Doctoral School of Regional and Business Administration Sciences

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Challenges to women's leadership in business organisations in Japan

Doctoral dissertation

Supervisor: Professor Carmela Di Mauro

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SZÉCHENYI UNIVERSITY

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Author's Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or any other institution of learning. Furthermore, this dissertation contains no material previously written and/or published by another person, except where an appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical references, etc.

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Dedication

With genuine gratitude and warmest regard, I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved grandparents, Asaf Gizzatov and Fluza Gizzatova. Your courage to teach the kids in the village school and your professionalism and intelligence has inspired and encouraged me to become a well-educated professional. Most importantly, you were the caring and loving grandparents, whom I miss greatly. I wish you could be here today with me.

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Budapest, March 18th, 2022

Elza Saitova

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PART I: OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

1.   Introduction

This dissertation consists of two parts. Part I—the overview—is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction to the study by explaining why studying challenges to women's leadership from the perspective of the management discipline is both important and topical. It also discusses the aims and positioning of the study. Chapter 2 presents the literature review summarising previous studies and provides the theoretical background for the research work undertaken. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodologies used in the dissertation. Chapter 4 summarises the results obtained in the three research papers and concludes with the study's implications. Part II of the dissertation contains the three original research papers.

1.1.   Motivation and background

According to ILO, since 1991, the share of women's participation in the labour force has grown globally. Importantly, more and more women worldwide seek leadership positions in business and become business leaders (Gul et al., 2013). However, despite the social and political initiatives that have triggered this shift by prioritising gender diversity in corporate boards and Top Management Teams (TMTs henceforth), gender equality in the most high-powered positions has not been achieved yet (Fernando, Jain and Tripathy, 2020.; Spencer et al., 2019). According to a 2020 UN report, women held only 28% of managerial positions globally in 2019 – almost the same proportion as in 1995[1]. Additionally, only 18% of enterprises surveyed had a female Chief Executive Officer in 2020. Cross-cultural studies across the globe show that women share the same challenges in accessing top positions (Peus et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2000; Tore et al., 1997; Wu and Minor, 1997). For instance, (Peus et al. 2015) found no apparent difference between Chinese, Indian, Singaporean, and American women concerning success factors and barriers to becoming a business leader. Regardless of the geographical location, women interested in developing a career have to face a reality where their male colleagues do not meet "the same kind of trade-

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[1] https://www.un.org/en/desa/world%E2%80%99s-women-2020

offs between career and children, as women do" (Mirotic et al., 2017, p. 4). There is ample evidence that the corporate world is still built on gendered practices, shaping masculine and feminine differences (Acker, 1990, 2006, 2009), which means that women are expected to put career over family if they target higher roles (Broadbridge, 2008; Júlíusdóttir et al., 2018). The challenges women face in attaining top management positions have been described using the "glass ceiling" metaphor, which was introduced in the 1980s to symbolise an unseen ceiling that prevents women from reaching the top managerial positions (Hartman and Barber, 2020). Although the "glass ceiling" often applies irrespective of geography, the type and extent of challenges vary. Gender diversity in the workplace is not a new research topic. It has attracted broad interest among policymakers, people in business and researchers, but research has mainly been focused on US and European experiences. There is not much empirical evidence from the countries where the gender gap has been the widest.

This dissertation focuses on women's leadership in business in Japan, a country where women on the boards of publicly traded companies were only 3.7% in 2017, vis-a-vis 18.7% in the US (Tanaka, 2018). These figures set Japan apart from other highly developed economies and call for policy and research attention. As a matter of fact, since the so-called Abenomics, closing the gender gap has become one of the essential strategies for generating economic growth in Japan (Iwaasa, Shoji and Mizuno, 2017) through its expected effect on the labour market participation rate. Institutional pressures from policy and foreign investors were directed at business and public organisations to increase the number of women in managerial and boardroom positions. Currently, Japan is setting a challenging goal to increase gender diversity in the private and public sectors. Media and consultant reports emphasize the importance of achieving gender parity and its potential benefits. However, social norms, traditional Japanese culture and religion are at the root of male-centred practices that persistently shape business relations inside Japanese organisations, resulting in reduced participation of women in the workplace and organisational decisions.

The motivation for this dissertation comes from the fact that gender remains an important career determinant in Japan, and potential women candidates with excellent qualifications are actively ignored and have to meet an unbreakable glass ceiling. The Japanese "glass ceiling" is also known as the "concrete ceiling", reflecting the extremely high level of discrimination (Wahlin, 2007). Although research on gender diversity in the Japanese workplace is slowly gaining momentum, there is still limited empirical evidence concerning challenges and success factors. Further, most contributions on antecedents of workplace

gender diversity focus their attention on single factors that affect the presence and extent of workplace gender diversity, such as the uniqueness of the Japanese culture, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or leaders' support for gender parity. There is conversely limited understanding of barriers and success factors at different levels of analysis (e.g., the level of the individual worker, the team level, the organisational level).

Working for more than 12 years with a Japanese organisation in the automotive industry, I was a part of a cross-cultural and multi-gender environment and would often be the only woman in the meeting room, which served as a key motivation for undertaking this research work. My business and personal experience prepared the ground for my Ph.D. study, and my research questions naturally arose in the quest to understand the true barriers and drivers of the inclusion of women managers in Japanese organisations. I had a chance to live in Japan from 2020 to 2021, and it allowed me to have the opportunity to see how women's subordinate status is embedded into business organisations. Living in Japan has also created the recognition that it was necessary to explore not only organisations' culture, policies, and practices but also look at women's aspirations and self-efficacy levels and compare these constructs for women and men in Japanese organisations. The above narrative of the motivations underscoring my research explains the pathway followed in developing the three studies that form the main body of the dissertation. The first study (conference paper) examines the literature on women's leadership in Japan and the challenges women working for Japanese organisations face. From this review, literature gaps are identified. The second paper presents the individual and organisational-level factors influencing the effective participation of women managers in Japan. A qualitative research approach was followed based on in-depth interviews with female and male middle and top managers working in Japanese organisations in various industries. The third study focuses on individual-level antecedents by offering novel quantitative evidence on the perceived occupational self-efficacy and career aspirations of working women and men in Japanese organisations and on how different types of success factors (family, culture, organisational support) exert an influence.

1.2. *Aims of the study*

This dissertation focuses on the issue of gender diversity in the management discipline. It has three aims: first, to explore success factors and barriers to female managers' access and inclusion in the Japanese workplace and to identify research gaps (Paper 1). Next, to explain

why organisational-level gender-equality policies and practices have had, so far, a weak impact in giving women managers active participation in organisational decisions. Finally, it provides an analysis of the relevance of individual-level factors for access to business leadership positions by investigating career aspirations and perceived occupation self-efficacy of women and men working in Japanese organisations (Paper 3).

To summarise, the research questions investigated are as follows:

1)   What are the literary gaps in the domain of gender diversity and women leadership with specific reference to Japanese organisations?

2)   What is the role of factors at different levels: organisational level factors (CSR programs, HR practices, diversity culture) and women's individual-level factors (personality, motivation, experience, and background) play in enabling/hindering effective participation of women managers in organisational decision-making in Japan, and what are the underlying reasons?

3)   What is the current status of career aspiration and perceived occupational self-efficacy of women and men and perceived success factors? What is the influence of perceived career success factors on career aspirations?

The research work comprises three papers. Each research question is discussed in one or more of these papers. The following section closely examines the papers and the research process.

1.3.   Summary of the original studies

Paper 1 - Saitova E., Di Mauro C., 2020. An analysis of factors driving gender diversity and inclusion in Japanese organisations, Economic and Social Development: Book of Proceedings. C. 262-272.

Paper 1 presents a literature review of success factors and barriers to gender diversity and inclusion in managerial roles in Japanese organisations. Using a holistic approach, the research addresses the societal, organisational, interpersonal, and individual-level factors related to workplace gender diversity and inclusion in Japanese organisations. It identifies research gaps for a future research agenda. The paper innovates with respect to the extant literature in two regards: first, by investigating different layers of factors that affect women's inclusion in Japanese upper ranks of business organisations. Second, by being the first study to focus on Japan, as most studies are based on experiences from the United States and

Western Europe. The study was instrumental to the development of the two empirical studies. In particular, the literature review showed the real scarcity of empirical evidence concerning the role of personal-level factors.

Paper 2 - Saitova, E., & Di Mauro, C. (2021). The role of organisational and individual-level factors for the inclusion of women managers in Japan. International Journal of Organisational Analysis.

Paper 2 aims to analyse and contrast the role of organisational and individual-level factors in influencing the effective participation of women managers in decision-making in Japanese business organisations. Results show that gender equality structures and practices are not effectively institutionalised within Japanese organisations. In particular, corporate social responsibility programs are perceived by women respondents to be formally adopted to gain legitimacy in the eyes of foreign investors. However, they lack effectiveness in giving the woman manager a "voice" in business decisions. Practices such as leadership development and mentoring are generally not evident in the organisations analysed. Conversely, personal traits of women managers, such as determination, self-confidence, and "being able to confront male colleagues", are the factors perceived to be crucial in influencing women's participation in decisions. The paper evolves with respect to existing literature through its focus on women managers' participation in business decisions and by using the theoretical lens of Institutional theory to explain the failure of organisational policies such as CSR to give women managers a "voice" in business decisions.

Paper 3 - The impact of gender on career aspiration levels and self-efficacy in Japan: What's new? Gender in Management: An International Journal (under review).

Paper 3 focuses on individual-level factors that fall in the domain of organisational behaviour studies, namely: perceived self-efficacy and aspiration levels. This study presents quantitative evidence on career aspirations and perceived occupational self-efficacy of workers in Japanese companies and provides a comparison between genders. The article offers novel quantitative evidence on Japanese women's career aspirations and on how different types of success factors (family, culture, organisational support) exert an influence. Unlike previous analyses of Japan, occupational self-efficacy does not differ by gender, suggesting that efforts in the educational domain have increased women's self-confidence. However, the persistence of the career aspiration gap indicates that more effort needs to be

undertaken, for instance, by offering women role models in the workplace. Further, the negative relation between career aspiration and the importance assigned to cultural values as a success factor suggests that culture still represents a constraining factor for women.

2.   Literature review and theory background

Chapter 2 presents a literature review organised by essential questions that informed the development of the dissertation. Section 2.1 discusses the main theories that can be leveraged to explain antecedents of gender diversity and women's leadership. Section 2.2. elaborates on the main challenges and enablers of women's leadership at different levels of analysis. Section 2.3 summarises the state of research about workplace gender diversity and women's leadership in Japan.

2.1.   *Identifying theories of gender diversity at different levels. A conceptual framework.*

There is no fixed definition of the concept "diversity". It is broadly defined as a "significant difference that distinguishes one individual from another" (Kreitz, 2008). Van Knippenberg and Schippers (2007, p. 516) define diversity as "a characteristic of social grouping that reflects the degree to which objective or subjective differences exist between group members". The concept of diversity brings a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-cultural perspective to organisations because the concept creates an awareness of diverse populations in workplaces and commercial markets (Aydin, 2017). The increase in workforce gender diversity has attracted the attention of governments, researchers, and people in business. In particular, the question arises whether the gender composition of the organisational workforce impacts individual, group, or organisational level performance. Following an early approach to gender and power in organisations (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989), we distinguish four levels of analysis: social systems, organisational, interpersonal and team level, and individual level. The social system level focuses on societal and cultural values that are gender related. The organisational level captures policies and practices within firms that may be used to promote gender equality, such as CSR and HRM. The interpersonal level focuses on relationships with leaders and peers. The individual level focuses upon the personal resources of an individual, which may include personality, motivation, and aspiration levels. To this four-tier classification, we add the institutional level, capturing pressures on companies emanating from political and economic stakeholders. Building on

previous literature, a conceptual framework was built that holistically encompasses the different layers of influence on women managers' inclusion in decision-making (Figure 1).
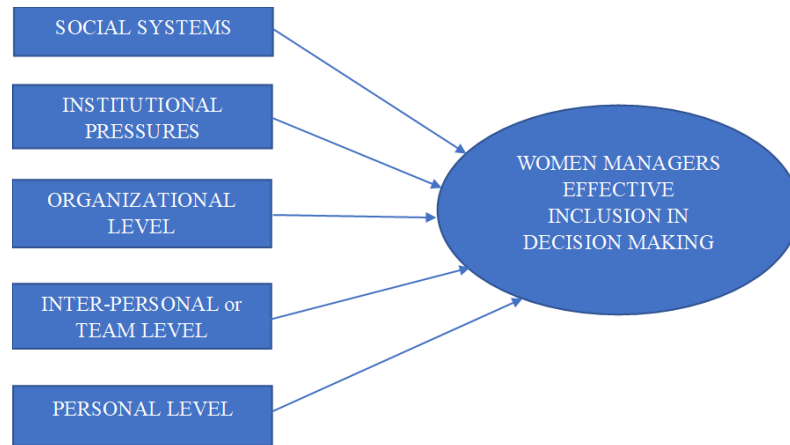
Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Concepts from several different theoretical approaches help report the analysis of the different levels of factors, thereby offering opportunities to integrate them into the study of gender inclusion in the workplace.

i.   Cultural/societal values level

Culture, intended as the norms and beliefs shared by people (Hofstede, 2001), clearly has a significant role in workplace gender diversity because culture influences social categorisation based on gender (Cox, 1994). The cultural context also influences the relationship between gender diversity and management team performance (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004) because culture affects the balance between effective information processing and social categorisation processes in work teams (Schneid, 2015). According to the fundamental work of Cox and Blake (1991), culturally diverse workforces create a competitive advantage. On the other hand, a diverse workforce may also result in negative outcomes (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998; Svyantek and Bott, 2004), confirmed by empirical studies that workforce diversity can result in positive and negative outcomes (Jayne and Dipboye, 2004).

ii. Institutional level

Political institutions have recently had a significant role in enforcing gender diversity at the management level, for example, by imposing gender quotas on corporate boards (Terjesen et al., 2015). However, the role of quotas is ambiguous. For instance, Ahern and Dittmar (2012) showed that Norway's quotas led to negative market reactions since investors saw the newly appointed directors who met the quota as less competent than previous ones. Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016) suggested that cultural establishments, multiple institutional domains, regulatory policies, welfare provision, and labour markets are interrelated and can positively influence gender diversity on corporate boards. The discussion on gender quotas is often associated with the concept of "Tokenism" (Kanter, 1977). When boards include only a few women, they are considered tokens (Torchia et al., 2011). These are appointed women directors who don't have real decision-making power (Post and Byron, 2015). Tokenism is based on the idea that, even when women reach managerial roles, the corporate practices are still discriminatory (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2006; Ryan et al., 2016) and tend to isolate and marginalise women. Among several others, "glass cliff" research has investigated corporate injustice (Cook and Glass, 2014; Yaghi, 2018) by showing that women tend to be assigned risky leadership and get blamed for failure.

Neo-institutionalism argues that organisations adopt structures and practices that conform to their environment. According to Lucas (2003), systems and practices supporting women's leadership are effectively "institutionalised" when organisations create beliefs among their members that successful organisations assign leadership positions to women. These structures may include CRS policies, specific women leadership development and mentoring programs, adopting inclusive work practices, and the creation of a diverse culture. However, organisational responses may differ if institutional fields exhibit little homogeneity and are characterised by contested values (Oliver, 1991). When the quest for legitimacy is at odds with efficiency or organisational values, the latter's responses may escape conformance to the institutional norm or practice, buffering, decoupling, or avoidance (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Consistent with this view, institutionally prescribed guidelines for facilitating women's careers and participation in decision-making may conflict with endowed cultural values (Goby, 2020). In these circumstances, ineffective institutionalisation may show up as "decoupling", which may occur whenever merely symbolic implementation is sufficient to

provide organisations with legitimacy in the eyes of their stakeholders, saving the organisation the costs and efforts of implementing a substantive change.

Murray and Southey (2020) build on Lucas (2003) to argue that, even if institutional pressures increase the number of women with managerial roles, their decision power within organisations will depend on the existence of effective "institutionalised workplace structures", which successfully embed gender equality into the organisation. If workplace structures are not fully institutionalised, women have to rely on their strengths to offset gender-biased expectations of their competency to perform their leadership roles (Murray and Southey, 2020). More often than men, women attribute a decisive influence on their career advancement to personal connections and job-related skills (Ottsen 2019). Additionally, in these circumstances, stereotyped traits associated with effective leadership - such as ambition, competitiveness, and self-confidence, which are more often attributed to men than women, may be activated by women to reach their career goals (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

iii.   Organisational level

Several studies have underscored the role of corporate culture and climate in influencing gender diversity (McDonald, 2003). The importance of creating an organisational climate for diversity (Guillaume et al., 2013) has been identified as an effective way to make "diversity at work to work" (McKay et al., 2008). Cox (1993) argues that climate plays an important role as a moderator in the impact of diversity on team performance. Van Knippenberg et al. (2013) suggest that a diversity mindset in organisations moderates the relation between diversity and performance and propose three aspects of this mindset: accuracy, sharedness, and awareness of diversity cognition. Mor Barak (1998) conceptualised a diversity-prone environment using two dimensions: personal views and prejudices towards people who are different from themselves and organisational policies and procedures concerning minorities and women. Analogous dimensions were suggested by Cox (1994) - individual-level and organisational-level factors to assess the organisational diversity climate.

A significant amount of research on workplace gender diversity has addressed it proposing two opposing perspectives: social categorisation suggests that diversity brings dysfunctional teamwork and conflicts and negative impacts on performance. Conversely, the

information/decision-making perspective suggests that diversity will bring more creativity and better decision-making. Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) and their Categorisation-Elaboration Model (CEM) integrate the two concepts mentioned above by arguing that both processes unfold simultaneously. According to CEM, the social categorisation processes caused by diversity lead to affective and evaluative reactions that moderate the main relationship between diversity and elaboration of task-relevant information and perspectives, which in turn influence group/organisational performance. CEM points to the importance of other moderating variables at the team level that strengthens benefits from diversity (e.g., specialisation and task complexity, effective conflict management, leadership), which had previously been overlooked. Therefore, through the analysis of moderating effects, both positive and negative outcomes can stem from increased diversity in the workgroup (Jackson et al., 2003; Van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). Consistent with the above, gender-diverse teams seem to focus on task accomplishment and have more formal job behavior (Schneid et al., 2015).

