or a woman but this person has to be aware about women's' situations.” (A)

This indicates that women tend to prefer female mentors, however, male mentors can play part in raising awareness among other men additionally, who are dominating the workplace and tend to make the biased decisions in the workplace. Therefore, whoever mentors a woman, needs to be aware of the issues and support the mentee in their career advancement. Two of the interviewees have experience in being mentors themselves.

“... I am a mentor of someone who is still in in my engineering school actually. It's a girl she wants to work and everything ... I think it's something I would have loved when I was younger because it helps you with questions that could seem dumb but when you don't have the answers it's very hard. Like how to behave in an interview, what to prepare for the things the stuff we look on online ...” (C)

The importance of having someone professional answering all the questions cannot be overstated. The flipside of the mentoring programme usually is that volunteers to mentor need to be available for free, without compensation, mandating several discussions for the year. Companies that run mentoring programmes could consider a small compensation or benefit to accelerate the

participation in these programmes. In conclusion, companies that run mentoring programmes could consider informing each new female employee of the opportunity to get a mentor for making sure that they have someone helping and guiding them throughout their journey. It is also important, that women seek mentors themselves, as it is important that the personalities match. To summarise, mentoring and sponsoring plays a key role in advancing women in their careers and to have successful mentoring and sponsoring women need to seek for people who understand the bias women face at the workplace.

4.1.3 Women's Network event

Did you participate in the Women's Event? Did you find it successful? Did you feel empowered? These questions aim to find out if organising an event only for women can be empowering itself.

Out of eight interviewees, six attended the event. All six women attending reported the event being successful and empowering. Three women were hoping for a call to action after the event, meaning a continuation for the event. This indicates that there should be a call to action after the event has taken place. However, to ensure that everyone felt included, the participants were allowed to ask questions during the event. Few women spoke out regarding their work issues, and it was reported that meetings solving these raised issues took place following the event. Therefore, delivering call to action to the few women raising concerns could have been reported to everyone attending the event to raise awareness of the actual call to action.

“I do believe from the feedback that a lot of women were happy to be there. A lot of women also did raise the fact that yes women need to be empowered and women need to be made aware of these issues and to actually just at least be actively or passively involved ... many of them did raise the fact that actually we need to do something to raise awareness with men which is true ... there are so many unconscious biases, so I think we need to work ... more with the men population on this.” (G)

As Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) suggests, the best way to challenge gender bias is for organisational members to engage as a group. The study suggests

that participating in unions, signing petitions, organising social movements, and recruiting others can be effective ways to empower women (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). A call to action involving more participants, men, and female, could be reoccurring meetings to facilitate conversations between different levels and functions within the organisation. It can be beneficial for engineers to hear the perspective of HR and vice versa. Men participating in the actions highlight the importance of male advocacy, where men play a part in raising awareness (Hewlett, Peraino, Sherbin, Sumberg, 2011). Therefore, inviting men to participate in the awareness sessions based on the topics discussed could be considered to improve male advocacy. A significant finding is that the youngest interviewees highlighted how hearing other women's stories inspired and gave them hope.

“These women give me hope that it's possible to manage everything at the same time and also I felt very relieved because some of their experiences I have already experienced it and it's like OK I'm not alone. It was very nice to feel this way like I'm not alone and that's why I think that these communities are so good because you are feeling understood and I was really happy about it.” (A)

As demonstrated above, being able to identify with other women and hear their stories can be empowering. In a study by Jolly et al (2019), sharing experiences increases the connection with others, and the desire to share experiences is not affected by momentary changes. Therefore, sharing other women's success stories can increase motivation, however, it would also be important to share the reality and failure stories since those tend to be the majority of the reality women face in the workplace.

“Seeing other women from different backgrounds and hearing their experiences and stories inspired and boosted my confidence a lot.” (H)

Therefore, to summarise, as long as gender inequalities exist, women need to go the extra mile raising awareness. As stated by Foster (2017) women can advance in corporations with having role models and hearing and seeing other women's success can enhance the motivation.

