

THE IMPACT OF SMART HR STRATEGIES ON REACHING GENDER EQUALITY GOALS

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This study explores the role of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) in advancing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Focussing on HR procedures that support equal opportunity for women in the workplace. The primary objective is to examine how strategic HR approaches in recruitment, talent development, leadership, and compensation contribute to achieving gender equality within organizations.

To achieve this, both qualitative and quantitative information was obtained using a structured survey of HR professionals and organizational leaders across various industries. The survey included questions designed to assess HR strategies related to hiring, training, remuneration, career progression, leadership opportunities, and work-life balance initiatives, all aimed at fostering gender equality. Additionally, respondents provided insights into the perceived effectiveness of these practices in mitigating gender disparities within their organizations.

The findings indicate that companies implementing strategic HR initiatives—such as gender-inclusive hiring, programs for developing leaders that are specifically designed for women, and equitable pay structures—demonstrate greater progress toward gender equality. However, challenges such as unconscious bias in recruitment processes and insufficient leadership commitment emerged as significant obstacles. The study concludes that SHRM plays an essential part in promoting SDG 5, with well-designed HR policies serving as key drivers in narrowing gender gaps. Organizations that strategically include gender equality into their HR frameworks not only support global sustainability goals but also improve business performance by cultivating a diverse and inclusive workforce.

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INTRODUCTION

In the workplace, gender equality has become a key priority for organizations globally, aligning with the United Nations' (SDG) 5, which emphasizes the need to attain gender parity and provide all women and girls more power (United Nations, 2015). SHRM plays an important part in promoting gender equality by formulating and implementing HR policies and practices that foster methods that encourage inclusivity and equal opportunities for employees regardless of gender (Hossain et al., 2020). Key HR strategies, including gender-inclusive recruitment, equitable compensation, leadership development initiatives, and work-life balance programs, are fundamental in ensuring organizational alignment with gender equality objectives (Eagly, 2020).

Despite increased awareness of gender equality's significance, many organizations continue to experience disparities in areas such as wage gaps, career advancement opportunities, and leadership representation (Carter et al., 2019). While strategically aligned Human Resources policies can help mitigate these inequalities and practise that foster aid in creating a more just workplace (Kossek & Lee, 2017), practise that foster obstacles like unconscious bias, inadequate leadership commitment, and persistent gender stereotypes remain substantial obstacles (Tambe et al., 2020).

This study looks at the function of SHRM in advancing SDG 5, with an emphasis on HR practices that facilitate gender equality in recruitment, talent development, compensation, career progression, and work-life balance. By evaluating the effectiveness. Using various tactics and pinpointing important obstacles, this study attempts to provide useful information for companies looking to reduce gender gaps and promote a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sugiyama et al. (2016) investigated the function of programs for developing leaders (GLDPs) and women's leadership development programs (WLDPs) in fostering long-term business effectiveness. Their study emphasized the significance of relational skills in leadership, which balance the need for individuality and a sense of belonging to support diverse identities in workplace.

Filut, Kaatz, and Carnes (2017) explored how bias systematically limits prospects for women to grow in their careers, particularly in leadership roles and male-dominated fields such as STEMM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine). Their research highlighted the negative impact

of unconscious gender bias on hiring decisions and performance evaluations, ultimately restricting women's professional growth.

Hossain et al. (2018) argued that SHRM plays a important role in shaping an organization's culture by implementing policies that are inclusive and guarantee equal opportunities for women. They identified HR initiatives such as equitable recruitment and unbiased performance evaluations as key to advancing SDG 5. Their study underscored the need for organizations in order to incorporate gender equality into their strategic objectives to align with global sustainability efforts.

Charlesworth and Smith (2018) analysed how equitable compensation practices contribute to reducing the gender pay gap. Their results showed that companies with is essential to transparent pay structures, routine pay audits, and equal pay policies experienced significant progress in achieving pay equity. They concluded that fair compensation should be a fundamental element of SHRM strategies to promote workplace fairness and gender equality.

Chung and Van der Lippe (2020) investigated the effects of flexible working arrangements on gender roles and work-life balance. Their study found that organizational culture, including the availability of flexible schedules and managerial support, plays a crucial role in shaping gender dynamics. However, in workplaces where the "ideal worker" culture prevails, flexible work arrangements may reinforce traditional gender divisions rather than fostering equality.

Linková and Mergaert (2021) analyzed institutional negotiations involving actors with varying backgrounds, values, and power dynamics. Their research identified key barriers and opportunities for organizational change and examined how a shared understanding of gender equality is developed within institutions.