Intersectionality theory suggests that people are members of more than one category or social group and examines how social and cultural categories interact and intertwine to create social categorisation (Acker, 2006; Richadson and Loubier, 2008; Zander et al., 2010). Along the same lines, Faultline theory (Lau and Murninghan, 1998; Van Knippenberg et al., 2010) suggested that diversity dimensions should be considered in conjunction to understand the overall impact of diversity within a team. Therefore, these theoretical approaches posit that gender will interact with other sources of social status/categorisation, for example, nationality, educational background, class, and ethnicity (Zander et al., 2010).

iv.   Individual level

Relevant individual-level factors for women's access to leadership positions have been found in aspiration levels and individual self-efficacy. O'Brien (1996) defined career aspirations as the degree to which women aspire leadership roles. According to Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1993, 1997) social-cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capabilities to accomplish given tasks by performing given behaviour. By creating barriers to women's career advancement (Fritz and Van Knippenberg, 2019), gender-related social categorisation in the workplace (Eagly and Karau, 2002) and gender

biases in leadership perceptions (Eagly and Carli, 2007) negatively affect women's career aspirations (Dolana, Bejaranob and Tzafrir, 2011). Although the expectation is that significant differences in aspiration levels will characterise masculine societies according to gender, evidence in this respect is controversial. For instance, in their research of students in Pakistan, Nadeem and Khalid (2018), found evidence of a difference that men had lower career aspirations than women, and Al-Bahrani et al., (2020) found that female adolescent respondents in Oman reported higher career aspirations than their male counterparties.

Self-efficacy plays a significant role in determining career aspirations and career development (Bindu and Padmanabhan, 2016). Self-efficacy has been identified as a key determinant of career choice and the efforts required to lead (McCormick, Tanguma and Lopez-Forment, 2002). The importance of occupational self-efficacy for women's career aspirations has been confirmed by recent studies (Hartman and Barber, 2019). In this respect, since organisation-level and institutional career success factors can affect career advancement (Aycan, 2004), the perception of their relative importance is expected to affect career aspirations.

2.2. *Drivers and barriers to women's leadership.*

In order to define drivers and barriers to women's leadership, a structured literature review was undertaken following the methodology proposed by Rousseau et al. (2008) and Tranfield et al. (2003). The method recommends three stages: planning, conducting, and reporting. The search was performed using the following strings in Scopus and Web of Science databases: *(leadership OR leader) AND (woman OR women OR gender OR female) AND (business OR organisation OR manager OR management).* The search was conducted at the end of September 2020. Since gender and leadership is a multidisciplinary topic addressed by several disciplines and journals, the scope of the search was limited only to the articles belonging to the business, management and accounting fields by focusing on leadership in the business sphere. The search resulted in several publications, showing 2073 articles. Inclusion criteria for the search were full texts, reviews, or academic research papers in peer-reviewed journals. In the next stage, exclusion criteria for studies were other than that of the English language, and this action produced a result of 1321 articles. Then the initial screening of the papers was started with title analysis. All the non-relevant papers

related to women in entrepreneurship, STEM, sports and political spheres were removed. This process made it possible to reduce the number of articles to 267. In the next stage, the abstracts were analysed, and the number of articles was narrowed. The study selection phase was complemented by the quality assessment phase, which refers to the assessment of the internal validity of a study. After reading the abstracts, in particular, the articles that lacked relevance (the search string in the abstract and the article content do not match) or specific insights (for example, focus on the development of female entrepreneurship rather than female leadership or focus on leadership in the social or political sphere) or discussed the topic of leadership without focusing on gender aspects were excluded from the sample. After this stage, the number of studies was reduced to 151. In the next step, all the papers published in interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary academic journals were removed.

The full text of the remaining 111 research papers was read, focusing on sampling and methodology. Due to the focus of this paper on women in business organisations, the articles with unknown sources of data or sampling from educational, NGOs, and political organisations were removed. The focus was on articles discussing samples/data from private firms or public entities which handle business activities; the ones with unknown interview samples were removed. The combined results of the procedures mentioned above yielded 95 articles for further in-depth analysis. The selected articles covering different aspects of women's leadership were classified into two categories: drivers and barriers. Each category was assigned to one of the following three levels of analysis: national, organisational, and individual. The articles which focused on examining drivers or success factors encouraging the access of women to business leadership were coded as "drivers"; the articles which investigated the barriers in different contexts that create obstacles were coded as a second category "barriers". In classifying articles, it is important to recognise that some articles cover multiple dimensions and levels.

Table 1 shows how the research questions were formulated for each of the dimensions (drivers and barriers) in order to fit each level: national, organisational and individual.

Table 1. Research questions on each level

	The Various Dimensions		
	National level	Organisational level	Individual level

Drivers	Which factors encourage women's engagement in senior positions or leaders' positions at the country level?	What influence do organisational culture, policies and practices have on the representation of women in leadership roles?	To which extent do individual characteristics influence women's career aspirations and achievement of leadership positions in organisations?
Barriers	What barriers in the national/cultural context create difficulties for women's career advancement in business?	What kind of organisational culture, policies, and practices hinder women's advancement to top managerial positions?	How do personal traits and particular behaviours create barriers for women themselves to achieve leadership roles?

The main drivers and barriers to female leadership, as gathered from the literature, can be substantially grouped into three major categories, as shown in Table 2: national, organisational, and personal levels.

At the national level, the positive association with women in power at the country level (parliament) and the existence of women role models can be considered drivers. There is an approach in the literature to understand the relevance of public and state-level gender policies through the introduction of quotas.

At the organisational level the most significant drivers are: HRM practices, supportive diverse business environment for women, including family-friendly policies, and support from top management and supervisors.

At the personal level, first role models (working mothers and grandmothers), strong educational background and personal traits like self-confidence, negotiation and other skills help women to gain credibility or overcome stress.

The main barriers to female leadership, according to the literature, are undoubtedly linked to stereotyped beliefs, gender bias and any kind of discrimination or prejudice at any level. Many of the difficulties that women face are the results of the incongruity of the traditional female role and business leading roles. This misalignment creates vulnerability, so women experience various reactions that adversely impact their judgments and performance as decision makers. And still male working cultures with long-hours, with gendered pattering like exclusion from networking or socialisation set the limitations on a women's ability to access top management roles.

Table 2. Drivers and barriers to women's leadership in business across the world

	Societal level	Authors
Drivers	1. Positive association with women in parliament and in power at the country level.	Brieger et al., 2019;
	2. Quotas for businesses, public forums and policies promoting more diversity in boards from an economic benefits and social outcomes standpoint.	Moreno-Gomez et al., 2018; Moreno-Gomez and Calleja-Blanco, 2018;
	3. Role models at all levels from national to organisational.	Peus et al., 2015; Ely et al., 2011;
Barriers	1. Unconscious biases at the societal level towards gender discrimination and stereotypes.	Datta and Agarwal, 2017; Rincon Diez et al., 2017; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Klettner et al., 2016;
	2. Cultural norms supporting patriarchal cultures and antagonistic of career growth.	Cho et al.,2019; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Kemp et al., 2015;
	3. Child-care policies, lack of nursing infrastructure, caregiver role of women.	Klettner et al., 2016; Peus et al., 2015;

	Organisational level	Authors
Drivers	1. Possibility of having individual coaching and mentors. 2. Participation in inclusive group programs.	Dworkin et al., 2018; Kossek et al., 2018; Cimirotic et al., 2017; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Sales et al., 2019;
	3. HRM practices like transparent evaluation and salary system. 4. Support from top-management. 5. Supervisor's support and trust. 6. Family-friendly policies for both genders, flex time.	Cimirotic et al., 2017; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Klettner et al., 2016; Mkhize and Msweli, 2011;
	7. Gender culture. 8. Diverse boards and teams. 9. Supportive business environment for women.	Vanderbroeck, 2010; Glass and Cook, 2018; Cimirotic et al., 2017; Kalysh et al., 2016; Klettner et al., 2016;
Barriers	1. Organisational 24/7 male working culture with "ideal worker norm". 2. Long working hours, no work-life balance. 3. Travel-intensive jobs.	Mölders et al., 2018; Júlíusdóttir and Rafnsdóttir, 2018; Evans and Maley, 2020; Simirotic et al., 2017; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Klettner et al., 2016;

	4. Gendered work: Gendered patterns setting limitations on women's ability to access the top management roles. 5. Masculine attributes to success, tasks performed by men are more valued than the ones performed by women. 6. Exclusion of women from knowledge sharing. 7. Sexual harassment.	Athanasopoulou et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2019; Hartman and Barber, 2020; Szymanska and Rubin, 2018; Diez et al., 2017; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Martin et al., 2018; Datta and Agarwal, 2017; Cimirotic et al., 2017; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Seo et al., 2017; Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Cook and Glass, 2014 (glass cliff); Ely et al., 2011; Tang, 1992; Van der Boon, 2003
	8. Limited or no access to resources: networking, sponsorship, career opportunities; "sticky floor effect". 9. Lack of ability to network and socialise.	Samuelson et al., 2019; Athanasopoulou et al., 2018; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Klettner et al., 2016; Ely et al., 2011; Altintaş FC and Altintaş MH, 2008; Rowney and Cahoon, 1990

	Personal level	**Authors**
Drivers	1. Upbringing background, respected working grandmothers, and mothers (performed as first role models), social context.	Spencer et al., 2019; Athanasopoulou et al., 2018; Kossek et al., 2016; Chawla and Sharma, 2016
	2. Strong educational background (top universities, a degree in engineering, math, and other operational specialisations.	Brieger et al., 2019; Spencer et al., 2019; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Wang and Kelan, 2013; Tang 1992
	3. Personal traits, like self-confidence, ambition, and drive; self-management and self-organisation to lead one's own career and cope with work as well as family challenges.	Spencer et al., 2019; Cho et al., 2019; Athanasopoulou et al., 2018; Datta and Agarwal, 2017; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Holton and Dent; Peus et al., 2015; Ely et al., 2011; Tang, 1992; Sales et al., 2019
	4. Discipline/time-management; spiritual practices to overcome stress.	Chawla and Sharma, 2016
	5. Commitment, credibility, learning orientation.	Peus et al., 2015; Cardenas et al., 2014
	6. Negotiation skills.	Ely et al., 2011; Tang, 1992
	7. Resilience - emotional intelligence, authenticity, and agility.	Holton and Dent, 2016; Sales et al., 2019
Barriers	1. Queen bee effect.	de Klerk and Verreyne, 2017; Ellemers et al., 2012

	2. Overburdened with family responsibilities, second shift at home, no support from a spouse.	Cimirotic et al., 2017; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Holton and Dent, 2016; Peus et al., 2015; Grant and Taylor, 2014
	3. Reluctance to self-promote.	Athanasopoulou et al., 2018; Peus et al., 2015; Grant and Taylor, 2014

2.3. What do we know about Japan?

Japan is a country, where culture and religion work against gender equality. Gender diversity has traditionally been low because traditional cultural values, which are then embedded in organisational cultures, are male-centred (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2002). According to Nemoto (2016), the Japanese have a traditional mindset and belief in the male-breadwinner model. In the past, government taxation and pension policies have reinforced this model. The typical Japanese family's welfare has long relied on its close connection with Japanese companies. For instance, the company's lifelong employment is a guarantee for a man with the assumption that women take care of the family. This has, in turn, saved the government welfare expenditure and triggered economic development in post-war Japan. However, this also has potential negative ramifications for women, because only older and experienced employees are eligible for top-managerial positions and promotions and get rewarded the most.

Past research on hindrances to women's access to managerial positions has shown that it is more difficult for women to build social capital due to the natural tendency of the male-dominated corporate elite to exclude demographically dissimilar others (Tsui et al., 1992). Additionally, women were found to be less instrumental in the way they leverage their social networks to avoid engagement in organisational politics compared to their male colleagues, especially in masculine organisational cultures (Doldor, 2011). This informal behaviour and social norms create a disadvantage for women, who are already in structurally less powerful organisational roles.

In Japan, traditional roles are changing but not quickly enough. Japanese companies have given options to women to choose from two tracks: the extensive career-track alternative, where they have the same work conditions as male professionals, and the non-comprehensive career track or a more general position. In the second option, only women were assigned, and they are considered non-professionals, working as assistants. Beverly

Bishop in her book "Globalisation and Women in the Japanese Workforce" (2004) notes that women on the extensive career-track alternative have to make remarkable efforts and work hard for the chance of receiving offers for male positions in the organisation, which shows the discrepancy in work opportunities based in gender.

Gender remains an important career determinant in Japan, and potential female management candidates with excellent qualifications are actively ignored and have to face an unbreakable glass ceiling. Few female workers are not affected by this "glass ceiling" and have the ability to reach the top managerial positions. In recent years, the glass ceiling has moved to a higher level of management than before because women have managed to get through to around one-third of middle managerial positions in many big organisations around the world (Betchoo, 2015). The Japanese glass ceiling is also known as the "concrete ceiling" reflecting the level of discrimination (Penketh, 2008). Although the issues of the glass ceiling and gender roles are not unique to Japan, there are nuances related to the culture, which showcase the unique character of the Japanese society (Futagami, 2010).

The global diffusion of the norms of CSR has pressed Japanese businesses to employ more women (Brinton and Mun, 2016; Haak, 2006; Mun and Jung, 2018). Recently, closing the gender gap has become one of the fundamental strategies to boost labour participation and improve economic growth in Japan (Iwaasa, Shoji and Mizuno, 2017). Although institutional pressures are driving an increase in the number of women managers, the social norms and male-centred practices are still shaping business relations inside Japanese organisations, resulting in reduced participation of women in organisational decision-making (Saito, 2018). Very few women hold top managerial or board positions in Japan today (Nemoto, 2016) and the development of career ladders for women managers remains a hurdle. In 2017, the percentage of women on the boards of publicly traded companies in Japan was only 3.7% in comparison with the US, where the percentage was 18.7% (Tanaka, 2018).

While management research on gender diversity in the Japanese workplace is slowly gaining momentum (Kato and Kodama, 2018; Mun and Jung, 2018; Tanaka, 2018), most contributions on antecedents of diversity present macro-level analyses such as parental leave legislation (Asai, 2015) or focus their attention on specific factors that affect the presence and extent of workplace gender diversity, such as CSR (Kato and Kodama, 2018; Mun and Jung, 2018).

In the last twenty years, there has been pressure from international institutions and from foreign investors to align Japanese companies' corporate governance with international

standards and introduce gender diversity on the boards (Saito, 2018). The effects of gender diversity on Japanese organisations have proved to be beneficial. Siegel and Kodama (2011) and Niikura and Seko (2017) show that organisations with more female directors have a positive effect on ROA. Additionally, a recent empirical study by Tanaka (2018) shows that publicly traded Japanese firms with more women directors exhibit better performance. Notwithstanding increasing pressure, Morikawa (2016) reported that the boards of the large, listed companies do not necessarily exhibit greater diversity. This state of things aligns with Oliver's (1991) contribution on organisations' strategic responses to institutional pressures, which highlights that diversity policies represent a "contested institutional terrain". In effect, failure to fully embrace policies that are considered standard in different national settings reflects more broadly "Institutional distance", that is, a difference between two 'countries' institutional profile' (CIP) based on the regulatory, normative, and cognitive institutions of a country (Ferner, Almond and Colling, 2005; Kostova, 1999; Scott, 1995).

At the organisational level, Macnaughtan (2015) argues that it is hard for women to make a career in Japan, since the workplace culture is based upon the male breadwinner model, prescribing women to work in the same way. Gender diversity has a central place within CSR policies and practices. The literature argues for a significant bi-directional relationship between CSR and board diversity since gender-diverse boards provide more effective monitoring of CSR performance (Bear, Rahman and Post, 2010; Harjoto et al., 2015; Williams, 2003). Mun and Jung (2018) investigated how Japanese firms responded to global standards of CSR norms in terms of gender diversity in the workplace. In their comparative study of Germany and Japan, Kemper et al. (2016) pointed out that Japanese organisations expect more negative outcomes from diversity practices than the German ones. Kato and Kodama (2016) connect work-life balance practices and CSR, and suggested CSR practices positively impact gender diversity in the workplace, even though not immediately after the inception of CSR but after two to three years.

Concerning HRM, Japanese organisations implement more top-down HR practices, since such an approach is believed to be more effective because in Japan the rules applied by superiors are always strictly followed. Magoshi and Chang (2009) evidenced that the implementation of gender related HRM practices is notably weaker compared to western companies. Nevertheless, HRM practices such as work-life balance and family-friendly policies have proved helpful for the career development of women (Yanadori and Kato, 2009; Wakisaka, 2007) as well as for the organisation's performance (Wakisaka, 2007).

At the personal level, according to Gottfried (2008), Japan invented a monolithic culture by filtering Japanese/non-Japanese. In this direction, with respect to gender, Adler (1987) found that foreign women in Japan are perceived not as women, meaning they face less discrimination compared to Japanese women. This implies that gender stereotypes, which put pressure on women to comply with the Japanese behavioural model (Gutek and Morasch, 1982; Boulouta, 2013), could be felt more strongly by Japanese women than by foreign ones. Recent research (Smirles et al., 2020) confirms that gender role stereotypes in Japan continue to create barriers for Japanese women in their career advancement.

Past research showed that companies assigned administrative or clerical positions that limited learning opportunities, thus constraining women's career aspirations (Matsui et al., 1991). In their cross-cultural study about career plans and aspirations, Morinaga et al. (1993) confirmed that both, females, and males, in Japan had the most traditional gender role attitudes. More recently, Fukahori (2009) showed that aspiration levels of Japanese young women were lower than men, prioritising marriage over job success. Inoue-Smith (2014) conversely indicated that the traditional gender role attitude had changed, lowering the importance of marriage among highly educated women, in her study about college student career aspirations. However, many Japanese young people, regardless of their gender, lacked clear career aspirations and paths.