4.1.4 Positive discrimination

How do you feel about positive discrimination? As a woman applying for positions, do you feel like you have earned the position in a company that wants to increase the number of women? As more women are needed in the workforce, companies may neglect male applicants as a result. This question aims to determine if it affects women negatively.

As demonstrated below, women do not want to be seen as quotas but for their abilities. The problem of companies hiring women to fill their gender quotas might be unsuccessful as women can recognise these attempts.

“I have been offered jobs several times... for the fact that I was a girl ... I was a pro but at the same time the problem is the managers that told me that they were not really believing in me, they were just like “oh plus you were girl so it's perfect for us” so I refused twice ... It was because I don't want to be seen for something else than my professional capabilities which I think are quite similar to another guy and that's an issue for me when I'm seen just as like the quota.” (C).

It can be damaging for the women's self-confidence as women already face resentment in hiring processes to be only hired due to their gender. However, governments that mandate gender quotas (Foster 2017; Løyning, 2021) highlight the importance of increasing share of females as it has positive impact on company performance. Therefore, raising the female ratio in companies needs to be done with caution and equality. No man should be turned down from an opportunity because of a gender quota nor a woman hired because of their gender. It is also crucial that the workplace recognises how women are treated with gender quotas, and how they are hired and promoted.

“The guys that were not that good but were there for a long time they were like “well she's been promoted only because she's a woman” and I know well this particular engineering manager ... I have known her like 10 years ago when she was just an engineer and she was rocking it she was very good at her job ... when you say that there will be a quota, then you don't get recognition for your work but only for your gender. Something women tend to face as a problem like these different kind of thoughts compared to men. No one questions the man, no one questions their abilities.” (C)

Among all six interviewees, the hope is that women are hired based on their merit and not their gender. Another striking matter was that people tend to hire similar people as themselves. Therefore, having more diverse board, could help solve the issue like Foster (2017) stated.

“They want someone to fit the team. The team I work in is exclusively composed of white heterosexual guys exclusively there is one black guy but he has been an internal move ... it makes sense because they want someone to feed the group what's better than the exact same than the group ... I understand the cognition bias and everything but it's an issue ... In the previous companies I worked in it was way less ... we had of all gender all races all sexual orientations and so on so I don't know if it's proximity or if it's just historical because when you have only white males of course they want to hire only white males and if they are not forced but strongly encouraged to hire more diversity it's an issue.” (C)

Løyning, (2021) used the phrase "old boys' network", where men with connections, tend to choose leaders and directors from a very limited pool of candidates. However, in Løyning, (2021) research found that women who reach the C-suite, remain peripheral. To this Geay (2023) published an article about Sexism Barometer 2023: study “The situation is alarming” says High Council for Equality. The article is about a study looking at sexism in France and it highlights that about 40% of women censor their words or do not speak aloud for the fear of a man’s reaction. This results in loss of self-confidence in women and has concrete consequences on their daily life and their professional career. A third of working women, for example, did not dare to ask for a promotion or a raise in their work. Therefore, it would be interesting to research, if lack of self-confidence lay as reason for staying peripheral in the network.

Two of the interviewees also fully supported positive discrimination.

“After you have more diversity, you attract more female because honestly if I if I apply to a job I will look online who will be my bosses who will be my co-workers. Of course, if you see only people you cannot identify to it's harder so, quotas I think it looks bad but I think it works on the long term, on the short term it's not the best.” (C)

Therefore, mandating certain percentages of female headcount in companies may not produce immediate results. However, in the long run, mandating

gender quotas can be an effective (Løyning, (2021) way to increase women representation in the company and attract more females to apply for the company.