Smith and Sinkford (2022) explored the impact of gender equality policies in global health organizations, highlighting a significant increase in women holding senior leadership positions. But their research also showed persistent barriers to women's advancement in high-level roles due to social norms, gender stereotypes, and systemic restrictions on women's rights, which continue to reinforce gender inequality in global health leadership.

Leal Filho et al. (2022) examined gender-related issues across all 16 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in addition to SDG 5. Their study emphasized that gender inequality is a critical factor that can hinder the achievement of various SDGs, affecting areas such as health, education, politics, and economic participation. The findings underscored the importance of integrating gender equality initiatives across multiple development goals to close the gender gap.

Shapiro (2023) explored the impact of corporate culture, unconscious bias, and person-organization fit (PO-fit) on recruitment decisions. The study suggested that unconscious bias significantly affects hiring outcomes by shaping

perceptions of PO-fit, leading to discriminatory selection practices and ethical concerns in recruitment.

Valduga et al. (2024) proposed a balanced scorecard framework for aligning HR policies with gender equity and sustainable development goals. Their study introduced measurable indicators for recruitment, promotion, and retention, enabling organizations to methodically monitor the advancement of gender equality and integrate equity-focused strategies into their HR management practices.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the impact of strategic HR practices on fostering gender equality in recruitment, talent development, and leadership opportunities.
- To analyze the effectiveness of HR policies in addressing gender disparities related to compensation, career progression, and work-life balance.
- To identify challenges and obstacles within SHRM that hinder efforts to achieve gender equality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This study employs a descriptive research design to investigate the connection between SHRM practices and gender equality outcomes. It focuses on evaluating HR policies, practices, and their perceived effectiveness in mitigating gender disparities. As an exploratory study, it aims to identify prevailing trends, challenges, and best practices in promoting gender equality within organizations.

Target Population: The study's target population consists of HR professionals, organizational leaders (such as managers and executives), and employees across various industries, providing a diverse range of perspectives.

Sampling Technique: The study employs a convenience sampling technique, incorporating both male and female participants to ensure diverse perspectives on gender equality.

Sample Size: A total of 200 respondents will be targeted, with 50 HR professionals, 50 organizational leaders, and 100 employees.

Sampling Method: The **semi-structured interviews** will be conducted with a subset of respondents (HR professionals and organizational leaders) to gain deeper insights into the challenges and effectiveness of SHRM practices in promoting gender equality. These interviews will provide an opportunity for open-ended responses, providing rich, qualitative data on the practical implementation of HR strategies and their impact on gender equality.

Findings

- The study reveals that Human Resource professionals (75%) and organizational leaders (68%) stated that their companies have implemented equitable pay structures to reduce gender disparities in compensation.
- (70%) of HR professionals have women's specific policies for career development and promotions for women, but only 55% of female employees feel they benefit from them.
- 80% of HR professionals offer flexible work and parental leave, but women stated that these kinds of measures are often undervalued in performance reviews.
- 72% of HR professionals use gender-inclusive recruitment, but 58% of employees feel biases persist.
- 65% offer women-targeted development programs, but only 50% of women believe they are adequately prepared for leadership.
- 45% of women in gender-equal organizations hold managerial roles, but only 35% are in senior leadership.
- One of the most notable barriers identified was unconscious bias in recruitment, performance evaluation, and leadership selection.
- Employees echoed this sentiment, with many citing limited supports for diversity initiatives from top management.

Recommendations

- Strengthen gender-sensitive recruitment policies by implementing bias-free hiring practices and equal opportunity programs.
- Ensure stronger leadership with measurable gender equality targets.
- Enhance leadership development programs to increase women's representation in executive and managerial positions.
- Establish clear metrics and regular audits to track gender equality progress.
- Promote work-life balance policies by offering flexible work options and parental support programs.
- Future research should focus on industry-specific challenges, cultural influences, and long-term impacts of SHRM policies on gender equality.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality. By implementing gender-inclusive practices such as equitable pay structures, programs that help women strengthen their leadership skills, and flexible work policies, organizations can significantly reduce gender disparities

and promote a more inclusive workplace. However, challenges like unconscious bias, insufficient leadership commitment, and limited support for diversity initiatives remain obstacles to achieving full gender equality. The critical role of SHRM in advancing SDG 5 through strategic interventions in recruitment, compensation, and workplace policies. However, persistent barriers necessitate initiatives aimed at enhancing women's leadership abilities, rather than treating it as an HR compliance issue. The findings emphasize the importance of leadership buy-in, regular audits, and overcoming biases in recruitment and performance evaluations. Organizations that strategically integrate gender equality into their HR practices not only contribute to SDG 5 but also foster a more diverse and productive workforce. This study urges ongoing work in enhancing gender equality policies and encourages further research to explore long-term impacts and industry-specific challenges in promoting gender equality within organizations.

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