Increasing international focus on women's rights, less dependence on men, and affordable health and childcare lead to the breakdown of traditional gender roles. These changes support the evolution of Japanese women in the workforce. Furthermore, in developed countries, the service sector is growing, and manufacturing is declining. This industrial shift translates to a recent change in employment type from manual labour based on physical strength to that of mental abilities. Economic factors force women to work and take the responsibility for the living costs of their families and children. All these facts show that the gender diversity in Japanese organisations is being challenged by the governmental, economic, and demographic challenges. However, simply having more women on board is not enough, people should think differently and benefit from different mindsets (Fitzsimmons, 2012).

In summary, the literature has identified several factors that affect gender diversity in Japan. These studies have shed light on the various barriers and drivers of women's leadership in Japanese organisations. Regardless, several antecedents are still not well explored, and analyses of their interplay are yet lacking. In order to contribute to the development of research in this field, Paper 1 provides a detailed literature review on gender diversity in

Japan, Paper 2 discusses in detail the role of organisational and individual-level factors for the inclusion of women managers and finally, Paper 3 elaborates different variables that influence the career aspirations and self-efficacy of women and men in Japan. Together, the papers provide a more holistic analysis of how to foster access and inclusion of women managers in Japanese organisations.

3.   Methodology

All of the three original papers in this dissertation focus on gender diversity and women's leadership in Japanese organisations; however, they take different epistemological approaches. Specifically, this dissertation comprises two empirical papers, of which one is based on extended interviews (Paper 2) using a qualitative approach and one (Paper 3) is based on a survey approach adopting quantitative methods. Paper 1 applies the literature review approach. This section discusses the three research approaches. Next, the research methods of each of the papers are discussed in more detail.

3.1. *Literature Review*

The first paper is based on a literature review. Its initial objective was to collect first-stage insights about gaps in gender diversity in Japanese organisations; the second was to focus on different layers of factors that affect women's inclusion in Japanese organisations; the third was to develop a framework based on literature review findings. In particular, the literature review showed the real scarcity of empirical evidence for the role of individual-level factors.

A literature review can broadly be described as a more or less systematic way of collecting and synthesising previous research (Baumeister and Leary, 1997; Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart, 2003). An effective and well-conducted review as a research method creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge and facilitating theory development (Webster and Watson, 2002). In my case, a literature review provided the basis for building a new conceptual model and mapping the development of women leaders in Japanese organisations. The following electronic databases and sources were used for searching Scopus, Science Direct, and EBSCO, using the search words "gender diversity in Japan", "women in Japanese organisations" and "inequality in Japan". The search was done in August 2019. Using this search strategy, more than 100 contributions were identified. A significant part of this literature was related to the history of equality in Japan and equal employment opportunities and education, as well as gender roles as being women/mothers in Japan and gender stereotyping, social studies, work-life balance, in addition to studies about women participation in civil and official political institutions of power in Japan. These articles were

removed unless they provided evidence of gender diversity in the workplace, leading to a final list of 28 articles, the content of which was analysed and classified (see Table 3 below).

3.2. Qualitative Method

The qualitative study approach is best suited to exploration, discovery and inductive logic, and can support the elaboration of grounded theories (Eisenhardt, 1989; Voss et al., 2002). In particular, qualitative research through face-to-face interviews allows exploring organisational level diversity management practices and their interaction with individual characteristics considered desirable to generate gender inclusion in decision making. The following research steps were followed for the study: development of the interview protocol, sampling, data collection, within-case analysis and theme identification, cross-case analysis and proposition development. The second paper of this dissertation explores the role of organisational-level factors (CSR programs, HR practices, diversity culture) and women's individual-level factors (personality, motivation, experience, and background) that play a role in enabling effective participation of women managers in organisational decision-making in Japan. We adopted a theoretical sampling method (Eisenhardt, 1989) guided by two aims: first, to avoid gender-specific perspectives, the sample includes both men and women with managerial roles. Second, in order to capture the strength of Japanese cultural factors in affecting workplace gender diversity we collected data from Japanese-owned workplaces operating domestically and abroad. The study uses explanatory type of questions (i.e., 'why' and 'how'), whose answers require the contexts and experiences of actors (Bonoma, 1985; Benbasat, Goldstein and Mead, 1987). A theory-building study seeks not to test a hypothesis, but to develop some initial assumptions, frameworks, and perceived problems (Flynn et al., 1990). An interview protocol with open-ended questions was built to capture the different factors of interest for this study (available from the authors upon request). Skype interviews with the informants were the first source of data. Interviews lasted at least 90 minutes, were performed by the research team, recorded, and manually transcribed and coded. For triangulation purposes, the interview information was augmented with external secondary sources such as the company's website and press, and company reports, to substantiate information concerning the organisational level dimensions.

In the within-interview analysis, we manually and inductively coded perceived success factors and barriers to workplace gender equality, separating organisation-level factors from individual-level factors. Based on theory and literature on workplace gender diversity, indicators were organised according to their relevance for gender equality in hiring (Gorman, 2005), career development (Kossek, Su and Wu, 2016) and participation in decision-making (Grosser and Moon, 2005).

3.3.   Quantitative Method

Flynn et al. (1990) suggested that the initial step in conducting empirical research is to articulate the theoretical foundation for the study and to determine whether the problem under investigation involves theory building or theory verification. Survey research is devoted to identifying causal relationships among variables using theory-based expectations, concerning how and why variables are related (Flynn et al., 1990). Thus, the foundation for the questionnaire development is the underlying theory (Flynn et al., 1990). Paper 3 used a survey to collect the empirical research data since these studies concern exact relationships among the defined variables (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012).

The empirical data for this research was obtained through an online questionnaire, which the researchers administered through different online channels via a professional organisation in the Kansai region in Japan, that supports women in business. The survey was open from September 10th to December 16th, 2020. Additionally, social networks were used to extend the number of respondents. All the respondents resided in Japan and work for Japanese organisations. In order to develop the survey instrument, a pilot study was conducted in the form of face-to-face interviews with six Japanese women who were team leaders or managers, to discuss the interest and validity of the constructs in the Japanese context. The first part of the survey collected socio-demographic information (age, education, experience level, position, etc.). The second part measured self-efficacy using the scale developed by Chen, Gully and Eden (2001) and leadership aspiration levels using the Leadership Aspiration subscale of the Career Aspiration Scale-Revised (CAS-R) proposed by Gregor and O'Brien (2015). The third part is related to perceived success factors for career advancement. The list included individual, organisational and institutional factors (Aycan, 2004; Saitova and Di Mauro, 2021).

4. Review of results and implications

This chapter presents the key findings of each of the original papers. First, it discusses the results of the literature review of gender diversity in Japan, which were obtained by searching in a multidisciplinary area of research in the fields of business, economics, psychological, social, and gender studies. Secondly, it presents qualitative study results concerning the role of organisational and individual-level factors in women's inclusion in Japan. Thirdly, it summarises the quantitative results concerning the impact of gender on career aspiration and self-efficacy in Japanese organisations. And finally, the Chapter discusses the implications: theoretical, managerial and for policymakers.

4.1. Findings

The research objective of this dissertation was to explore gender diversity drivers and success factors in Japanese organisations, as well as to investigate challenges women leaders face in Japanese organisations. This objective was divided into three more focused research questions, which are reviewed in the following:

Paper 1 contributes to the literature on gender diversity in Japan by reviewing and investigating the various gaps in the literature. This study has organised the literature on workplace gender diversity in Japan based on several factors. Five main areas of research were identified: Japanese culture, political institutions in Japan, organisational changes through the prism of HRM and CRM practices, inter-personal and personal issues that can support or hinder gender diversity and inclusion in Japan.

The literature review showed the scarcity of empirical evidence from Japanese organisations, in particular, for the role of personal factors. Additionally, there is no evidence on the impact of diversity moderators at a team level, for example, if specialisation and task complexity or team tenure can moderate the link with women's participation in decision-making. Next, most of the studies cover problems and issues the women face during career advancement however, there is not much evidence of "success stories" and what the triggers and key factors of such favorable outcomes are. The final list of relevant literature related to the Japanese context consists of 28 contributions and are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. List of articles relating to workplace gender diversity in Japan.

Article	Journal	Title	Main themes
Abe (2013)	Japan and the World Economy.	Regional variations in labour force behaviour of women in Japan.	Study about regional differences in women's participation in the labour market in Japan.
Adler (1987)	Human Resource Management.	Pacific Basin Managers: A Gaijin not a woman.	Perception of foreign women in management.
Adler (1994)	International Studies of Management and Organisation.	Asian women in management.	Obstacles women face in Asia in advancing their career.
Alkubati (2019)	Journal of International Women's Studies.	Re-Evaluation Gender Reforms in Non-Western Nations: A case study of women's empowerment in Japan.	Evaluation of womenomics, Japanese Prime Minister policy.
Benson and Yukongdi (2011)	Asia Pacific Business Review.	Asian Women Managers: Participation, Barriers, and Future Prospects.	Review of barriers, legislation norms for better women' participation.
Bobrowska and Conrad (2017)	Japanese Studies.	Discourses of Female Entrepreneurship in the Japanese Business Press – 25 Years and Little Progress.	Positioning of women, entrepreneurs in the Japanese press, stereotyping.
Fontana (2019)	Culture and Organisation.	When the main job tasks are perceived to be "irrelevant" in the workplace: the internal uselessness of corporate social responsibility work in Japan.	About frustration of CSR workers and their work as "useless".
Hirsch (2000)	Ethics.	Culture, Gender, and Work in Japan: A case study of a woman in management.	About difficulties a woman manager faces in Japan.
Iwaasa, Shoji and Mizuno, (2017)	Book, Springer International Publishing.	A study of the current status of diversity fault lines in Japanese work organisations	Observation of diversity fault lines
Kato and Kodama (2018)	British Journal of Industrial Relations.	The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Gender Diversity in the Workplace: Econometric Evidence from Japan.	Empirical study of effect CSR on gender diversity in Japanese organisations.
Kato and Kodama (2015)	IZA Discussion Paper No. 9379.	Work-Life Balance Practices, Performance-Related Pay, and Gender Equality in the Workplace: Evidence from Japan.	Empirical evidence from Japan, impact of HRM practices (work-life balance and performance-related pay) on gender equality in the workplace.
Kawaguchi (2015)	Journal of the Japanese and International Economies.	Internal labour markets and gender inequality: Evidence from Japanese micro data, 1990-2009.	Investigates the association of internal labour market with gender equality.

Kodama et al. (2016)	Discussion paper of RIETI and part of the project "Effect of diversity on economic growth and business competitiveness".	Transplanting Corporate Culture across International Borders: FDI and Female Employment in Japan.	Foreign institutions and gender diversity in Japan.
Liddle and Nakajima (2004)	Women's History Review.	States of Distinction: gender, Japan and 1the international political economy.	Impact of internationalization, conceptual framework to understand the place of women in Japan.
Macnaughtan (2015)	The Asia-Pacific Journal.	Womenomics for Japan: is the Abe policy for gendered employment viable in an era of precarity?	Womenomics policy, analysis of obstacles.
Magoshi and Chang (2009)	Journal of World Business.	Diversity management and the effects on employees' organisational commitment: Evidence from Japan and Korea.	Empirical evidence of diversity management practices in Japan.
Morikawa (2016)	Japan and the World Economy.	What types of companies have female directors? Evidence from Japan.	About ownership of the companies which have female directors.
Mun and Jung (2018)	Administrative Science Quarterly.	Change above the Glass Ceiling: Corporate Social Responsibility and Gender Diversity in Japanese Firms.	CSR and investor relations and influence on gender diversity.
Nakagawa and Schreiber (2014)	Journal of Diversity Management.	Women as drivers of Japanese firms' success. The effect of women managers and gender diversity on firm performance.	Empirical study to investigate the impact of female managerial participation and corporate performance.
Nemoto (2013)	Gender, Work and Organisation.	Long work hours and the corporate gender divide in Japan.	The impact of long working hours on gender inequality.
Nemoto (2013)	Work, Employment and Society.	When Culture Resists progress: Masculine organisational culture and its impacts on the Vertical segregation of women in Japanese companies.	Employment barriers that regular women workers face in Japan.
Nemoto (2016)	Book, Cornell University Press.	Too Few women at the Top: The Persistence of Inequality in Japan.	Observation of 5 Japanese companies, empirical study to review the issues of gender inequality in Japan.
Nemoto (2008)	Gender and Society.	Postponed Marriage: Exploring Women's Views of Matrimony and Work in Japan.	How gender inequality shape women's decisions to postpone marriage in Japan.
Ogasawara (1998)	Book. University of California press.	Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender and Work in Japanese companies.	About work and gender segregation in Japanese organisations.

Ono (2007)	American Sociological Review.	Careers in foreign-owned firms in Japan.	Review of foreign companies and career there in Japan.
Sugihara and Katsurada (2002)	Sex roles.	Gender role development in Japanese culture: diminishing gender role difference in a contemporary society.	Gender and roles segregation in the Japanese society.
Tanaka (2018)	Journal of the Japanese and International Economies.	Gender diversity on Japanese corporate boards.	Analysis of female directors on Japanese corporate boards.
Usui et al. (2003)	Asian Perspective.	Women, Institutions and Leadership in Japan.	Overview of female representation in leadership positions in Japan.

Paper 2 focuses on the political issue of enhancing the inclusion and participation of women in decision-making (Grosser and Moon, 2005) within Japanese organisations. Specifically, it compares the role that organisational-level factors (CSR programs, HR practices, diversity culture) and women's individual-level factors (personality, motivation, experience, and background) play in enabling effective participation of women managers in organisational decision-making in Japan.

Building on an interview-based qualitative study, this study considers the experiences of men and women in managerial positions in Japanese businesses. The goal is to compare and contrast the perceived relative importance assigned to organisational and individual-level factors in legitimising women managers' inclusion in organisational decision-making.

Table 4 provides a synopsis of indicators developed for organisation-level and individual-level factors with frequencies based on interview results.

Results suggest that, although companies formally espouse gender diversity values and policies, organisational structures, and practices to support gender equality are still ineffective, and peer-to-peer and leader-to-peer relations are still characterised by gender segregation. Ineffectiveness implies that the personal traits of women managers (such as being self-confident and the ability to stand up to men) are considered crucial in giving the woman manager a "voice" within the organisation.

Results highlight that government-level and organisation-level agendas should give importance to the political role of women inside an organisation, alongside the emphasis on equality of access to managerial positions.

Table 4. Barriers and success factors (interviews results).

Indicators / Success factors	Level	Factors sustain gender equality for	Frequency among women (12)	% women	Frequency among men (9)	% men	Total (21)	%total
Leadership development, leadership training programs for both males and females	Organizational level	career development participation in decision-making	6	50%	6	67%	12	57%
Corporate culture promoting diversity and multi-culturalism		career development participation in decision-making	6	50%	5	56%	11	52%
CSR programs		access	5	42%	6	67%	11	52%
Accountable and fair performance evaluation based on objective KPIs		career development participation in decision-making	7	58%	3	33%	10	48%
High professional standing of top management		participation in decision-making	6	50%	4	44%	10	48%
Top-management emphasizing value of gender diversity		participation in decision-making	4	33%	6	67%	10	48%
Leadership has international experience		participation in decision-making	6	50%	3	33%	9	43%
Climate of trust and mutual respect in the workplace		participation in decision-making	4	33%	4	44%	8	38%
HRM practices (promoting compatibility of family and career: flexible working hours, individual work schedules, home-office in case pregnancy and maternity leave)		participation in decision-making	7	58%	0	0%	7	33%
Conflict management practices		participation in decision-making	5	42%	0	0%	5	24%
Barriers		**Factors hinder gender equality for**						
Corporate culture emphasizing loyalty to the company through long working hours		access participation in decision-making	8	67%	5	56%	13	62%
Lack of equal access opportunities for men and women to some business functions (e.g. Sales only for men)		career development	7	58%	4	44%	11	52%
Lack of women roles models in the workplace		career development, participation in decision-making	9	75%	0	0%	9	43%
Tokenism		participation in decision-making	8	67%	0	0%	8	38%
Existence of strong male cliques		participation in decision-making	6	50%	0	0%	6	29%
Issues that are not mainstream are escalated (including gender issues)		participation in decision-making	4	33%	0	0%	4	19%
Leadership tolerance of sexual harassment		access	4	33%	0	0%	4	19%
Success factors		**Factors sustain gender equality for**						
International experience	Individual level	career development	10	83%	7	78%	17	81%
Determination, self-confidence		participation in decision-making	10	83%	6	67%	16	76%
Previous experience and strong background		career development participation in decision-making	8	67%	7	78%	15	71%
Ability to debate, express own thinking, communication skills with top management		career development participation in decision-making	8	67%	4	44%	12	57%
Willingness to put more effort on career orientation than male colleagues, showing that a woman has ambitions and career aspirations		career development	4	33%	4	44%	8	38%
Readiness to accept greater responsibility when there is a chance for it		career development	5	42%	0	0%	5	24%
Barriers		**Factors hinder genders equality for**						
Traditional education and upbringing		career development participation in decision-making	9	75%	6	67%	15	71%
Low aspiration levels		career development participation in decision-making	4	33%	6	67%	10	48%

Paper 3 analyses career aspirations and perceived occupational self-efficacy of women and men working in Japanese organisations and provides a comparison between genders. Through an online survey, 283 responses were collected, out of which 194 complete answers could be used for analysis, with 56% women and 44% men of Japanese nationality.

The age of the participants ranges between 25 and 70 years and the average age is 45 years. 85% of respondents, equally split between men and women, have a university degree. 85% have more than seven years of working experience and 48% of respondents have a leadership position at various levels of the organisational hierarchy (team leader, manager, head of the department, board member, entrepreneur). In terms of sector of activity, 50% of respondents work in manufacturing, 31% in the private service sector and 19% in the public sector.