4.1.5 The power of role models

In addition to empowerment in the workplace, a good example of the power of being able to identify with someone is a role model study from Morgenroth, Ryan and Peters (2015). The study found that individuals who are motivated by role models are more likely to set and achieve ambitious goals, particularly those who belong to stigmatised groups. Throughout the study, role models are discussed as an effective means of influencing motivation and goals. As part of the Motivational Theory of Role Modelling, this new theoretical framework explores how role models can be used to increase motivation, reinforce existing goals, and facilitate the adoption of new goals in role aspirants (Morgenroth et al 2015).

“New Disney movie Ariel ... there was a lot of noise just because she was half black and half white it was insane ... it gives a chance to the black girls to see themselves ... this is what we need more of ... people to see, the little ones to see that you have a chance to do something like that. I have two girls. (F)

To encourage women to aim higher it would be essential to have them represented everywhere. As mentioned before, identifying with women from different backgrounds and positions could increase the self-confidence women need to apply for challenging positions. Additionally, McKinsey & Company report (2019) states that women need role models early in their careers. The success of another woman is an inspiration in and of itself. Through these relationships, women may be able to sponsor other women, assisting them in navigating opportunities and advancing within their organisations.

4.2 Promoting and retaining the female workforce

Have you noticed any different challenges between women and men advancing in their careers? What different needs have you noticed? Caregiving? The aim

of these questions is to find out what kind of challenges women and men experience as a confirmation for what has been mentioned in the literature review.

4.2.1 Caregiving policies and unpaid labour

According to a study published in the United States in 2010, male and female scientists perform disproportionate amounts of unpaid work. Women scientists devote approximately 54% of their time to cooking, cleaning, and laundry at home, adding more than 10 hours to their nearly 60-hour work weeks, compared to men's contribution of only 28%. Moreover, women in their data set performed 54% of the parenting labor in their households, while male scientists performed 36%. Women in India spend 66% of their working hours doing unpaid work, whereas men only do 12%. Women in Italy work unpaid 61% of the time, compared to men who work 23%. French women do 57% of unpaid work, compared to 38% of men (Schiebinger and Gilmartin, 2010).

A good example of how women are held in different level of responsibility when it comes to caregiving is the New Zealand's former Prime minister Jacinda Ardern. Women as the primary caregiver tend to do most of the unpaid labour at home as stated in the McKinsey & Company (2022) report. The case with Jacinda Ardern is no different. According to The Guardian's article from Lock and Henley (2023) she faced unfair treatment from bullies, "the misogynists" while being the world's youngest prime minister and second prime minister to give birth while in office. She has been described as a global icon from women in leadership.

"When a woman says they need to leave early to pick up my kids from school it's tolerated it's accepted ... when a man says the same thing he's a hero. Because we're encouraging these aspects and yet women are still disadvantaged by because now we're accepting it for women but a man who needs to leave early because his son is a superhero ..." (G)

The corporate policies and standards affecting women's careers lag behind those of men (Ponton, 2019; Alawi and Mubarak, 2019: International Labour

Organization, 2017). Social and cultural structures influence policies and practices of organisations, resulting in biased appraisals of women's performance. Women's competences, capabilities, and suitability for work within organisations are influenced by organisational policies and practices (Khan et al 2019).

“In my last job ... a mother she did not get the positions she wanted because of a manager who was big manager ... who said “you just had a young child ... you might get pregnant again so I cannot give you the responsibility of this project” ... he gave it to a man the same age ... same competency level ... this guy just got a new child as well and left for three months...” (B)

As in the study from Alawi and Mubarak, (2019), the study from Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek (2021) in the context of women's caregiver role, the study confirms that women have been negatively affected by these issues. There is often a perception by employers that women are more likely to prioritise their families than their careers. Accordingly, women lack equal opportunities for career advancement and training compared to men, which leads to a significant disadvantage for them (Khan et al 2019).