Results reveal that the null hypothesis of equal mean between men and women is rejected for all items in the aspiration level scale, pointing to a significantly lower aspiration level for women with respect to men. Conversely, it is not possible to detect any significant difference in the measurement of self-efficacy.

Results also point to the fact that factors for a successful career differ by gender. To illustrate, institutional factors (family and policy support) are considered to be more important enablers of career advancement by women than by men. Similarly, workplace characteristics such as leader and peer support and performance evaluation systems are recognised as being more relevant for a career by women than by men.

Table 5 presents the main findings of the study. Through a regression model, significant determinants of aspiration levels are identified. Models 3a and 3b are estimated using women's responses only. Self-efficacy is significantly related to aspiration levels. Noticeably, unlike what is observed for men, age has no significant association with women's career aspirations. Model 3b shows that the importance assigned to cultural values as success factors for career development determines lower aspiration levels, therefore suggesting that women living in cultural environments characterised by discrimination will have lower career aspirations.

Table 5. Regression results (Dependent variable: career aspirations).

	Model 1a			Model 1b			Model 2a (Men)			Model 2b (Men)			Model 3a (Women)			Model 3b (Women)		
	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t
Gender	.358	.110	**0.001**	.316	.124	**0.012**												
Age	.001	.005	0.821	.001	.005	0.786	-.034	.009	**0.000**	-.038	.009	**0.000**	.010	.007	0.134	.010	.007	0.138
Leadership role	.271	.117	**0.022**	.318	.121	**0.009**	.381	.164	**0.022**	.433	.187	**0.023**	.189	.159	0.236	.311	.157	**0.050**
Self-efficacy	.581	.056	**0.000**	.568	.061	**0.000**	.400	.093	**0.000**	.393	.090	**0.000**	.615	.083	**0.000**	.588	.087	**0.000**
Personality				.061	.067	0.367				.088	.103	0.395				.107	.105	0.310
Motivation				-0,069	.107	0.520				-.004	.174	0.980				.122	.123	0.325
Leader support				.147	.079	0.066				.004	.136	0.979				.148	.133	0.270
Peer support				-0.151	.090	0.155				-.022	.133	0.872				-.091	.118	0.441
HRM practices				-.046	.065	0.477				-.159	.0832	0.061				.102	.105	0.338
Performance Evaluation				.235	.088	**0.008**				.183	.130	0.165				.161	.146	0.271
Gender-related policy				.050	.071	0.478				-.024	.106	0.820				.141	.104	0.179
Family				-.095	.091	0.296				-.054	.146	0.713				-.157	.159	0.326
Cultural values				-.173	.080	**0.031**				-.108	.120	0.370				-.298	.120	**0.014**
constant	.697	.257	**0.011**	-.583	.880	0.509	1.606	.394	**0.000**	2.076	1.116	0.067	-.695	.292	**0.019**	-1.707	1.102	0.125
Prob > F		0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000	
R2		0.44			0.49			0.35			0.40			0.45			0.52	
N		194			194			83			83			111			111	

4.2. Implications

- Theoretical implications

In many workplace cultures, women have been known to have to rely on their individual-level resources rather than lean on organisational-level resources to develop a career and leadership position. The persistence of this state of things is at odds with the fact that many organisations (also in Japan) formally espouse the principles of responsible management and implement gender equality through CSR policies. This dissertation has used institutionalism-based logic to argue that, when institutional demands and organisational expectations diverge, then compromise solutions emerge (Oliver, 1991). CSR has been the most investigated policy related to gender diversity in the Japanese context (Kato and Kodama, 2018; Mun and Jung, 2018). In line with previous findings, our respondents' perception is that CSR has led to more women being hired to managerial positions but none of the respondents state that CSR gives women equivalent career opportunities or decision-power as men (Evans and Maley, 2020). In summary, CSR has so far been a strategic response to institutional pressures, which provides adherence to pressures but also hides resistance and facade compliance (Oliver, 1991).

Therefore, the use of the institutionalism perspective has allowed shifting the emphasis on gender diversity and women leadership in Japan from "compliance" to "institutionalisation",

by showing that compliance to the CSR norms represents just the start of the journey toward gender equality and that deeper action is needed at the organisational cultural level.

Theoretical findings of this research also emerge from Study 3, which studies the relation between self-efficacy and leadership aspiration levels. While the study confirms Bandura's hypothesis of a positive relation, it innovates by providing evidence that self-efficacy does no longer differ by gender, while the aspirational levels of women are still significantly lower than that of men. Therefore, Japanese women no longer feel that they have lower capabilities than men, although the work environment is still unfavourable to them. The finding of equal self-efficacy by gender paves the way to future research that should assess whether it reflects a positive outcome of the efforts undertaken toward gender equality in the educational sphere.

- *Managerial implications*

The results of this dissertation have important managerial implications. The most important contribution in the field of gender management and women leadership is not to add further to the academic literature, but to provide results that can be applied to companies' HRM development and gender diversity management in practice. According to Holton and Dent (2016), a shift in mindset is required to change the culture of male-dominated organisations to a more female-friendly one. A new binominal society where both men and women can share work and family responsibilities is a new reality that will have to take place regardless of geography or cultural differences in the upcoming years. Therefore, organisations in Japan shall have to be ready to face a new normal. This conclusion aligns with Fernando et al. (2020), according to whom the "think manager, think male" (p. 494) stereotype may be shifting to a more inclusive "think manager, think diversity" paradigm.

However, the Japanese society appears not to be ready for "dual breadwinner model" and women remain "overloaded with dual burden rather than men" (Júlíusdóttir and Rafnsdóttir, 2018). Our results suggest the importance at the organisational level of creating a diversity-oriented environment and corporate culture, which is friendly both to women and men and where both genders can contribute to the company's success. This cultural shift has to accompany the adoption of CSR policies and practices, which otherwise represent a form of

symbolic compliance to the diversity norms. Additionally, only through a cultural shift in the organisation members can correctly perceive diversity as a resource (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

Results concerning the lower leadership aspiration of women with respect to men also lead to recommendations for organisations to develop ad hoc career paths for women (Hartman and Barber, 2020). In particular, this finding reinforces the need to create talent pipelines and to invest in creating mentoring roles for women within organisations, especially for new entrants.

- *Implications for policymakers*

In addition to advancing research and practice, the individual papers of this dissertation have significant policy implications. The Japanese society has not yet abandoned the traditional gendered division of labour. Organisational cultures which value spending long hours at the workplace do not facilitate the transition of companies towards gender equality. Therefore, support at the policy level is needed to facilitate the balance of work and family life of Japanese citizens, both men and women. The rapid aging of the labour force suggests that Japanese women would play an important role in society (Matsui and Onglatco, 1991). Policy makers have to play a vital role in order to help systematically remove the gender gap and increase the representation of women in decision-making.

Another role for policy lies in supporting the ambitions of young women. Results from Paper 3 show that younger Japanese women perceive to have the same career opportunities as older generations (Spencer et al., 2019). To address this issue, the Japanese educational system should more vigorously support the access of women to STEM higher education programs.

4.3. *Limitations and future research*

We acknowledge limitations that suggest future research avenues. Although the qualitative study has allowed gaining an understanding of the role of organisational and individual factors, it relies on limited sample size. Future studies may complement current findings from Paper 2 with quantitative survey information. Finally, the investigation of specific

gender diversity management programs in global corporations is still missing in the Japanese context.

Concerning Paper 3, the sample size of the quantitative evidence could be increased to include several age cohorts. Next, a larger sample size would allow for a more fine-grained analysis of the different components of aspirations and self-efficacy. Finally, a more in-depth analysis of success factors/barriers could offer recommendations to organisations on how to create leadership pathways for women.

Finally, institutional pressures engender higher gender diversity and better practices for women's inclusion in organisational decisions. However, even if Japanese women are promoted and ready for career advancement, the workplace situation will not change without modifications in the work-life balance of Japanese men. Therefore, future studies should investigate whether men in Japanese organisations are ready to change and move forward in support of women in childcare and how this new balance can be promoted.

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PART II: THE ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPERS

Paper 1 – Saitova, E. and Di Mauro, C. (2020). An analysis of factors driving gender diversity and inclusion in Japanese organisations, Economic and Social Development: Book of Proceedings. C. 262-272.

Paper 2 - Saitova, E. and Di Mauro, C. (2021). The role of organisational and individual-level factors for the inclusion of women managers in Japan. *International Journal of Organisational Analysis.* *https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-09-2021-2946*

Paper 3 - Saitova, E. and Di Mauro, C. (2022). The impact of gender on career aspiration levels and self-efficacy in Japan: What's new? Gender in Management: An International Journal (under review). The paper has been submitted for peer-review.

AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS DRIVING GENDER DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN JAPANESE ORGANISATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a literature review of success factors and barriers to gender diversity and inclusion in managerial roles in Japanese organisations. Although the literature regarding gender diversity in Japan is slowly gaining momentum, most studies are still based on experiences from the United States and Western Europe. Using a holistic approach, this research addresses the societal, organisational, inter-personal and individual-level factors related to workplace gender diversity and inclusion in Japanese organisations and identifies research gaps for a future research agenda.

Keywords: gender diversity, literature review, women in Japanese organisations

1. INTRODUCTION

Equality Opportunity Law 1985, in Japan, bans gender discrimination; however, gender discrimination remains (Nemoto, 2013; Benson and Debroux, 2013). Women are still underrepresented at managerial levels, characterized by the pay gap in Japanese organisations (Nemoto, 2013). Japanese government and institutions have increased the pressure to put more women into leadership positions (Koura et al, 2017), however, the large, listed companies in Japan still do not represent diversity (Morikawa, 2016; Saito, 2018). Very few women currently hold managerial or board positions in Japan (Nemoto, 2016). In 2017, the percentage of women on the boards of publicly traded companies in Japan was only 3.7% in compariśon with the US, where the percentage was 18.7% (Tanaka, 2018). In

Japan, gender diversity has traditionally been low because of ancient cultural values, which are then embedded in organisational cultures and are male-centered (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2002). Against this backdrop, the global diffusion of the norms of CSR has undoubtedly put pressure on Japanese businesses to employ more women (Brinton and Mun, 2016; Haak, 2006; Mun and Jung, 2018) and closing the gender gap has recently become one of the key strategies to boost labour participation and improve economic growth in Japan (Iwaasa et al, 2017). However, the "glass ceiling" that prevents women from accessing higher positions in the organisational hierarchy appears to persist (Mun and Jung, 2018).

This research seeks to summarize the papers about gender diversity in Japan and build a review of the academic literature within the Japanese context to contribute to organisational studies and understand the factors and reasons responsible for female underrepresentation in Japanese organisations. While management research on gender diversity in the Japanese workplace is slowly gaining momentum (Kato and Kodama, 2018; Mun and Jung, 2018; Nakagawa and Schreiber, 2014; Tanaka, 2014), most contributions on antecedents of diversity present macro-level analyses such as parental leave legislation (Asai 2015), or focus their attention on specific factors that affect the presence and extent of workplace gender diversity, such as CSR (Kato and Kodama, 2018; Mun and Jung, 2018).

To understand the factors influencing better female participation in decision making, all the findings from the literature were integrated into several layers: institutional, organisational, team, and individual levels which helped to organise the existing literature based on this analysis, literature gaps were identified that may need more empirical evidence. This "holistic" approach captures all complications related to gender diversity and inclusion in Japanese organisations. Specifically, the research paper addresses the following question: What is the interplay among system-wide, organisational, inter-personal and individual-level factors? To investigate the impact of different layers of factors and to organise them, insights were obtained from different theoretical approaches: Hofstede cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2009), Neo-institutional Theory (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), the Categorization-Elabouration Model (CEM) of diversity (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004), and Intersectionality theory (Holvino, 2010). Finally, the paper has practical relevance as it may help HRM and top managers of the Japanese organisations to pay attention to uncovered areas of managerial practices and corporate culture to increase diversity and inclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW APPROACH

This paper is focused on the studies published in English, in peer-reviewed academic journals and books. Additionally, a few discussion papers were added to our study, since the data published there is considered highly relevant. Workplace gender diversity is a multidisciplinary topic, and there are cross-disciplinary studies in the fields of business, economics, psychological, social and gender studies. The following electronic databases and sources were used for searching Scopus, Science Direct and EBSCO, using the search words "gender diversity in Japan", "women in Japanese organisations" and "inequality in Japan". The search was done in August 2019. Through this search strategy, more than 100 contributions were identified. A significant part of this literature was related to the history of equality in Japan, equal employment opportunities and education, as well as gender roles as women or mothers, gender stereotyping, social studies, work-life balance in addition to studies about women participation in civil and official political institutions of power in Japan. These articles were removed unless they provided evidence of gender diversity in the workplace. The final list of relevant literature related to the Japanese context consists of 28 contributions (Table 1).

Table 1: List of literature

| Article	Journal	Title	Main themes
Abe (2013)	Japan and the World Economy.	Regional variations in labour force behaviour of women in Japan.	Study about regional differences in women's participation in the labour market in Japan.
Adler (1987)	Human Resource Management.	Pacific Basin Managers: A Gaijin not a woman.	Perception of foreign women in management.
Adler (1994)	International Studies of Management and Organisation.	Asian women in management.	Obstacles women face in Asia in advancing their career.
Alkubati (2019)	Journal of International Women's Studies.	Re-Evaluation Gender Reforms in Non-Western Nations: A case study of women's empowerment in Japan.	Evaluation of womenomics, Japanese Prime Minister policy.

Benson and Yukongdi (2011)	Asia Pacific Business Review.	Asian Women Managers: Participation, Barriers, and Future Prospects.	Review of barriers, legislation norms for better women' participation.
Bobrowska and Conrad (2017)	Japanese Studies.	Discourses of Female Entrepreneurship in the Japanese Business Press – 25 Years and Little Progress.	Positioning of women, entrepreneurs in the Japanese press, stereotyping.
Fontana (2019)	Culture and Organisation.	When the main job tasks are perceived to be "irrelevant" in the workplace: the internal uselessness of corporate social responsibility work in Japan.	About frustration of CSR workers and their work as "useless".
Hirsch (2000)	Ethics.	Culture, Gender and Work in Japan: A case study of a woman in management.	About difficulties a woman manager faces in Japan.
Iwaasa, Shoji and Mizuno, (2017)	Book, Springer International Publishing.	A study of the current status of diversity fault lines in Japanese work organisations	Observation of diversity fault lines
Kato and Kodama (2018)	British Journal of Industrial Relations.	The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Gender Diversity in the Workplace: Econometric Evidence from Japan.	Empirical study of effect CSR on gender diversity in Japanese organisations.
Kato and Kodama (2015)	IZA Discussion Paper No. 9379.	Work-Life Balance Practices, Performance-Related Pay, and Gender Equality in the Workplace: Evidence from Japan.	Empirical evidence from Japan, impact of HRM practices (work-life balance and performance-related pay) on gender equality in the workplace.
Kawaguchi (2015)	Journal of the Japanese and International Economies.	Internal labour markets and gender inequality: Evidence from Japanese micro data, 1990-2009.	Investigates the association of internal labour market with gender equality.
Kodama et al. (2016)	Discussion paper of RIETI and part of the project "Effect of diversity on economic growth and business competitiveness".	Transplanting Corporate Culture across International Borders: FDI and Female Employment in Japan.	Foreign institutions and gender diversity in Japan.
Liddle and Nakajima (2004)	Women's History Review.	States of Distinction: gender, Japan and 1the international political economy.	Impact of internationalization, conceptual framework to understand the place of women in Japan.
Macnaughtan (2015)	The Asia-Pacific Journal.	Womenomics for Japan: is the Abe policy for gendered employment viable in an era of precarity?	Womenomics policy, analysis of obstacles.
Magoshi and Chang (2009)	Journal of World Business.	Diversity management and the effects on employees' organisational commitment:	Empirical evidence of diversity management practices in Japan.

		Evidence from Japan and Korea.	
Morikawa (2016)	Japan and the World Economy.	What types of companies have female directors? Evidence from Japan.	About ownership of the companies which have female directors.
Mun and Jung (2018)	Administrative Science Quarterly.	Change above the Glass Ceiling: Corporate Social Responsibility and Gender Diversity in Japanese Firms.	CSR and investor relations and influence on gender diversity.
Nakagawa and Schreiber (2014)	Journal of Diversity Management.	Women as drivers of Japanese firms' success. The effect of women managers and gender diversity on firm performance.	Empirical study to investigate the impact of female managerial participation and corporate performance.
Nemoto (2013)	Gender, Work and Organisation.	Long work hours and the corporate gender divide in Japan.	The impact of long working hours on gender inequality.
Nemoto (2013)	Work, Employment and Society.	When Culture Resists progress: Masculine organisational culture and its impacts on the Vertical segregation of women in Japanese companies.	Employment barriers that regular women workers face in Japan.
Nemoto (2016)	Book, Cornell University Press.	Too Few women at the Top: The Persistence of Inequality in Japan.	Observation of 5 Japanese companies, empirical study to review the issues of gender inequality in Japan.
Nemoto (2008)	Gender and Society.	Postponed Marriage: Exploring Women's Views of Matrimony and Work in Japan.	How gender inequality shape women's decisions to postpone marriage in Japan.
Ogasawara (1998)	Book. University of California press.	Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese companies.	About work and gender segregation in Japanese organisations.
Ono (2007)	American Sociological Review.	Careers in foreign-owned firms in Japan.	Review of foreign companies and career there in Japan.
Sugihara and Katsurada (2002)	Sex roles.	Gender role development in Japanese culture: diminishing gender role difference in a contemporary society.	Gender and roles segregation in the Japanese society.
Tanaka (2018)	Journal of the Japanese and International Economies.	Gender diversity on Japanese corporate boards.	Analysis of female directors on Japanese corporate boards.
Usui et al. (2003)	Asian Perspective.	Women, Institutions and Leadership in Japan.	Overview of female representation in leadership positions in Japan.

3. LAYERS OF FACTORS

This section provides an overview of the different factors impacting on gender diversity. The focus is on factors impacting gender inclusion in business decisions and, and whenever previous research exists, on their relevance in the Japanese business context. Following an early approach to gender and power in organisations (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989), four levels of analysis were identified: social systems, organisational, interpersonal and team level as well as individual. The social system level focuses on society and cultural values that are gender related. The organisational level captures policies and practices within firms that may be used to promote gender equality, such as CSR and HRM. The interpersonal or team-level focuses on relationships with leaders and peers. The individual level focuses on the personal resources of an individual, which may include personality, motivation and aspiration levels. To this four-tier classification, we add the institutional level, capturing pressures on companies emanating from political and economic stakeholders (Figure 1). Concepts from several different theoretical approaches help inform the analysis of the different levels of factors, thereby offering opportunities to integrate them in the analysis of gender inclusion in the workplace.
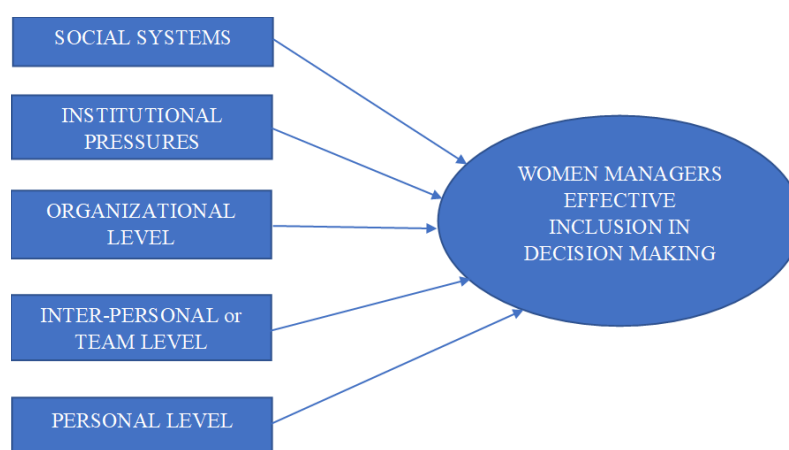
Figure 1 – Layers of factors relevant for women managers' inclusion

3.1. Social Systems and Institutional Pressures

This section introduces cultural and institutional influences on gender diversity and inclusion and presents contributions concerning Japan. This part is widely observed in academic literature in the Japanese context. Culture, intended as the norms and beliefs which are shared by people (Hofstede, 2001), clearly has a significant role in workplace gender diversity, because culture influences social categorization based on gender (Cox, 1994). Gender stereotypes are culturally shared beliefs (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Hirsch, 2000) and gender roles are culturally constructed (Moore, 2015). Socio-cultural context influences the formation of work and family-related values and norms (Aygan, 2004). Adler (1994) explained the underrepresentation of Asian women in management by cultural and religious traditions. Japanese culture has traditionally triggered gender bias and segregation in the workplace (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2002), as well as more participation of females in the public and males in the domestic roles, which was not supported in the past (Tamanoi, 1990). Religions in Japan (Confucianism, Buddhism and Shintoism) encompass female un-friendly values, which support male-dominating thinking, and gender discrimination (Liddle and Nakajima, 2004). Confucianism strongly influenced Japanese culture (Adler, 1994, 1987; Sugihara and Katsurada, 2002) and the Japanese viewed women, not only as decision-makers but were even more egalitarian in nature. Japan originally a matriarchal society, turned to a patriarchal system (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2000; 2002). Two dimensions of the national culture: power distance and masculinity affect social gender roles (Hofstede, 2001; Szymanowicz and Furnham, 2013; Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle, 2019). Cultural expectations still put pressure on Japanese women to be solely responsible and caring for the family (Smirles et al., 2020; Aono and Kashiwagi, 2011). Japanese society still practices a gendered division of labour, where a woman`s place is at home (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2000). According to Hofstede's dimensions, Japan is a hierarchical society, putting a higher value on group interests than on individualistic ones. Power distance is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 98). Japan's power distance has an intermediate score of 54, it is not so hierarchical as other Asian countries, however, all the decisions must be confirmed by each hierarchical level. Japan has one of the highest

indexes of uncertainty avoidance with a score of 92, and a score of 95 in masculinity because gender roles in the society are rigid and assign greater importance to masculine values (Hofstede, 2003). As noted by Hofstede (2001, p.297) "social gender roles are clearly distinct" in countries with high scores of masculinity. Male characteristics like achievement and status are emphasized and encouraged as a source of pride. And women shall be focused on roles involving personal relationships (Hofstede, 2001). Hall (1966) distinguishes high and low context cultures and classifies Japan as a "high context" culture, where formal, indirect, and implicit communication convey the messages; sensitive topics and direct expressions of opinion tend to be avoided to reach the intergroup harmony and shun conflicts. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) classified Japan as having an upper-middle level degree of "universalism", whereby formal rules are much more important than human relationships. In the same direction, the GLOBE project (House et al., 2004), which extends the Hofstede model (Ralston et al., 2018; Schneid et al., 2015) shows the Japanese culture as being relatively low gender-egalitarian (GLOBE project, 2019).

By representing formal and informal constraints (North, 1990), institutions influence organisational structure and business behavior (Iannotta, Gatti and Huse, 2016; Meyer, 2010; North, 1990; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016) suggested that cultural institutions, multiple institutional domains, regulatory policies, welfare provision and labour markets are interrelated and can positively influence gender diversity on corporate boards. Various institutional barriers remain to prevent equal women's participation in the labour market (Ono, 2007). The discussion on gender quotas in corporate boards is often associated with the concept of "Tokenism" (Kanter, 1977). When boards include few women, they are considered tokens (Torchia et al., 2011), leading to the conjecture that tokenism characterises Japanese boards. Tokenism explains the importance of organisational structures and context in the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions (King et al., 2010). Token women experience an increased level of visibility since the token is scarcely present, which creates social isolation and make them feel the pressure to be in line with social role and gender stereotypes (Kanter, 1977a; King et al., 2010). A woman is considered to be a token if females are less than 15% in the given context according to tokenism theory. In the last twenty years, there has been intimidation from international institutions and foreign investors to align Japanese companies' corporate

governance with international standards and introduce gender diversity on boards (Saito, 2018). In foreign organisations Japanese women have more career opportunities than in Japanese firms, historically foreign companies utilized more female talents in Japan according to the White Paper of Gender Equality published by the Cabinet Office in Japan as their host countries are more advanced in terms of gender equality. The effects of gender diversity on Japanese organisations have proved to be beneficial. Siegel and Kodama (2011) and Niikura and Seko (2017) show that organisations with more female directors have a positive effect on ROA. Additionally, a recent empirical study by Tanaka (2018) shows that publicly traded Japanese firms with more women directors exhibit higher performance. Notwithstanding increasing pressure, Morikawa (2016) reported that the boards of the large, listed companies do not necessarily exhibit greater diversity. This state of things aligns with Oliver's (1991) contribution on organisations' strategic responses to institutional pressures, which highlights that diversity policies represent a "contested institutional terrain". In effect, failure to fully embrace policies that are considered standard in different national settings reflects more broadly "Institutional distance", i.e., a difference between two 'countries' institutional profile' (CIP) based on the regulatory, normative, and cognitive institutions of a country (Ferner, Almond and Colling, 2005; Kostova, 1999; Scott, 1995). Cultural stereotypes affect Japanese women's career aspirations, work-life goals and confidence in their leadership potential (Yamamoto and Ran, 2014; Smirles et al., 2020; Aono and Kashiwagi, 2011). Recent researchers show that Japanese culture has become more supportive of an egalitarian view of gender roles and women in the workplace due to recent demographic and economic changes (Yamamoto and Ran, 2014; Hashimoto, 2017; Piotrowski et al., 2019; Smirles et al, 2020).

3.2. Organisational level

Several studies have underscored the role of corporate culture and climate in influencing gender diversity (McDonald, 2003). Additionally, King et al., (2010) considered the psychological climate of gender inequity as a critical and broader indicator of women's interpretation of the work and social contexts and gender inequity, focused on individual perceptions of policies and practices in the organisations which were interpreted as unfair.

The importance of creating an organisational climate for diversity (Guillaume et al., 2013) has been identified as an effective way to make "diversity at work to work" (McKay et al., 2008). Cox (1993) argues that climate plays an important role as a moderator in the impact of diversity on team performance. Van Knippenberg et al. (2013) suggest that a diversity mindset in organisations moderates the relation between diversity and performance, and propose three aspects of this mindset: accuracy, inclusivity, and awareness of diversity cognition. Mor Barak (1998) conceptualized a diversity-prone environment using two dimensions: individual views and prejudices towards people who are different from themselves and organisational policies and procedures concerning minorities and women. Analogous dimensions were suggested by Cox (1994) individual-level and organisational-level factors to assess the organisational diversity climate. Adler (1993) already mentioned that male-dominant organisational culture is an obstacle to women's career advancement, with difficulty to enter the "old boys' network" (Aygan, 2004; Davidson and Cooper, 1992). Macnaughtan (2015) argues that it is hard for women to make a career in Japan, since the workplace culture is based upon the male breadwinner model, prescribing women to work in the same way. Most women work in occupations that are associated with lower power, nurses, elementary school teachers, secretaries, and assistants (King et al., 2010; Lips, 2001; Thornborrow and Sheldon, 1995). Fritz and Van Knippenberg (2017) suggest that organisational climate, as well as cooperative climate, may encourage leadership aspiration therefore it is important to create such an environment and stimulate female leadership aspiration. Moreover, the Japanese working environment is characterized by a complex value system, high formality and hierarchical system, and top-down culture (Demise, 2005; Fontana, 2019). Being a hierarchical society in which relationships are defined as subordinate-superior; obedience and loyalty to bosses and companies are naturally driven by the influence of Confucian teaching (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2000; Hamada, 1996). Workplace culture in Japan force women to choose between career or family orientation, "emulating masculinity or opting out" (Nemoto, 2013 p.514), stereotyping woman who want to combine the roles, while men's career opportunities are not limited by fatherhood (Lyon and Woodward, 2004; Watts, 2009; Nemoto, 2013). The environment of long working hours also doesn't support women's career advancement in Japanese organisations, intensifying the separation between work and family (Nemoto, 2013).

Gender diversity has a central place within CSR policies and practices. The literature argues for a significant bi-directional relationship between CSR and board diversity since gender-diverse boards provide more effective monitoring of CSR performance (Bear, Rahman and Post, 2010; Harjoto et al., 2015; Williams, 2003). Tanimoto (2017) noted the increased number of CSR employees since this activity started in Japan in 2003. Mun and Jung (2018) investigated how Japanese firms responded to global standards of CSR norms in terms of gender diversity in the workplace and added that CSR is used to be attracted to external investors. In their comparative study of Germany and Japan; Kemper, Bader and Froese (2016) pointed out that Japanese organisations expect more negative outcomes from diversity practices than the German ones. Kato and Kodama (2016) connect work-life balance practices and CSR and suggested that CSR practices positively impact gender diversity in the workplace, though not immediately after the inception of CSR but after two to three years. There is a study by Fontana (2019) who critically observed CSR as "an emotionally tainted occupation" in Japan, confirmed that CSR in Japan is used for public recognition, while the workers in the CSR field feel useless. Other scholars have confirmed that the Japanese workplace is still contradictory even to CSR policies (Mun and Jung, 2018; Kimura and Nishikawa, 2018).

Concerning HRM, Japanese organisations implement more top-down HR practices, since such an approach is believed to be more effective. This is because in Japan the rules are applied by superiors and based on a high-context culture with many unwritten rules that are always strictly followed (Sekiguchi et al., 2016). HRM in Japanese organisations was successful in the internationalisation of operations but not in the internationalisation of management, characterised by an ethnocentric management style (Sekiguchi et al., 2016). There is a great chance to be discriminated against through HRM practices, like selection, evaluation or promotion (Aygan, 2004). Magoshi and Chang (2009) evidenced that the implementation of gender related HRM practices is notably weaker compared to western companies. Nevertheless, HRM practices such as work-life balance and family-friendly policies have proved beneficial for the career development of women (Yanadori and Kato, 2009; Wakisaka, 2007) but also for the organisation's performance (Wakisaka, 2007). There is evidence that recent HRM practices use flexible employment and performance-related payments (Sekiguchi, 2013).

3.3. The inter-personal and personal level

A significant amount of research on workplace gender diversity has addressed workplace teams proposing two opposing perspectives: social categorisation suggests that diversity brings dysfunctional teamwork and conflicts and negative impacts on performance. Conversely, the information/decision-making perspective suggests that diversity will bring more creativity and better decision-making. Van Knippenberg et al., (2004) and their Categorisation-Elaboration Model (CEM) integrate two of the above-mentioned concepts, by arguing that both processes unfold simultaneously. According to CEM, the social categorisation processes caused by diversity lead to effective and evaluative reactions that moderate the main relationship between diversity and elaboration of task-relevant information and perspectives, which in turn influence group/organisational performance. CEM points to the importance of other moderating variables at the team level that strengthens benefits from diversity (e.g., specialisation and task complexity, effective conflict management, leadership) which had previously been overlooked. Therefore, via the analysis of moderating effects, both positive and negative outcomes can stem from increased diversity in the workgroup (Jackson et al, 2003; Van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). Consistent with the above, gender-diverse teams seem to focus on task accomplishment and have more formal job behavior (Schneid et al., 2015).

Intersectionality theory suggests that people are members of more than one category or social group, and it examines how social and cultural categories interact and intertwine. (Acker, 2006; Richardson and Loubier, 2008; Zander et al., 2010). Along the same lines, Faultline theory (Lau and Murninghan, 1998; Van Knippenberg et al., 2010) suggested that diversity dimensions should be considered in conjunction to understand the overall impact of diversity within a team. Therefore, these theoretical approaches declare that gender will interact with other sources of social status/categorisation, e.g., nationality, educational background, class, and ethnicity (Zander et al., 2010). According to Gottfried (2008), Japan invented a monolithic culture by filtering Japanese/non-Japanese. Concerning gender, Adler (1987) found that foreign women in Japan are perceived not as women, meaning less discrimination compared to Japanese women. According to gender studies, women are more associated with

caring, empathy and concern for others (Fondas, 1997). Such stereotypes, which put pressure on women to comply with that particular behavioral model (Gutek and Morasch, 1982; Boulouta, 2013), could be felt more strongly by Japanese women than by foreign ones.

Women managers are expected to follow masculine work norms and prioritise work over personal and family matters (Nemoto, 2012). Women who choose careers often remain single or childless to avoid the "double pressure of being good workers and mothers" (Nemoto, 2013, p. 524). The literature on women's career advancement discussed individual and situational factors (Aycan, 2004). The personal factors include attitude toward career development: high level of self-efficacy, strong desire to succeed, positive attitude toward relocation, higher level of education, having extensive working experience and knowledge: with these factors, women have better chances of being in decision-making positions (Aycan, 2004; Adler, 1993; Adler et al., 2000). In Japan a person being silent equals being polite or modest, therefore women hesitate to speak up and self-present to behave as expected by society (Takano, 2005). The discrimination is often more apparent at the inter-personal level than within the organisation. Concerning peers, women feel discriminated in their ability to express their opinions and contribute to decisions because of the existence of strong male cliques within work teams.

Japanese media still supports traditional gender roles and societal expectations and shows the female character being a homemaker (Arima, 2003; Aono and Kashiwagi, 2011) and at the same time shows more stories about women in politics. Recently, in the Japanese mainstream and public discourse entrepreneurship is offered as a solution to work-life balance, portraying a female as a "superwoman" (Bobrowska and Conrad, 2017), pushing to be responsible for family obligations and being pioneers in a male-dominated industry as women. In general, situational factors may influence women's career advancement, as well as role models. There is a lack of female role models in Japanese organisations (Yoshida, 2018). In most cases, mothers play a key role in creating self-confidence and ambitions for a career (Aycan, 2004), or on the contrary, the negative image of the mother as being a homemaker can force women to choose a career over marriage (Nemoto, 2008).

A recent study by Kuroda and Yamamoto (2018) revealed that the relationship between a supervisor and employees affects the employees' productivity and well-being, and bosses' management and communication skills are critical to improving a workers' well-being. The

personal traits of the supervisor are essential and envision the outcomes in social aspects. However, Japan is still characterised by gender differentiation and professional career is often associated with male-gender (Hirsch, 2000; Ogasawara, 1998).

4. CONCLUSION

This study has organised the literature on workplace gender diversity in Japan based on several layers of factors. Five main areas of research were identified: Japanese culture, political institutions in Japan, organisational changes through the prism of HRM and CRM practices, inter-personal and personal issues that can support or hinder gender diversity and inclusion in Japan.

The literature review showed the scarcity of empirical evidence, in particular with respect to the role of personal factors. Additionally, there is no evidence on the impact of moderators of diversity at the team level, e.g., if specialisation and task complexity or team tenure can moderate the link with women's participation in decision-making. Next, most of the studies cover problems and issues that women face during career advancement, however, there is not much evidence of "success stories" as to what the triggers and key factors of such favorable outcomes are.

Finally, institutional pressures engender higher gender diversity and better practices for women's inclusion in organisational decisions. However, even if Japanese women are promoted and ready for career advancement, the workplace situation will not be altered without changes in the work-life balance of Japanese men. Therefore, future studies should investigate whether men in Japanese organisations are ready to change and move forward in support of women in childcare and how this new balance can be promoted.

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THE ROLE OF ORGANISATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL FACTORS FOR THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN MANAGERS IN JAPAN

Structured abstract

Design/methodology/approach

A qualitative study based on 21 in-depth interviews with women and men in managerial positions in Japanese organisations is adopted.

Purpose

This study analyses and contrasts the role of organisational and individual level factors in influencing the effective participation of women managers in decision-making in Japanese business organisations.