“I saw two women who managed to have promotions regardless of getting pregnant but is two women representative no actually it's alarming and when these women are celebrated ... they have this tunnel vision of thinking that everyone is treated like them, it is very dangerous actually to think so. On the contrary when we are privileged, we have to see that there are so many missed opportunities within the companies and actually two exceptions make it alarming.” (G)

As an example, Finland redefined parental leave in 2022, offering both parents 160 days of paid leave each. Additionally, 63 days can be transferred from one parent to the other. A law such as this helps disrupt the antiquated idea that mothers are meant to be caretakers, improving women's position in the labour market (Lindahl, 2022) The Gender Equality in Workplace report by Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek (2021) suggests that investing and re-evaluating family-care policies could be explored as a means of retaining female talent and closing the gender gap (Froehlicher and Knuckles Griek, 2021). As a

controversial example, Barbara Judge, specialising in energy companies, had over 20 directorships in British organisations. In 2016, Judge said that long maternity breaks were bad for women and that those who took a year off risked losing their jobs. When her son was born, she only took 12 days off work (Kollewe, 2018).

Teleworking possibilities and more flexibility were common answers to all interviewees responding for the caregiving question. McKinsey & Company (2022) report emphasises the importance of flexible working arrangements and remote work. According to the report by McKinsey & Company (2019), young workers are more likely to stick with a company if they can see a way to balance their career with their family life.

“During the pandemic I was working with two kids so it's not easy so they have given us more flexibility ... we have now two days of teleworking and I think would be good to have three days of teleworking and keep this flexibility arrival time ... my husband brings the kids to the school in the morning and it's my role to pick them up in the evening so it's good to have flexibility ... COVID made companies to realise that families need different kind of schedules compared to someone else and they should have the right to choose this.” (F)

However, companies offering flexibility should provide the employees access to the same support and opportunities as those employed on-site (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Furthermore, McKinsey & Company (2019) report on Women in Oil and Gas states that if young people are going to stay interested in the industry, they must be informed about flexible career paths. Moreover, flexible paths are vital for the success of women and set them up for the future.

4.2.2 Climbing the ladder

All interviewees noted that women seem to have less opportunities than men. Ziviani (2021) concludes in her study that companies cannot ignore the persistent barriers to women's professional advancement, since it harms not only women but corporations as well.

“It is very obvious the difference between male and female in terms of opportunities to go up I mean even in HR it is only female, but the boss is a is a guy ...” (C)

Several barriers, such as gender-based discrimination and unconscious gender bias, prevent women from advancing into corporate leadership positions, according to the International Labour Organization (2017). Thus, the report recommends that companies provide more opportunities for women with high levels of expertise to advance into leadership positions (International Labour Organization, 2017).

“I have difficulty to find in fact example around me of woman with a lot of responsibilities but in my past company I had a woman as a manager.” (D)

It is alarming that it seems hard to find women in higher positions. Consequently, the underrepresentation of women in upper management positions continues until companies re-formulate their practices and policies to cater to the career path of a woman, and male-dominated environments reduce their presence by creating conditions that are more inviting to women (Ziviani, 2021).

The International Labour Organization (2017) highlights how discrimination against female workers at work should be understood to what extent and how it occurs. Women face biased assessments, fewer career development opportunities, lower pay, fewer challenging tasks and less training (Khan et al 2019).

“He got recruited within 5 minutes and earned something like 80K. When you are 23 it's a lot of money at that time and I stayed for one year looking for a job and applying for jobs ... I think the fact that my name is so exotic and that I was a woman totally refrained or made recruiters scared because they had perhaps some additional paperwork to file ... perhaps it's just simple discrimination ... but the observation is that within 5 minutes my male friend was recruited in one of the biggest groups for 80K and I struggled for a year to get a job and my first job that I got I was so happy after one year for 35K ... I would have to say it's still taking me time to catch up with him and his salary I mean I will never catch up with him ...” (G)

It is important to raise the awareness how unequal recruitment towards different genders is. The studies from Khan et al (2019) and Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) confirm that the biases women face affect women's chances of advancing in their careers. As Foster (2017) stated, unequal treatment and continuous discrimination might lower the employee's motivation.