Findings

Results show that gender equality structures and practices are not effectively institutionalized within Japanese organisations. In particular, CSR programs are perceived by women respondents to be formally adopted to gain legitimacy in the eyes of foreign investors. However, they lack effectiveness in giving the woman manager "voice" in business decisions. Organisational practices such as leadership development and mentoring are generally not evident in the organisations analysed. Conversely, the personal traits of the woman manager, such as determination, self-confidence and "being able to confront men colleagues" are the factors perceived to be crucial in influencing women's participation in decisions.

Social implications

The study suggests that, in order to increase the weight of women managers in Japanese organisations' decision-making, action is still needed within organisations to create a true diversity-culture. Additionally, action at the educational level has to remove women own self-segregation.

Originality

The study offers novel evidence on the "glass ceiling" in Japanese businesses by investigating whether women's access to management positions corresponds to effective

decision power. The study also highlights the key enabling factors, therefore contributing to the analysis of how to create more effective gender "diversity" within Japanese businesses.

Keywords: gender diversity, Japan, organisational practices, women leadership

Introduction

Diverse cultural contexts with distinctive elements of gender inequality exhibit unique constraints for women leadership and inclusion in the workplace (Alhadhrami et al., 2018). The Japanese corporate world has often been described as built on strongly gendered practices (Adler, 1994; Benson and Yukonghi, 2005; Liddle and Nakajima, 2004; Saito, 2017; Sugihara and Katsurada, 2002). However, in the last decade, closing the gender gap has been pursued as a national strategy to increase labour participation (Iwaasa *et al.*, 2017) and Japanese businesses have experienced growing societal pressure towards greater gender equality (Piotrowski *et al.*, 2019; Smirles *et al.*, 2020; Yamamoto and Ran, 2014). As a result, Japanese organisations have started to appoint more women in managerial positions and a growing number of Japanese organisations have adopted corporate social responsibility (CSR) and Human Resource (HR) practices expected to promote women's access to the workplace (Kato and Kodama, 2018; Mun and Jung, 2018).

According to neo-institutionalism (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983; Suchman, 1995), organisations aim at increasing their legitimacy by adopting structures and practices that are accepted in the 'organisational field' and which represent isomorphic responses to institutional pressures coming from government, society or peers. In this respect, workplace structures and practices adopted by organisations towards gender equality may be seen as isomorphic adaptations to institutional pressures. However, research in workplace gender equality has suggested that structures and practices become effectively "institutionalized" if organisational members expect adoption to increase the organisation's likelihood of success (Lucas, 2003). Conversely, ineffective institutionalization may imply that conformance to institutional pressures is characterised by decoupling (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Additionally, and significantly for this study, ineffective institutionalization of gender equality structures and practices implies that women must rely on their personal abilities and

ad hoc opportunities to succeed in their jobs and to gain real power within organisations (Murray and Southey, 2020).

Several streams of gender research (Kanter, 1977; Ryan et al., 2016; Samuelson et al., 2019) have indeed emphasized that the appointment of women to managerial positions does not straightforwardly correspond to women's decision power within the organisation: women may be marginalized or isolated, so that their actual contribution to organisational decision-making is small.

Currently, there is still a lack of empirical evidence for Japan on whether structures and practices those Japanese businesses have adopted as a result of institutional pressures have succeeded in enabling effective participation of women in decision-making and whether they have reduced the need for women to rely on their own personal strengths in order to have effective decision power (Kossek et al., 2017). To address this gap, this study compares the role that organisational level factors (CSR programs, HR practices, diversity culture) and women's individual level factors (personality, motivation, experience, and background) play in enabling effective participation of women managers in organisational decision-making in Japan. A qualitative research approach relying on in-depth interviews with female and male middle and top managers from Japanese business organisations is adopted. The interviews were predominantly collected in manufacturing, a work environment that still employs few women (Benson and Yukongdi, 2005; Fernando, Cohen and Duberley, 2018).

Results suggest that, in spite of the fact that companies formally espouse gender diversity values and policies, organisational structures and practices to support gender equality are perceived to be largely ineffective and peer-to-peer and leader-to-peer relations are still characterized by gender segregation. Ineffectiveness implies that the personal traits of women managers (such as being self-confident and the ability to stand up to men) are considered crucial in giving the woman manager "voice" within the organisation.

By focusing on how to enhance the inclusion and participation of women in decision-making (Grosser and Moon, 2005) within Japanese organisations, this study highlights the importance of this aspect of workplace gender equality, which should inform government-level and organisation-level agendas, alongside the emphasis on equality of access. The paper is organised as follows: the next section presents the background literature. The methodology section and results section follow. The paper concludes with a discussion of

findings and implications for gender equality policies in Japan.

Background literature

Women's participation in organisational decision making: an institutional perspective

Several streams of managerial literature have emphasised that, even when women reach managerial roles, still the corporate practices are discriminatory (Wilson-Kovacs *et al*., 2006; Ryan *et al.*, 2016) and tend to isolate and marginalize women. Among several others, "glass cliff" research has investigated corporate injustice (Cook and Glass, 2014; Yaghi, 2018), by showing that women tend to be assigned risky leaderships and get blamed for failure. In a similar vein, the analysis of gender quotas in corporate boards has unveiled the phenomenon of "Tokenism" (Kanter, 1977), whereby the presence of women is not matched by real decision power (Joecks *et al*., 2013; Post and Byron, 2015).

Neo-institutionalism argues that organisations adopt structures and practices that conform to their environment. According to Lucas (2003), structures and practices supporting women's leadership are effectively "institutionalized" when organisations create beliefs among their members that successful organisations assign leadership positions to women. These structures may include CRS policies, specific women leadership development and mentoring programs, the adoption of inclusive work practices, and the creation of a diversity culture. However, if institutional fields exhibit little homogeneity and are characterized by contested values, organisational responses may differ (Oliver, 1991). In particular, when the quest for legitimacy is at odds with efficiency or with organisational values, organisational responses may eschew conformance to the institutional norm or practice, and favour buffering, decoupling or avoidance (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Consistent with this view, institutionally prescribed guidelines for facilitating women's career and participation in decision-making may conflict with endowed cultural values (Goby, 2020). In these circumstances, ineffective institutionalization may show up as "decoupling", which may occur whenever merely symbolic implementation is sufficient to provide organisations with legitimacy in the eyes of their stakeholders, saving the organisation the costs and efforts of implementing a substantive change.

Murray and Southey (2020) build on Lucas (2003) to argue that, even if institutional pressures increase the number of women with managerial roles, their decision power within organisations will depend on the existence of effective "institutionalized workplace structures", which successfully embed gender equality into the organisation. If workplace structures are not fully institutionalized, women have to rely on their own strengths to offset gender-biased expectations of their competency to perform their leadership roles (Murray and Southey, 2020). More often than men, women attribute a decisive influence on their career advancement to personal connections and to job-related skills (Ottsen, 2019). Additionally, in these circumstances, stereotyped traits associated with effective leadership - such as ambition, competitiveness, and self-confidence, which are more often attributed to men than women, may be activated by women to reach career goals (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

Research on gender diversity in the Japanese workplace

While equal opportunities for women in the workplace are espoused by many societies, there are cultural values that still hinder women's career by influencing social categorization in the workplace based on gender (Cox, 1994; Mate et al., 2019). The cultural context has also been shown to influence the relation between gender diversity and workgroup performance (Van Knippenberg, et al., 2004), because culture affects the balance between effective information processing and social categorization processes in workgroups (Schneid, 2015). The traditional Japanese culture has been associated with gender bias and discrimination in the workplace (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2002). Confucianism, Buddhism and Shintoism, the main religions in Japan, have been argued to be at the root of the "male-breadwinner" model (Liddle and Nakajima, 2004).

In the last twenty years, government, international institutions, foreign investors and society alike have exerted pressures on Japanese companies to align with international norms recommending gender diversity in the workplace and within governance boards (Saito, 2017). In spite of evidence of beneficial effects of gender diversity on corporate performance (Siegel and Kodama, 2011), the boards of directors of listed companies exhibit limited

gender diversity (Morikawa, 2016; Nemoto, 2016; Spencer *et al.*, 2019), as witnessed by the fact that in 2017 the boards of these firms had 3.7% of women in Japan vis-a-vis 18.7% in the US (Tanaka, 2018). Failure to comply to norms that are mainstream in other national settings has been explained through the concept of "institutional distance" (Ferner, Almond and Colling, 2005), i.e., the extent to which regulatory, normative, and cognitive institutions between two countries' differ.

Institutional pressures have led many Japanese firms to adopt the global standards of CSR, within which gender diversity has a central place. Mun and Jung (2018) find that CRS has contributed to push more gender diversity only in the upper ranks of Japanese organisations, while the traditional employment system persists in the lower ranks. Using data on Japanese public-listed companies, Kato and Kodama (2018) find that CSR positively impacts workplace gender equality of hiring, although the effects are generally felt after two to three years. Fontana (2019) offers evidence that CSR is often used for public recognition in Japan and is decoupled from the organisational reality.

Family-friendly policies and HR practices favouring work-life balance have been beneficial for women's career development (Yanadori and Kato, 2009; Wakisaka, 2007) but also for organisational performance (Wakisaka, 2007). However, Magoshi and Chang (2009) report that HR practices related to gender are notably weaker in Japanese organisation vis-à-vis western companies, because leadership does not perceive their value. In this direction, a comparison between Japanese and German firms reveals that Japanese organisations expect more negative outcomes from diversity programs than German firms (Kemper, Bader and Froese, 2016).

Research Strategy

To investigate the role that organisational structures and individual-level factors play in influencing women managers' decision-making power in Japanese businesses, we adopted a qualitative study approach, which is best suited to exploration and discovery (Eisenhardt, 1989). An interview protocol with open ended questions was built to capture the different factors of interest for this study (available from the authors upon request). Skype interviews with the informants were the first source of data. Interviews lasted at least 90 minutes, were

performed by the research team, recorded, and manually transcribed and coded. The interview information was augmented with external secondary sources such as the company's website and press and company reports, in order to substantiate information concerning the organisation-level dimensions. A theoretical sampling method (Eisenhardt, 1989) was adopted guided by two aims: first, to avoid gender-specific perspectives, the sample includes both men and women with managerial roles. Second, in order to capture the strength of Japanese cultural factors in affecting workplace gender diversity we collected interviews in Japanese-owned workplaces operating either domestically or abroad. In total, thirty-one invitations for interviews were sent out to managers of large Japanese firms. Six Japanese women in top management positions declined because of concerns that participation in the study may negatively influence their career if content was disclosed, while four more potential participants were excluded due to insufficient managerial experience. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the twenty-one interviewees.

Table 1. Summary of interviewees' characteristics

Business unit	Number of employees	Country of employment	Nationality	Number of informants	Gender	Position	Women in Board of directors
Automotive	143000	Hungary	Hungarian	1	Female	Managing Director	2
Automotive	18000	Japan	Japanese	10	Male	CEO	0
		Japan	Japanese		Male	Director	
		Japan	Japanese		Female	Team leader	
		Japan	Japanese		Female	Project Leader	
		Japan	Syrian		Male	Team leader	
		Hungary	Russian		Female	Vice-President	
		Japan	Japanese		Male	Auditor of the company, VP	
		Japan	Japanese		Female	Team leader	
		Japan	Japanese		Male	General Manager	
		Japan	Japanese		Male	Director	

Automotive	1500	Germany	Japanese	1	Female	Head of European office	0
Chemical industry	3500	Japan	Japanese	1	Male	Team leader	1
Child care products	4000	Japan	Russian	1	Female	Team leader	4
Electronics	114000	Japan	Japanese	1	Male	Vice-President	1
Recrtuiment Services	1430	Japan	Japanese	1	Female	Regional Director	1
Steel manufacturing	3600	Netherlands	Japanese	1	Female	Head of European office	1
Machinery	1200	Russia	Russian	1	Male	Vice-President	1
Oil	1500	Japan	Russian	1	Female	Project leader	0
University	no infomration	Japan	Japanese	1	Female	Full Professor	0
Packaging production	no information	Japan	Japanese	1	Female	No title	0

In the within-interview analysis, coding was used to identify indicators of success factors and barriers to workplace gender equality, focusing on organisation-level factors and individual-level factors. Based on theory and literature on workplace gender diversity, indicators were organised according to their relevance for gender equality of hiring (Gorman, 2005), career development (Kossek *et al*., 2017) or participation in decision-making (Grosser and Moon, 2005). For organisational-level success factors, respondents were also asked whether they were present in their organisation and whether they considered them to be effective.

Results

Table 2 provides a synopsis of indicators developed for organisation-level and individual-level factors with frequencies. In what follows, we summarize the main results and offer a grounded illustration of the different aspects via verbatim citations.

Table 2 – Summary of findings.

Indicators / Success factors	Level	Factors sustain gender equality for	Frequency among women (12)	% women	Frequency among men (9)	% men	Total (21)	%total
Leadership development, leadership training programs for both males and females	Organizational level	career development participation in decision-making	6	50%	6	67%	12	57%
Corporate culture promoting diversity and multi-culturalism		career development participation in decision-making	6	50%	5	56%	11	52%
CSR programs		access	5	42%	6	67%	11	52%
Accountable and fair performance evaluation based on objective KPIs		career development participation in decision-making	7	58%	3	33%	10	48%
High professional standing of top management		participation in decision-making	6	50%	4	44%	10	48%
Top-management emphasizing value of gender diversity		participation in decision-making	4	33%	6	67%	10	48%
Leadership has international experience		participation in decision-making	6	50%	3	33%	9	43%
Climate of trust and mutual respect in the workplace		participation in decision-making	4	33%	4	44%	8	38%
HRM practices (promoting compatibility of family and career: flexible working hours, individual work schedules, home-office in case pregnancy and maternity leave)		participation in decision-making	7	58%	0	0%	7	33%
Conflict management practices		participation in decision-making	5	42%	0	0%	5	24%
Barriers		**Factors hinder gender equality for**						
Corporate culture emphasizing loyalty to the company through long working hours		access participation in decision-making	8	67%	5	56%	13	62%
Lack of equal access opportunities for men and women to some business functions (e.g. Sales only for men)		career development	7	58%	4	44%	11	52%
Lack of women roles models in the workplace		career development, participation in decision-making	9	75%	0	0%	9	43%
Tokenism		participation in decision-making	8	67%	0	0%	8	38%
Existence of strong male cliques		participation in decision-making	6	50%	0	0%	6	29%
Issues that are not mainstream are escalated (including gender issues)		participation in decision-making	4	33%	0	0%	4	19%
Leadership tolerance of sexual harassment		access	4	33%	0	0%	4	19%
Success factors		**Factors sustain gender equality for**						
International experience	Individual level	career development	10	83%	7	78%	17	81%
Determination, self-confidence		participation in decision-making	10	83%	6	67%	16	76%
Previous experience and strong background		career development participation in decision-making	8	67%	7	78%	15	71%
Ability to debate, express own thinking, communication skills with top management		career development participation in decision-making	8	67%	4	44%	12	57%
Willingness to put more effort on career orientation than male colleagues, showing that a woman has ambitions and career aspirations		career development	4	33%	4	44%	8	38%
Readiness to accept greater responsibility when there is a chance for it		career development	5	42%	0	0%	5	24%
Barriers		**Factors hinder genders equality for**						
Traditional education and upbringing		career development participation in decision-making	9	75%	6	67%	15	71%
Low aspiration levels		career development participation in decision-making	4	33%	6	67%	10	48%

Organisational factors

Most of the firms included in the sample have formal CSR programmes with a provision for gender diversity. CSR is generally perceived by women managers as facilitating the hiring of women managers, in line with what reported by Mun and Jung (2018). However, CRS is considered devoid of substantial effectiveness with respect to women's participation in decision-making. In this direction, CSR is perceived as a source of legitimacy in the eyes of foreign investors, as the following quote illustrates: "*I feel they (the company) talk about gender diversity and try to hire women just because of investors, since they need to be appealing.*" (Japanese woman, Head of European office). In the same vein, the appointment of more women is sometimes seen by women negatively, as generating tokenism: "*Expectation levels from a woman and a man are different. They don't expect much from a woman, they don't care, or they pretend to care but eventually I feel they want more men.*" (Japanese woman, Team Leader).

Interviewees perceive that gender equality guidelines are not fully institutionalized in their companies' organisational culture (Lucas, 2003), and several respondents advocate a true corporate culture promoting diversity and multi-culturalism among the most important success factors: *"My previous employers, American companies, were more careful about gender. They assigned tasks and roles based on previous performance, not anything else. Even my appointment is a rare event, I am "a new thing" for my Japanese colleagues" (Foreign woman, Managing Director).* The development of diversity culture is viewed as often being hindered by top management: *"The top management generation has old thinking, that's why they try but may be just appealing to foreign investors. They grew up in the time when women's territory was the kitchen." (Japanese woman, Head of European office).* Though formally espousing gender diversity, corporate organisational culture emphasizes showing loyalty to the company through long working hours, thereby hindering mothers' role within organisations.

Therefore, irrespective of gender, respondents concur that leadership's support to the creation of a diversity-oriented organisational culture is needed to facilitate women's active participation in decisions (Virick and Greer, 2012). *"By actively promoting the importance*

of gender diversity, I generate more trust, which means better communication and higher commitment. This is very good for performance." (Japanese man, VP).

Two findings that mirror each other concern HR practices that develop leadership paths for women and the frequent absence of mentoring and role models for women in the workplace: *"There is no role model in the company nor a clear career development path that can guide women, I feel I am a pioneer." (Foreign woman, VP). "There is no dedicated pipeline. If you want women leaders, you need to develop them." (Foreign woman, Managing Director).*

Two other organisational practices are considered key to foster women's participation in decisions: First, transparency in performance evaluation systems. *"Companies should have fair performance evaluation systems. There is no point for women in getting additional skills if the system to measure the skills and output is biased against them." (Japanese man, VP).*

Next, HR practices promoting work-life balance, which are highlighted as success factors by women interviewees but not by men: *"If you have to work after 6pm every day, it is not possible that you have kids, and you are a successful director." (Japanese woman, Regional director)*

Individual level factors

Both men and women interviewees concur that the professionalism and international experience of a manager are more important success factors for women than for men. Additionally, interviewees stress that women's individual traits remain extremely important success factors within Japanese companies. In particular, several interviewees pointed to the importance of self-confidence and determination in the pursuit of own goals: *"A woman manager has to be extremely proactive, while Japanese women are too quiet and shy. Be noisy and show what you want and your own thinking." (Japanese woman, Head of European office).* Similarly, dedication and willingness to put more effort on career than male colleagues are recognised as often more important than competence: *"If there is a guy willing to offer 12 hours of his day, kind of dedication to work, then he has advantage in comparison with a woman, even if she can do the same work in 6 hours." (Japanese man, Director).*

Other respondents stressed that a key success factor for women is being able to effectively communicate with leadership and to argue back to male colleagues, which is perceived to be a feature often missing in the Japanese workplace: *"A Japanese woman is not taught to debate or argue with a man and defend her opinion. Even myself, in most cases I will step back and shut up if a man is speaking."* *(Japanese woman, Regional director)*.

Similar to the previous success factors, key barriers at the individual level are in direct connection with the traditional Japanese culture. In fact, traditional education and upbringing emphasising women's ancillary role and the consequent low aspiration levels engender women's self-segregation at work. *"There are not so many women with the right qualifications. Of course, the company should be fair. However, the woman herself should have career aspirations and challenge herself at work."* *(Japanese man, CEO)*.

Discussion

Institutional theory views organizing within a broad, societal perspective. Organisations will increase their social legitimacy and chances of survival by conforming to structures and practices accepted in their fields (Suchman, 1995). Institutionally prescribed organisational structures and practices that purport workplace gender equality are expected to disrupt gender bias against women reaching senior positions and should reduce the need for women to gain legitimacy by relying on their personal strengths alone (Lucas, 2003; Murray and Southey, 2020). In the last decade, Japanese businesses have faced significant institutional pressures from government, investors and foreign institutions, which have indeed led to more women managers being hired. However, since organisations deploy a range of strategic responses to institutional pressures, which include adherence but also resistance and facade compliance, these pressures may not be successful in giving women status and an active role in decisions (Oliver, 1991).

Building on qualitative analysis, this study has considered the experiences of men and women in managerial positions in Japanese businesses. The goal has been to compare and contrast the perceived relative importance of organisational and individual level factors in legitimizing women managers' inclusion in organisational decision-making. Organisational cultures that genuinely incorporate the norm of diversity are considered by respondents the

main success factor to women's career development and women's decision power. However, a gender diversity-oriented culture does not appear to be fully institutionalized in the organisations the respondents work for. In particular, the perceived legitimacy of the diversity agenda appears not yet strongly established in the minds of Japanese senior managers, especially old-generation ones. Conversely, Japanese top-management with experience abroad has a positive attitude towards women's role in the working place (Ferner, Almond and Colling, 2005). Institutionalism-based research has stressed that compromise solutions emerge when institutional demands and organisational expectations diverge (Oliver, 1991). In this study, this is evident in the analysis of CSR. Among organisational structures often adopted because of institutional pressures, CSR has been the most investigated in the Japanese context (Kato and Kodama, 2018; Mun and Jung, 2018). In line with previous findings, respondents' perception is that CSR has led to more women being hired to managerial positions. However, no woman states that CSR gives women equivalent career opportunities or decision-power as men (Evans and Maley, 2020). Significantly, CSR is linked to "tokenism" (Kanter, 1977).

As highlighted by other studies, HR practices such as leadership development and mentoring programs and the existence of role models for women within the organisation (Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; Murray and Southey, 2020) are highly valued by women respondents. However, these practices appear to be scantily present in the organisations investigated. Next, as already stressed by previous contributions concerning Japan (Yanadori and Kato, 2009; Magoshi and Jang, 2009; Wakisaka, 2007), there is a significant recognition of the importance of HR practices that support work-family balance. Leadership support to these practices enhances the legitimacy of women's managers in their role and reduces the likelihood that women cannot perform up to their role.

In summary, CRS emerges as the only widespread organisational structure towards workplace gender equality. CSR is considered a mimetic response to external pressures, but it is also perceived as ineffective towards legitimizing women's participation in decision-making. As a consequence of missing or ineffectively institutionalized workplace structures, women assign a greater role to individual factors with respect to organisational ones. The emphasis on individual factors is also higher for women than for men. Strong motivation, strength of character and being proactive, high level of professionalism, associated with

bossy attitudes seem to be considered necessary to foster women managers' inclusion and success in career. Women managers who claim they have to rely on their strengths and personal resources alone to offset gender-biased expectations and to have voice, often felt vulnerable and isolated at work.

To summarize, the major contribution of this paper is to deepen the understanding of how Japanese organisations are handling the issue of creating gender equality in the workplace. Evidence provided in this study suggests that putting diversity at work to work in Japanese organisations requires a broad set of actions. At the organisational level, gender equality-oriented strategies advocated by our interviews with women and men managers in Japanese businesses call for the institutionalization of leadership development pathways for women, and the implementation of training programs for both genders that reveal implicit gender biases and pros and cons of gender diversity. Results also suggest that action is needed beyond the workplace in order to create effective gender equality and inclusion. Women point to job-related skills as the reason of their career advancement, in addition to personal connections and professionalism (Ottsen, 2019). In this respect, the growth in women's educational levels is certainly contributing to close the gender's gap. However, our results suggest that it is also important to strengthen the motivational aspects in women's education and training. Traditionally, Japanese women are not taught to argue or compete with men. Hence, education programs must strive to make them more ambitious and proactive, expressing desire to achieve higher levels of career and have more responsibility (Nemoto, 2016).

Limitations

We acknowledge limitations that suggest future research avenues. Although the qualitative study has allowed gaining understanding of the role of organisational and individual factors, it relies on a limited sample size. Future studies may complement current findings with quantitative survey information. Next, a finer grained stratification of respondents than the one used in this study could be used to throw light on inter-sectionality aspects of gender equality in the Japanese context. In this respect, interesting insights could be obtained by comparing the experiences and perception of younger generation managers with older ones,

to assess how societal changes are changing women's leadership aspirations. Finally, the investigation of specific gender diversity management programs in global corporations are still missing in the Japanese context.

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THE IMPACT OF GENDER ON CAREER ASPIRATION LEVELS AND SELF-EFFICACY IN JAPAN: WHAT'S NEW?

Structured Abstract

Purpose

While the Japanese workplace has often been described as unfavourable to women's career aspirations, in the last thirty years significant changes have occurred urged by the government. This study presents quantitative evidence on career aspirations and perceived occupational self-efficacy of workers in Japanese organisations and provides a comparison between genders. Additional new contributions are offered: first, the study analyses the relation between aspiration levels perceived self-efficacy and perceived career success factors. Next, the relationship between respondents' age and career aspiration levels are investigated to identify whether aspiration levels have risen in younger generations.

Design/methodology/approach

The data has been collected from an online survey distributed through professional websites in Japan. Regression analysis is used to analyse the relations of interest.

Findings

Unlike previous analysis of Japan, occupational self-efficacy does not differ by gender, therefore suggesting that efforts in the educational domain have increased women's self-confidence. However, the persistence of the career aspiration gap signals that more efforts need to be undertaken, for instance by offering women role models in the workplace. Further, the negative relation between career aspiration and the importance assigned to cultural values as a success factor suggests that culture still represents a constraining factor for women.

Originality

The study offers novel quantitative evidence on Japanese women career aspirations and on how different types of success factors (family, culture, organisational support) exert an influence.

Introduction

Despite the progress made in recent years, according to the recent International Labour Office (2021) estimates women are still far from achieving gender equality in the workplace and are often trapped in lower-skilled and lower-paid jobs than men. Among the advanced economies, Japan has been highlighted as being a laggard in the gender equality journey. Past research on cultural dimensions had described Japan as a masculine culture (Hofstede, 2001). Gender roles were traditionally strictly defined in Japanese society and relegated women to lower positions in the organisational hierarchies (Cho *et al.*, 2015). In the past two decades, due to the challenges of an aging society (Inoue-Smith, 2013), there has been rising support in politics and society toward an egalitarian view of gender roles in the workplace (Yamamoto and Ran, 2014; Piotrowski *et al.*, 2019; Smirles *et al.*, 2020). However, as recently as 2019, Brieger *et al.* (2019) found the lowest women participation rate on the boards of directors in Japanese organisations: 1.4% compared to the highest rate, namely Sweden at 23.6%. According to data recently released by the 2021 Global Gap Report, Japan ranks 120th out of 156 countries on gender parity. Japanese women still experience difficulties in breaking the "glass ceiling", as also evidenced by the challenges they experience in attaining leadership roles and having decision-making power within organisations (Saitova and Di Mauro, 2021).

Cultural stereotypes not only affect organisations' willingness to hire and promote women to leadership roles but are also likely to negatively influence Japanese women's career aspirations (Aono and Kashiwagi, 2011; Yamamoto and Ran, 2014; Smirles *et al.*, 2020). Exploring gender-related differences in career aspiration is crucial because aspiration levels are a major predictor of career attainment, occupational status and hierarchical advancement (Schoon and Polek, 2011; Fritz and Van Knippenberg, 2020). Compared to other developed countries, the career aspirations of Japanese women have been relatively unexplored. Recent qualitative research on 35 college women (Smirles *et al.*, 2020) confirms past findings

(Fukahori, 2009) by suggesting that Japanese women's aspirations and perceived confidence are lower than men.

As low career aspirations may compound the negative effects created by social categorisation, it is important to throw light on their determinants. Ever since Bandura (2009), self-efficacy has been identified as a key determinant of career choice and of the efforts to lead (McCormick *et al.,* 2002). The importance of occupational self-efficacy for women's career aspirations has been confirmed by recent studies (Hartman and Barber, 2020). In turn, career aspirations and self-efficacy are influenced by environmental factors that may impact an individual's perceptions of their capability to lead (Bandura, 1997) and opportunities to achieve higher positions (Sanchez and Lenhert, 2019). In this respect, since organisation-level and institutional career success factors can affect career advancement (Aycan, 2004), the perception of their relative importance is expected to affect career aspirations. Finally, given women's widened access to managerial roles in Japan, an important research goal is to explore whether career aspirations are higher among younger women.

Therefore, the purpose of our study is to investigate career aspiration levels and occupational self-efficacy after over ten years of gender equality policies (Matsui, 2019) such as "womenomics", which have purported to increase women's participation in the workforce (Dalton, 2017) and other institutional coercions towards a more pronounced presence of women in the higher ranks of Japanese organisations (Saitova and Di Mauro, 2021). Additionally, we investigate the relation between career aspiration levels and perceived self-efficacy for men and women and the impact of perceived success factors on career aspirations.

The study relies on the results of an online survey with over 200 responses from employees in various Japanese business organisations. The results of the study show that, with respect to past findings, women possess equal levels of self-efficacy to that of men. However, women still exhibit remarkably lower career aspirations. These findings indicate the need to strengthen women's aspiration level by fostering career orientation programs for women and providing special training for them, offered by other women in the corporate world. The study also contributes insights toward understanding how different variables influence the

career aspirations of women and men in Japan, by showing the persistent role assigned to women by Japanese cultural values.

Literature Background

Career Aspirations and Gender

O'Brien (1996) defined career aspirations as the degree to which women aspire leadership roles. Career aspirations reflect a desire to advance in one's career (Strauss *et al.*, 2012) and are defined as the "degree of commitment to a given career" (Gray and O'Brien, 2007, p. 318). By creating barriers to women's career advancement (Fritz and Van Knippenberg, 2020), gender-related social categorisation in the workplace (Eagly and Karau, 2002) and gender biases in leadership perceptions (Eagly and Carli, 2007) negatively affect women's career aspirations (Dolana, Bejaranob and Tzafrir, 2011). In fact, given the obstacles to career advancement (Connell, 2006), women may choose less prestigious professions (Shapka *et al.,* 2008), which underutilize their abilities (O'Brien *et al.*, 2000). Sanchez and Lehnert (2019) confirmed that men and women have different aspirations for leadership and found that compared to men, "women's aspirations to leadership depend on how competent they think they are, how negatively they perceive the trade-offs of leadership to be, and how much experience they have" (p. 182). Conversely, recent evidence from China (Zhang *et al.*, 2020) does not conclude that gender differences in career aspirations exist.

Although the expectation is that masculine societies are characterised by significant differences in aspiration levels according to gender, evidence in this respect is controversial. For instance, Nadeem and Khalid (2018) in their research of students in Pakistan find evidence of a difference that men had lower career aspirations than women, while Al-Bahrani *et al.*, (2020) found that female adolescent respondents in Oman reported higher career aspirations than male counterparties.

The relation between career aspirations and age is ambiguous and appears to be little investigated: Pillay *et al.*, (2006) find that career aspirations do not significantly differ between older (>40 years) and younger workers (≤40 years), while Schoon *et al.*, (2007) find that gender, education level and job type impacted on career attitudes of different cohorts.

Self-efficacy and Career Aspirations

According to Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1993, 1997) social-cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capabilities to accomplish given tasks by performing given behaviour. Self-efficacy plays a major role in determining career aspirations and career development (Bindu and Padmanabhan, 2016). In fact, individuals with a high perception of self-efficacy are more likely to meet their career goals even in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 2009; Lent and Brown, 2013; Hartman and Barber, 2020). Leadership roles are generally assumed by people with high self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997; Paglis and Green, 2002;) and, therefore, self-efficacy is considered very important in the leadership domain (Hoyt, 2013). Additionally, self-efficacy is defined as a "building block" in career development (Lent *et al*., 2003), being an important part of psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000).

Self-efficacy predicts career-related aspirations from early high school through college (Lent *et al.*, 1989; Gray and O'Brien, 2007; Al-Bahrani *et al*., 2020). Positive relations have been documented in a variety of cultural contexts such as Nigeria (Aremu and Lawal, 2009), India (Bindu and Padmanabhan, 2016), Latin America (Ali and Menke, 2014), and students on American campuses (Nguyen, 2016). A 10-year longitudinal study in the US found that self-efficacy interceded the relationship between learning experiences and career aspirations in high school students (Tang *et al*., 2008).

Empirical research has offered ample evidence of differences between men and women in occupational self-efficacy (Bandura *et al*., 2001; Betz and Hackett, 1986; Roy *et al*., 2018; Yeagley *et al*., 2010) although a recent survey by Hartmann and Barber (2020) reports no significant gender effect.

Career Success Factors and Career Aspirations

Past research indicates the importance of environmental level factors on women's advancement in their careers (Tharenour and Convoy, 1994; Aycan, 2004). These factors are related to organisational variables such as culture, climate, and HRM practices, family-level

factors (Aycan, 2004) as well as gender-related policies. Awareness of the relevance of specific success factors is expected to influence women's career aspirations.

This negative effect may stem from the fact that, even when women reach managerial roles, the corporate practices may still be discriminatory (Ryan *et al.*, 2016) and that gendered corporate cultures play against women (Eagly and Carli, 2002), thus discouraging women's plans for career development. In this direction, Fritz and Van Knippenberg (2017) evidenced that gender-biased barriers to leadership advancement such as a women-unfriendly organisational climate may lead to lower levels of leadership aspirations.

Research has identified multiple career success factors, but only limited evidence is available of their link with career aspirations. Organisational-level career success factors include a diversity-oriented organisational climate, corroborating HRM practices, supportive supervisors and co-workers, transparent performance evaluation systems, and work-life balance policies (White, 1995; Ely *et al*., 2011; Mkhize and Msweli, 2011; Chawla and Sharma, 2016; Datta and Agarwal, 2017; Saitova and Di Mauro, 2021). Among these, organisational climate and female role models have been shown to positively impact women's career aspirations (Nauta *et al*., 1998; Fritz and Van Knippenberg, 2017).

Home-related factors are associated with support from family (Holton and Dent, 2016). In particular, emotional support from a spouse/partner is very important for women in coping with career stress (Datta and Agarwal, 2017). Heikkinen *et al*., (2014) found the male spouse who is willing to break the traditional gender order and provide changing forms of support has a positive impact on the career of his spouse. Social support and encouragement from family members and friends can drive an individual's career aspirations (Lent *et al*, 2000). In the same order, the challenges of balancing career and family responsibilities are linked to women's career aspirations (Hartman and Barber, 2020).

The perception of the importance of the gender norm that women are responsible for childcare and housework will likely limit the search for career opportunities (Bittman *et al*., 2003; Jayachandran, 2021). Delecourt and Fitzpatrick (2021) find that childcare duties are associated with lower profitability and relate to the gender gap in business performance, thus ending up discouraging women from undertaking their own businesses.

Hypotheses development

In this section, empirical research concerning the impact of gender on career aspiration, self-efficacy and career success factors in Japan is reviewed. Results from this overview and findings from the general literature discussed in the previous section are then combined to formulate testable hypotheses.

In Japan, women are more often associated with caring, empathy and concern for others (Fondas, 1997) and this stereotype puts pressure on women to comply with that behavioural model (Boulouta, 2013). In a recent qualitative study, Smirles *et al.* (2020) report that gender role stereotypes in Japan still create barriers for Japanese women in their career advancement. Past research has shown that companies assigned administrative or clerical positions that limited women's learning opportunities, thus constraining career aspirations (Matsui *et al.*, 1991). In their cross-cultural study about career plans and aspirations, Morinaga *et al.*, (1993) confirmed that both, women, and men in Japan, had highly traditional gender role attitudes. Fukahori (2009) showed that aspiration levels of Japanese young women were lower than men, prioritizing marriage over job success. Inoue-Smith (2014) indicated that the traditional gender role attitude had changed, lowering the importance of marriage among highly educated women, in her study about college student career aspirations. However, many Japanese young people, regardless of their gender, lacked clear career aspirations (Adachi, 2006; Inoue-Smith, 2014).