In addition to discrimination, women face harassment in the workplace. A study from Raj, Johns, Jose (2020) states that the risk of harassment from supervisors is greater for women in occupations dominated by men. Geauy (2023) states that employers should be required to receive anti-sexism training as part of their employee benefits package.

“I was so disappointed because my manager at that time I mean not going through the details he did have a file for harassment, and he showed his best aspects for me in the first three months and then the harassment started...” (G)

In addition, a few of the women interviewed stated that they had struggled to adjust to a more a masculine role at work to be taken seriously by their male colleagues.

“I have to be serious with these people because if not, they are not going to take me seriously ... I had no option, so I started to be very serious ... they took you seriously after you had to be more serious so you have change yourself a bit ... to I had to force myself to be more serious and to be more direct and more straight ... serious” (A)

It seems that after changing themselves to be more serious there was a change. Nevertheless, Isaac et al (2012) highlights the complex issues faced by women with more masculine traits tending to face opposition.

“My whole life I have some of my very mature managers told me “you need to be more assertive ... you need to be more assertive and I'm like no you know I know where my quality is I'm a very good listener I observe if I am in a meeting and I'm not speaking it's not because I'm dreaming or I don't have anything I'm just saying it's because I'm observing. Because I'm looking at the stakeholders and then I try to find a solution who is agreeable to everyone, and

“this is a quality don't tell me to push a decision into someone's face but being assertive is celebrated being agreeable is perceived as being weak why because it's a feminine value.” (G)

This suggests that changing company culture's masculine traits to more feminine could be considered. However, in comparison to men, women receive more negative personality criticism (Snyder, 2014). A study by Isaac et al (2012) examines leadership from a feminist perspective. Feminine values in leadership such as being able to listen and make agreeable decisions should be considered as important tool to execute business. Feminist perspective treats everyone equally despite their gender to achieve set goals.

“If we are in a meeting for example if a man is talking ... a woman will more listen to him ... even if the woman is saying good things ... we'll have more trust in the men than the women.” (E)

Mönkäre and Välimäki (2021), found that gender stereotypes and traditional and cultural practices continue to influence workplaces around the world, resulting in gender discrimination that denies women equal opportunities to men at work. In the recent research on gender inequality at work, company policies have been found to make a big difference in preventing gender bias (Khan et al 2019). It is often the manager who is the driver when one has a very good mentor/manager who's there to think outside the box to see to see their strength to have this emotional intelligence. Foster (2017) states that there is a lack of managers who will give women equal responsibility to their male colleagues.

“I did suffer in many occasions from feeling invisible in a meeting so I was the only woman in the meeting and when I said something it was either totally ignored like I was invisible or dismissed and then 5 minutes later if it was restated by someone else who was like congratulated and when you say but guys I just said that 5 minutes ago they would go please don't be such a baby.” (G)

The corporate culture systematically discriminates against women, which limits their access to meaningful work (Foster, 2017). It is interesting to note that all female interviewees reported that there were times when they had to play less intelligent or play a different role in order to benefit themselves.

“I played the silly young woman and it worked quite perfectly but I adapted myself to this type of engineer ... you need to and we need to play kind of game just to be able to have all the answers I wanted. and indeed ... he helped me quite a lot.” (G)

Perhaps, being a seemingly less intelligent plays a role in men’s need to feel themselves as powerful masculine men. A study from Alqahtani (2019) highlights that throughout society, gender stereotypes create an unequal relationship between men and women, establishing men's superior position over women. In this case, the perceived status of women is lower than those of men. As a result, such status affects both their performance and perception of their status. Women leaders face a lack of support and negative reactions when they try to exercise authority outside their gender stereotypes.

“I can have more what I want ... I'm a girl it's terrible I'm blonde and I can have a lot of things more than the men can have in the company. If I need something from a colleague, I ask him and he will reply me directly ... We tried to reach to someone and it's very difficult to shoot this person like impossible ... they didn't have any involvement with him because he wasn't available and as I asked the first time I had two three answers from him and they didn't..” (E)

Being an attractive female however has its downsides in the workplace as according to Johnson et al (2018) it increases competition between women, objectification of attractive women, and workplace sexual harassment. Therefore, the study highlights the importance of bringing women’s achievements up as it can decrease the objectification of women as achievements lessen the emphasis on appearance. On the contrary, issues such as betrayal, competition, jealousy, unhealthy rivalry, and suspicion impact the way women perceive fellow women in leadership positions (Ebunuwele, 2023), therefore it is important that women realise the need to support each other instead of hate. To summarise, gender stereotypes persist, and companies need to be mindful of the treatment women face daily at work. Highlighting women’s achievements in the company might lessen the objectification of women and raising awareness on women supporting other women might lessen the hatred. The interview data collection approach has

limitations due to the time required to collect data, the quality of the data can vary, and the size of the sample was limited.

5 Conclusion

A strong female representation in top management is imperative for oil and gas companies. Studies and the data indicates that women are not sufficiently motivated to apply for jobs at companies with a low level of female representation and inadequate policies for women. To attract and retain female employees, a feminist and gender-neutral approach is essential, and women's unpaid labour needs to be considered and accounted for in the paid work culture. Consequently, companies must realize that women's needs are not universal, as policies which favour men prevent women from reaching their full potential.

Women require more sponsorship and mentoring at work in order to reach the C-suite. A company's ability to offer flexibility is also crucial to attracting young talent. A mentoring or sponsorship programme plays an important role in advancing women's careers, and it is imperative that women seek out mentors and sponsors who are familiar with the bias women face in the workplace. Furthermore, the lack of empowerment in companies discourages women from achieving higher positions, as they are not able to see other women in higher positions. When women observe the success of other women, they are motivated to move up in their careers.

Due to inequalities in gender, women must go beyond what is required. Self-confidence can be affected when women change themselves in an attempt to fit in a more masculine role or a role of a less intelligent individual. Having low self-esteem results in low motivation. Women may be less objectified by showing off their accomplishments in the workplace, and women may be less hated if they are made aware of how they support one another. Gender stereotypes persist at work, and companies should pay attention to how women are treated every day.

As a result of the pandemic, remote work and childcare should be adapted according to individual needs, and flexible work arrangements enhanced to retain more women. Although significant improvements have been made in the workplace over the last decade, women continue to experience gender bias. It is particularly challenging for new mothers to balance their personal and professional lives when climbing the corporate ladder. As a result, employers must ensure that employees with children are not left behind, but rather are celebrated by their employers and their policies adjusted accordingly.

It is the responsibility of both women and men to be part of the solution as allies and protectors of women. There should be a stronger emphasis on awareness sessions and events together to lower jealousy and hate among women. Increasing awareness among men will increase their chances of helping and sponsoring women. Consequently, employers need to be trained on anti-sexism. The conclusion of the thesis is demonstrated by a quote of Nobel Prize 1977 winning speech from Rosalyn Yalow, a medical physicist on the importance of women believing in themselves to succeed.

“We cannot expect in the immediate future that all women who seek it will achieve full equality of opportunity. But if women are to start moving towards that goal, we must believe in ourselves or no one else will believe in us; we must match our aspirations with the competence, courage, and determination to succeed.” Rosalyn Yalow, 1977

There is a slow but inevitable process of change. Self-confidence, courage, and support play a critical role in women’s career advancement. It is therefore everyone's responsibility, women, and men to assist women in achieving higher positions in male-dominated organisations. The data collection has limitations, therefore, future research could investigate how to effectively increase the self-confidence, courage, and support of women at work.

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