Concerning self-efficacy, Matsui and Onglatco (1991) found that Japan's culture and lifestyle hindered Japanese women from developing occupational self-efficacy. Further, Japanese women's self-efficacy was lower in non-traditional rather than traditional women's occupational settings, due to the dearth of role models, while Japanese men's self-efficacy was equivalent in all domains. Matsui and Onglatco (1992) revealed that Japanese women with low self-efficacy expectations failed to cope with high overload and react emotionally. Research on factors facilitating women's careers in Japan has addressed the beneficial impact of family-friendly policies and HR practices favouring work-life balance (Wakisaka, 2007; Magoshi and Chang, 2009; Yanadori and Kato, 2009)). Recent qualitative research based on interviews with women managers shows that women view individual-level characteristics, such as motivation, pro-active behaviour, and professionalism, as more

important success factors with respect to organisation-level. A diversity-oriented organisational culture is considered to be a critical factor not yet fully institutionalised in the Japanese workplace, whereas traditional upbringing and cultural values are viewed as barriers to career development (Saitova and Di Mauro, 2021).

Based on these literature findings, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypotheses 1 – Career aspiration levels of women in Japan are lower than those of men.

Hypotheses 2 – Self-efficacy levels of women in Japan are lower than those of men.

Hypotheses 3 - Self-efficacy and career aspirations are positively related for both genders.

Hypotheses 4 - Younger Japanese women have higher career aspirations than older ones.

Hypotheses 5 – The importance assigned to personal level success factors is positively related to Japanese women's career aspirations.

Hypotheses 6 – The importance assigned to organisational level success factors is positively related to Japanese women's career aspirations.

Hypotheses 7 – The importance assigned to cultural values and family support as success factors is positively related to Japanese women's career aspirations.

Methodology

Data collection

The empirical data of this research was obtained through an online questionnaire. The researchers administered the questionnaire through the online channels of professional organisations in the Kansai region. The survey was open from September 10th to December 16th, 2020. All respondents are Japanese nationals and work for Japanese organisations.

In order to develop the survey instrument and verify the constructs in the Japanese context, a pilot study was conducted with six Japanese women, who were team leaders or managers, in the form of face-to-face interviews. The first section of the survey collected socio-demographic information (age, education, experience level, work position, etc.). The second part of the questionnaire measured self-efficacy, using the eight-item scale developed by Chen, Gully and Eden (2001) and career aspirations using the eight-item Career Aspiration Scale proposed by Gregor and O'Brien (2015). The third part was related to the perceived success factors for career advancement, which included individual, organisational and

institutional factors, which had been identified as important in the Japanese context in the course of the pilot study and by previous literary findings (Saitova and Di Mauro, 2021; Smirles *et al*., 2020).

Descriptive analysis

The online survey produced 283 responses, out of which 194 complete answers could be used for analysis, with 56% women and 44% men of Japanese nationality. The age of the participants ranges between 25 and 70 years and the average age is 45 years. 85% of respondents, equally split between men and women, have a university degree. 85% have more than seven years of working experience and 48% of respondents have a leadership role at various levels of the organisational hierarchy (team leader, manager, head of the department, board member, entrepreneur). In terms of sector of activity, 50% of respondents work in manufacturing, 31% in the private service sector and 19% in the public sector.

As for the main variables of interest, namely career aspiration levels (AL) and self-efficacy (SE), Table 1 reports mean values and standard deviations by gender. The asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference by gender via a two-sample t-test with $p \leq 0.01$. The table reveals that the null hypothesis of equal means is rejected for all items in the aspiration level scale, pointing to a significantly lower aspiration level for women with respect to men. Conversely, it is not possible to detect any significant difference in the measurement of self-efficacy.

Table 1 – Mean values for career aspiration levels and self-efficacy by gender

Variable	Women		Men	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Self-efficacy				
SE1	3.22	0.92	3.33	0.87
SE2	3.75	1.23	3.66	1.10
SE3	3.65	1.26	3.66	1.05
SE4	3.43	1.33	3.59	1.16
SE5	3.45	1.27	3.72	1.08
SE6	3.46	1.18	3.60	1.08
SE7	3.36	1.37	3.40	1.23
SE8	3.49	1.27	3.63	1.07
Career aspiration level				
AL1*	2.89	1.62	3.45	1.34
AL2*	2.80	1.52	3.43	1.38
AL3* (R.C.)	2.82	1.58	3.26	1.47
AL4*	2.64	1.61	3.26	1.39
AL5*	3.13	1.46	3.86	1.07
AL6* (R.C.)	2.64	1.58	3.20	1.43
AL7*	2.62	1.59	3.24	1.39
AL8*	2.14	1.57	2.87	1.50

(R.C.) = item is reverse coded

*$p < 0.001$ two-tailed T-test

The survey also collected information on the most important perceived factors for career success. Institutional factors, identified as being important pillars for career development, were represented by Government and Policy, Family and Cultural values. Social exchange within the workplace was represented by items such as Leader Support and Peers Support. Organisational factors were also captured by Human Resource Management policies and practices and by Performance Evaluation systems. Finally, individual-level factors important for career advancement were identified in Personality and Motivation. Table 2 summarises the mean value assigned to each of these variables by gender and presents a t-test of the hypothesis that these factors are perceived to be more important by women than by men. The table shows that all institutional factors are considered to be more important enablers of career advancement by women compared to men. Similarly, workplace characteristics such as leader and peer support and performance evaluation systems are recognised as being more relevant for a career by women than by men.

Table 2 – Importance assigned to career success factors (Likert scale 1-5)

Career success factor	Mean value (Men)	Mean value (Women)	Probability, One-sided T-test (mean value women > mean value men)
Personality	4.24	4.40	0.067
Motivation	4.53	4.64	0.131
Leader support	4.36	4.53	0.052
Peers support	4.32	4.5	**0.040**
HRM practices	4.30	4.98	**0.008**
Performance Evaluation	4.33	4.57	**0.010**

Gender-related policies	3.88	4.29	**0.000**
Family support	4.49	4.79	**0.000**
Cultural values	3.99	4.45	**0.000**

Factor analysis

Given the new context to which they were being applied, the two scales of SE and AL items were re-validated using principal component factor analysis. Barlett's sphericity test for SE has a p-value below 0.05 while the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sample adequacy test shows a KMO value of 0.906. Factor analysis led to the identification of a single factor for SE with an eigenvalue greater than one, which included all the eight items on the scale and explained 65% of the total variance. For AL, Barlett's sphericity test has a p-value below 0.01 while the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sample adequacy test shows a KMO value of 0.870. Two factors with eigenvalues greater than one were obtained, which explained 76% of the variance. Factor 2 was saturated by items AL3 and AL6, while Factor 1 was saturated by the remaining items. Uniqueness values of individual items were verified to be below 0.6 for all scales and considered acceptable. Factor scores were obtained from the validated scales to be subsequently used in regression analysis.

Regression models

Several models were estimated using career aspiration levels as the dependent variable. Table 3 reports the binary correlations among model variables.

Table 3 – Correlations among model variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Career aspiration (1)	1													
Self-efficacy (2)	0.6236	1												
Gender (3)	0.2300	0.0527	1											
Leadership role (4)	0.2995	0.2277	0.1689	1										
Age (5)	0.1764	0.1817	0.0770	0.3294	1									
Personality (6)	0.1398	0.1973	-0.1023	-0.0306	-0.0458	1								
Motivation (7)	0.0072	0.1289	-0.0815	-0.0167	-0.0200	0.1121	1							
Leader support (8)	0.1175	0.1101	-0.1184	-0.0202	-0.0877	0.4191	0.1683	1						
Peer support (9)	-0.0272	0.0514	-0.1244	-0.0507	0.0647	0.2572	0.2771	0.3969	1					
HRM practices (10)	-0.1045	-0.0705	-0.1721	-0.1584	-0.0946	0.0502	0.1199	0.2852	0.1331	1				
Performance evaluation (11)	0.0646	0.0507	-0.1672	-0.0862	-0.0894	-0.0116	0.2054	0.1781	0.1439	0.3445	1			
Family (12)	-0.0403	0.0530	-0.2277	0.0648	-0.1315	0.1746	0.0788	0.2343	0.1057	0.0755	0.2726	1		
Gender-related policy (13)	-0.0601	-0.0256	-0.2331	-0.0681	-0.1263	0.1420	0.1023	0.1094	0.1313	0.2137	0.3170	0.3736	1	
Cultural values (14)	-0.1140	0.0312	-0.2682	-0.0046	-0.1175	0.0161	0.2193	0.0627	-0.0206	0.3076	0.4683	0.4434	0.4412	1

Table 4 presents regression results. All models presented are estimated using White robust standard errors to correct for heteroscedasticity. Variance inflation factors for all models were below the threshold of three so that multi-collinearity can be ruled out. In Model 1a, career aspirations are positively explained by self-efficacy (b = 0.581, p < 0.000). Significant effects are also detected for some of the control variables (gender: b = 0.358, p < 0.001; leadership role: b = 0.271, p < 0.022). Model 1b adds to the previous variables the importance assigned to the individual, organisational, and institutional factors as enablers of career prospects. Model 1b shows that self-efficacy (b = 0.568, p < 0.000) and gender (b = 0.316, p < 0.012) are strong determinants of aspiration levels, with women exhibiting lower aspiration levels than men (coding is women = 1 and men = 2). Respondents who already have some kind of leadership position express higher career aspirations (b = 0.318, p < 0.009). Age is not significantly associated with aspiration levels. Among perceived factors for career success, Performance Evaluation (b = 0.353, p < 0.008) is positively related to AL. Conversely, the importance assigned to cultural values as an enabler of career advancements is significantly but negatively associated with aspiration levels (b = -0.173, p < 0.031). Models 2a and 2b are estimated using only the sub-sample of men in the survey. We find support that younger respondents have higher career expectations than older ones, given that the coefficient for Age is negative and statistically significant (b = -0.038, p < 0.000). None of the success factors are significantly associated with career aspirations.

Models 3a and 3b are estimated using women's responses only. Again, we find that Self-

efficacy is positively and significantly related to aspirations levels (b = 0.588, p < 0.000). Noticeably, unlike what is observed for men, age has no significant association with women's career aspirations in Model 3a (b = 0.189, p < 0.236) while it is weakly significant in Model 3b (b = 0.311, p < 0.050). The positive sign suggests aspirations ae higher for older workers. The importance assigned to cultural values as a success factor for career development determines lower aspiration levels, as pointed by the negative and significant coefficient (b = -0.298, p < 0.014).

Table 4 – Regression results (Dependent variable: career aspirations)

	Model 1a			Model 1b			Model 2a (Men)			Model 2b (Men)			Model 3a (Women)			Model 3b (Women)		
	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t
Gender	.358	.110	**0.001**	.316	.124	**0.012**												
Age	.001	.005	0.821	.001	.005	0.786	-.034	.009	**0.000**	-.038	.009	**0.000**	.010	.007	0.134	.010	.007	0.138
Leadership role	.271	.117	**0.022**	.318	.121	**0.009**	.381	.164	**0.022**	.433	.187	**0.023**	.189	.159	0.236	.311	.157	**0.050**
Self-efficacy	.581	.056	**0.000**	.568	.061	**0.000**	.400	.093	**0.000**	.393	.090	**0.000**	.615	.083	**0.000**	.588	.087	**0.000**
Personality				.061	.067	0.367				.088	.103	0.395				.107	.105	0.310
Motivation				-0,069	.107	0.520				-.004	.174	0.980				.122	.123	0.325
Leader support				.147	.079	0.066				.004	.136	0.979				.148	.133	0.270
Peer support				-0.151	.090	0.155				-.022	.133	0.872				-.091	.118	0.441
HRM practices				-.046	.065	0.477				-.159	.0832	0.061				.102	.105	0.338
Performance Evaluation				.235	.088	**0.008**				.183	.130	0.165				.161	.146	0.271
Gender-related policy				.050	.071	0.478				-.024	.106	0.820				.141	.104	0.179
Family				-.095	.091	0.296				-.054	.146	0.713				-.157	.159	0.326
Cultural values				-.173	.080	**0.031**				-.108	.120	0.370				-.298	.120	**0.014**
constant	.697	.257	**0.011**	-.583	.880	0.509	1.606	.394	**0.000**	2.076	1.116	0.067	-.695	.292	**0.019**	-1.707	1.102	0.125
Prob > F	0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000		
R2	0.44			0.49			0.35			0.40			0.45			0.52		
N	194			194			83			83			111			111		

Discussion

Several streams of research have emphasised that gendered categorisation and discriminatory corporate practices hinder women's career development, therefore demotivating women from pursuing a career. Further, the trade-off between career and childbearing that women face additionally depresses aspiration levels (Fritz and Van Knippenberg, 2017).

In Japan, these worldwide issues have been amplified by traditional culture stressing the woman's role as mother and wife (Magoshi and Chang, 2009; Yanadori and Kato, 2009; Kato, 2018). Additionally, the 24/7 working male culture (Júlíusdóttir *et al.*, 2018) is considered a work-life perspective, therefore producing a strong imbalance in the career perspectives of women and men (Kato *et al.*, 2016; Frkal and Criscione-Naylor, 2020). This ends up generating, in women, the perception of lower ability to take up leadership roles and may translate into low leadership self-efficacy. Compared to men, women's aspirations are lower, and a successful career often depends on family support or spousal support (Datta and Agarwal, 2017; Holton and Dent, 2016)

Past research on Japan had suggested that both career aspiration levels and occupational self-efficacy were lower among women than among men. Recent interview-based research by Smirles *et al.* (2020) suggests that the above-mentioned state of things still holds. However, considering policy initiatives and institutional pressure on Japanese employers in the last twenty years (Dalton, 2017), fresh quantitative information on whether these gaps still hold is important to obtain actionable insight into how the career prospects of Japanese women can be improved.

Findings from this study provide partial support for the hypotheses made in our research. First, self-efficacy does not differ by gender, hence Japanese women no longer feel to have lower capabilities than men, a testament to the success of the dramatic increase in the number of women with university degrees. However, aspiration levels of women are still significantly lower than that of men, signalling that the work environment is still perceived to be unfavourable to women's career development. Therefore, results support Hypothesis 1, while Hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Further, results support the positive relationship between self-efficacy and aspirations levels (Hypotheses 3 confirmed). Similar recent findings by Hartman and Barber (2020) are attributed by the authors to the gender division of labour, whereby "women assess their capabilities based on roles that are traditionally female roles and not within a broader spectrum of career choices." (p.103). We tend to agree with this view, which implies that efforts should be directed to expanding the range of career opportunities that women view within their reach (e.g., by promoting STEM careers among young women). However, it is also true that in our study the finding of equal self-efficacy by gender may also reflect the high educational level of respondents in our sample and therefore corresponds to a positive outcome of the effort undertaken toward gender equality in the educational sphere.

In our view, the gap between perceived self-efficacy and aspiration levels requires action that removes the perceived barriers represented by gendered cultural models of leadership. With this approach, results from the study show that the importance attached to cultural values as a success factor is associated to lower aspiration levels (Hypothesis 7) disconfirmed), a finding that asserts the importance of overcoming the traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity in the workplace (Connell, 2006). In the same vein, Saitova and Di Mauro (2021) found that organisational cultures that truly incorporate the norm of gender equality were perceived as a key success factor for women's career development by female managers. However, the legitimacy of the diversity agenda did not appear to be fully institutionalised in the Japanese workplace due to the persistence of "old thinking" tied to traditional cultural values.

Finally, while younger men in our study have higher aspiration levels, age has no statistical impact on women's aspiration levels, signalling that younger Japanese woman perceive to have the same career opportunities as older generations (Spencer et al., 2019). This finding further reinforces the need to create talent channels and to invest in creating mentoring roles for women within organisations, especially for new entrants.

Conclusions and limitations

The rapid aging of the labour force in Japan suggests that Japanese women have an important role to play in filling leadership roles in the economy. However, a shift in mindset is required to change the culture of male-dominated organisations to a more female-friendly paradigm, both within organisations and in society as a whole. This will encourage women to pursue careers in verticals such as manufacturing, which traditionally are less open to women. Companies have to create environments and opportunities to help systematically increase the representation of women in decision-making and start their careers in core operational business rather than in support roles. The companies need to adjust their talent pipelines to have women access the same career opportunities as men.

While this study has contributed to the understanding of diversity in the workplace by offering fresh quantitative evidence from Japan, limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size could be increased to include several age cohorts of women and men. Next, a more fine-grained analysis of the different components of aspirations and self-efficacy could allow a more in-depth understanding of how they relate to success factors. Finally, expanding the range of success factors/barriers could offer recommendations to organisations on how to create leadership pathways for women.

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Conclusions

This dissertation has presented three studies that have enabled a better understanding of workplace gender diversity in Japanese organizations. In particular, through a combination of literature review and empirical studies it has been possible to throw light of what has already been achieved in terms of gender parity, what is still missing and what are the drivers/barriers to women's access to leadership roles.

It is hard to imagine that Japan will, within the next 5 years achieve all of its goals of gender inclusivity set by the government. As shown by our qualitative study of women and men managers (Study 2), much needs to be achieved in terms of "institutionalizing" gender parity in corporate culture and practices. Interviews strongly suggest that CSR towards gender parity in the workplace often results in symbolic rather than substantive initiatives.

Positive signs can be detected. Not to be undervalued is the finding of Study 3 of a net positive improvement in the self-efficacy level of the Japanese women, which is not statistically different from their men counterparts. This finding signals that Japanese woman no longer feel inferior in terms of their leadership capabilities compared to men. This is a big step forward in terms of building women's self-confidence and other desirable personal traits for leaders.

The results of the three papers provide actionable recommendations for combined efforts at different levels: policy (institutional), organizational (team) and personal. Policy should enforce family-friendly work practices such as flexible working hours for mothers and shared child responsibility for both parents. Such initiatives could spur a fundamental shift in societal mindset towards a more woman-friendly culture. Organizations should create better opportunities and leadership pathways for Japanese women. In particular, Japanese companies should adjust their talent pipelines to provide women access to the same career opportunities as men and offer female role models. Finally, there should be an individual effort from women as well, who should aspire to start their careers not only in supporting and administration roles, but dare to challenge themselves with core operational, sales and business roles.